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**Increasing Strategies and Programs for the Retention and Graduation of Black
Undergraduate Students at the University of Central Florida**

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**Increasing Strategies and Programs for the Retention and Graduation of Black Undergraduate
Students at the University of Central Florida**

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
in the National College of Education
National Louis University

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Higher Education Leadership

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Abstract of Dissertation

Increasing Strategies and Programs for the Retention and Graduation of Black Undergraduate Students at the University of Central Florida

This study aims to expand the knowledge and understanding of retention and persistence opportunities for Black students at the University of Central Florida. Qualitative research and data were collected and analyzed on six minority students at UCF. The study discovered academic, social, and cultural factors that affect Black undergraduate students' retention, persistence, and graduation at the University of Central Florida.

Analysis of the data revealed the need for minority students to access academic strategies and participate in intervention programs that aid Black students in succeeding and graduating from UCF. While recruitment is an essential factor with minorities attending higher educational institutions- ensuring academic strategies and interventions are equally important in the success and graduation of minority students at UCF and American higher educational institutions.

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Chapter 1

Increasing Strategies and Programs for the Retention and Graduation of Black Undergraduate Students at the University of Central Florida

The following paper provides an institutional study for the University of Central Florida (UCF). There are three main sections: internal context, external context, and considerations of people. The internal context section includes the following components: history, mission, leadership and governance, academic and curricular decisions, areas of concern, distinguishing characteristics; and institutional decision-making. The second section, external context consists of: characteristics of the institution type, including general trends, issues; challenges and successes of post-secondary institutions; state roles in higher education; financial and budgetary considerations; fundraising and philanthropic giving efforts; local, state, federal political, and governmental factors; historical legal issues; enrollment; marketing; and partnerships.

Further, the third section considerations of people include: Student Affairs functions; student body demographics; co-curriculum student experiences; student populations; faculty leadership; academic freedom; organizational and administrative structure; shared governance in practice; institutional decision-making; weak links and consideration of human factors within the institution. In addition, the following sections are included: the research question discussion, the significance of the study, and conclusion. The above components support the purpose of the paper which is to provide information relevant to the research question (RQ): *What strategies and programs can be provided for the retention and graduation of Black undergraduate students at the University of Central Florida?*

Moreover, the University of Central Florida (UCF), a state university, is 13 miles east of downtown Orlando. UCF is a prominent research university located near area attractions in the

UCF

metropolitan area of Orlando (UCF, n.d.-a). The university employs a diverse faculty and staff of over 13,000, and a secure campus environment is provided to support students to learn, grow, and succeed (UCF, n.d.-a). The mission of UCF is to “offer high-quality undergraduate and graduate education, student development, and continuing education; To conduct research and creative activities, and to provide services that enhance the intellectual, cultural, environmental, and economic development of the metropolitan region, address national and international issues in key areas, establish UCF as a major presence, and contribute to the global community.” (UCF, n.d.-a)

During the research, the researcher analyzed enrollment data for several Florida public institutions. The researcher, specifically, reviewed the African American admission data from several post-secondary institutions. The researcher identified lower than average minority student enrollment percentages at public universities in the state of Florida (see Appendix A). The reveal of data strengthened the researcher’s resolve to pursue the research question: *What strategies and programs can be provided for the retention and graduation of Black undergraduate students at the University of Central Florida?* As a result, the researcher can influence the outcomes by passionately continuing the research in this area. The researcher’s capstone will provide strategies and programs to increase and maintain the minority representation at UCF and enlighten other HEIs in the state of Florida and beyond to follow suit.

Section 1: University of Central Florida

History

The University of Central Florida was founded by the Florida legislature June 10, 1963, and February 1, 1966, then named Florida Technological University, with the mission of providing support to the U.S. Space program at Kennedy Space Center and Cape Canaveral Air Force Station on Florida's Space Coast (UCF, n.d.-y). The academic focus was changed from engineering and technology, and the name changed by the Florida legislature to the University of Central Florida, December 6, 1978 (UCF, n.d.-b). UCF is one of the few universities nationwide that is a participant of the National Space Grant College and Fellowship Program (NASA, n.d.). The purpose of the program is to provide scholarships for students pursuing careers in science, mathematics, engineering, technology or STEM and support the University's curriculum and faculty development (NASA, n.d.).

Moreover, historically in higher education, there are characteristics which are similar to institutions like UCF. According to National Louis University, *The Colonial College* (2016), the purpose of the colonial college was to train students and enhance the climate and culture on campus and in the surrounding community. The Colonial Colleges included nine higher education institutions within the Thirteen Colonies before the United States became a sovereign nation after the American Revolution. Another similar aspect of the higher educational system to the colonial college is the origin of the Board of Directors. UCF and many public universities seek funding from state legislation, research, endowments, and college tuition costs (NLU, 2016).

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UCF is one of 12 state public universities (UCF, 2019). The official colors are black, and gold, and the logo is the Pegasus, which supports the institution's vision of "endless possibilities" (UCF, n.d.). UCF's motto is "reach for the stars" (UCF, 2019). The college mascot is the UCF Knights, also known as "Knightro" (UCF, n.d.-b). U.S. News & World Report ranks UCF in the U.S. as the top ten most innovative colleges (UCF, 2019).

Most universities and colleges similar to UCF have high admission standards which in turn attract successful and qualified students who become equipped for their careers, and as a result are prominent citizens in the communities in which they live after graduating from college (UCF, 2019). The average SAT combined score for incoming freshmen for the fall 2018 semester was 1328, and UCF is ranked 25 among other prestigious universities by the National Merit Scholars (UCF, 2019). In addition, the organization's budget exceeded \$1.7 billion in 2018; researchers utilized over \$183 million dollars for funding research in the same year (UCF, 2019).

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2017) total undergraduate enrollment for the University of Central Florida was 66,059, with the following racial and ethnic composition: 49% of the students are White, 25% Hispanic, 11% African American (Black), 4 % two or more races, 1% unknown race, and 4% alien unknown. The total number of female students are over 36,000 and there are 29,793 male students. 8% of the students have out-of-state residency, and the average age is 24 and under (NCES, 2017).

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2017), UCF is a four or more years, public university. The institution's category is degree-granting, primarily baccalaureate, and above (NCES, 2017). The Carnegie classification is Doctoral universities: very high research activity. According to the Carnegie classification (n.d.), UCF's undergraduate

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instructional program, Professions plus arts and sciences are categorized as a very high graduate coexistence which includes professional, academic and medical programs.

Moreover, Carnegie classification (n.d.) outlined two types of undergraduate and graduate profile characteristics: full-time and part-time students, and transfer students entering for the first time. NCES (2017) listed the following award levels: Associate degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, post-master's certificate, doctorate degree (research/scholarship), and doctorate degrees (professional practice). UCF offers 224 degrees. 101 bachelor's degrees and 88 master's degrees. The institution provides 29 research degrees, three professional degrees, and three specialists programs (NCES, 2017).

Mission

UCF's core values are quality, integrity, and teamwork (UCF, n.d.-d). The strategic plan for UCF outlined several areas in which the university stated that it will become a transformational leader in the market (UCF, n.d.-d). UCF's strategic plan is committed to students and society and is supported by the following five promises: 1. Harness the power of scale to transform lives and livelihoods. 2. Attract and cultivate exceptional and diverse faculty, students, and staff whose collective contributions strengthen us. 3. Deploy our distinctive assets to solve society's most significant challenges. 4. Create partnerships at every level that amplify our academic, economic, social, and cultural impact and reputation. 5. Innovate academic, operational, and financial models to transform higher education (UCF, n.d.-d). The promises are supported by the mission of UCF:

The University of Central Florida is a public multi-campus, metropolitan research university, dedicated to serving its surrounding communities with their diverse and

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expanding populations, technological corridors, and international partners. The mission of the university is to offer high-quality undergraduate and graduate education, student development, and continuing education. To conduct research and creative activities; and to provide services that enhance the intellectual, cultural, environmental, and economic development of the metropolitan region, address national and international issues in critical areas, establish UCF as a significant presence, and contribute to the global community. (UCF, 2019)

The operational factors of the institution are supported by the mission of the university through the collective efforts of the school, community and the board of trustees. The planning process was coined as Collective Impact (UCF, n.d.-d). The strategic plan involved more than 800 internal and external stakeholders across Central Florida (UCF, n.d.-d). The strategic planning commission created the plan to support three important dimensions of focus: 1. Philosophy establishes culture, identity and its role within the community (UCF, n.d.-d). 2. Value is the ratio of quality to cost. “Universities that provide high value clearly define quality, diligently constrain unnecessary costs, and ensure that advance value will meet demand. In order to achieve this, UCF must foster a cost containment culture.” (UCF n.d.-d, p. 6) 3. Distinctive impact which includes distinguishing from other higher educational institutions (HEIs) such as recruiting scholars, relevant partners, modeling simulation, an advanced research center and a plethora of hospitality and management models (UCF, n.d.-b). These powerful concepts have guided UCF over 50 years, which means “big is better” and the institution has the potential to become better in years to come.

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Leadership and Governance Structure

According to President Dr. Alexander Cartwright, UCF is categorized as a success story in higher education based on the following operational strategies that support the institution's mission, and vision (UCF, n.d.-d). The plans include 1. Increase student access, success, and prominence. 2. Strengthen the faculty and staff. 3. Growth of the research and graduate programs. 4. Create community impacts through partnerships. 5. Lead innovation in higher education. The plan will reach faculty, staff, and stakeholders across campus and the community. Seventy benchmarks were created in 2016 and span over five years; the UCF's strategic plan supports the operations of the institution (UCF, n.d.-d).

UCF is governed by a campus president, Board of Trustees, administrators, and departmental chairs. The Board of Trustees has 13 members as set forth by the Florida constitution and the guidelines of the State University System of Florida (SUS) (UCF, n.d.-g). Six of the members are appointed by the Governor, and five members are appointed by the Board of Governors (UCF, n.d.-g). The appointed members are confirmed by the Florida Senate and serve staggered terms for up to five years (UCF, n.d.-g). The Faculty Senate's chair and the president of the university's Student Government body are also members.

The UCF Board of Trustees is dedicated and consistent to the institution's vision and the mission and purpose of the State University System. The UCF board's responsibilities include: "cost-effectiveness decisions, implementation, and maintenance of quality education programs, financial management and accountability, personnel, the reporting of information, and compliance with laws, rules, regulations, and requirements." (UCF, n.d.-g, para. 4) The UCF Board of Trustees consists of seven operating committees: advancement, audit and compliance,

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compensation and labor, educational programs, finance, and facilities, nominating and governance, and strategic planning.

Moreover, shared governance models at HEIs have taken on a transitory meaning throughout time and from university to university (Olsen, 2009). The mechanism of shared governance has assumed the persona of administration v. Faculty. Campus leaders have the responsibility to override the misconception of shared governance as merely a “consensus” between administration and faculty (Olsen, 2009). Olsen (2009) contended shared governance is not a simple matter of committee consensus, or the faculty's engaging administrators to take on the dirty work or any number of other common misconceptions. Shared governance is much more complicated; it is a delicate balance between faculty and staff participation in planning and decision-making processes, on the one hand, and administrative accountability on the other.

Therefore, UCF has established a faculty senate, as described by Olsen (2009). The constitution states the faculty senate is an advisory board maintained and nurtured by the president, administrators, students, faculty and the serving terms on the board are typically two years (UCF n.d.-f). In addition to the faculty senate, UCF's administration facilitates the inclusion of faculty, staff, and stakeholders in the University's decision-making processes in the spirit of shared governance. The institution has over 55 committees or task forces that engage faculty, staff, and stakeholders in matters on campus that relate to campus concerns, projects, and initiatives (UCF, n.d.-e).

UCF has a Senate Curricular Committee in which the Faculty Senate is responsible for all university curricular committees and councils. There are two governing councils within the Senate Curricular Committee: the undergraduate council and the graduate council (UCF, n.d.-f). Both curricular boards are responsible for policy and curriculum matters. The two committees

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examine course action requests, requests for new programs, and other issues pertinent to curriculum matters (UCF, n.d.-f).

Moreover, the membership of the Senate Curricular Committees consists of the dean of undergraduate studies in the case of the Undergraduate Council, assistant dean, 15 tenured faculty members and general faculty with multi-year appointments, or professional librarians. Faculty members will be balanced by the size of the college in which they represent (UCF, n.d.-f). Terms of service are two years, staggered (UCF, n.d.-f).

The responsibilities and duties of the Senate Curricular Committees include the following: “to review all course additions, revisions, deletions, and special topics course requests and transmit its recommendations to the dean of the college or designee for approval.” (UCF, n.d.-f, para. 3) “The dean of the Undergraduate Studies will inform the Undergraduate Policy and Curriculum Committee of any mandated curriculum changes.” (UCF, n.d.-f, para. 5) Any new programs or the deletions of existing programs will be evaluated by the Undergraduate and Graduate Senate Curricular Committees and subsequently submitted to the Academic Provost and the Office of the Academic Affairs before the submission to the Board of Trustees for final approval (UCF, n.d.-f).

Academic and Curricular Decisions

The University of Central Florida is a public multi-campus, metropolitan research university, dedicated to serving its surrounding communities with their diverse and expanding populations, technological corridors, and international partners. The overview of the university is to offer high-quality undergraduate and graduate education, student development, and continuing education; to conduct research and creative activities; and to provide services that enhance the

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intellectual, cultural, environmental, and economic development of the metropolitan region, address national and international issues in critical areas, establish UCF as a significant presence, and contribute to the global community (UCF, 2019).

UCF's student population is over 66,000 and is the largest university by enrollment in the state of Florida and one of the largest post-secondary institutions in the United States (UCF, 2019). Therefore, a strength of the institution is its vastness and scale; the institution has set strategic goals to impact students and the community in which the school serves to harness global recognition (UCF, n.d.-d). The U.S. News & World Report ranks UCF among the nation's top 10 most innovative colleges, while both *Kiplinger* and *Forbes* rank UCF as a best-value university.

Areas of Concern

On the other hand, one of the significant gaps the University of Central Florida is currently facing is recruiting and retaining minority students from diverse backgrounds (NCES, 2017). As mentioned, the demographics for UCF is approximately 49% white students, with 25% Hispanic students and 11% Black students (NCES, 2017). The minority students' representation is lower compared to the overall mission and goals of the university, which states the need to provide diversity and inclusion to a multiplicity of diverse students (UCF, n.d.-b).

According to Jones (2014), government and nonprofit systems are not profitable when data management systems fail to produce results suited for the organization. Developing a strategic enrollment management system (SEM) and hiring a SEM minority specialist will enhance the strategic goals of UCF as it relates to increasing minority enrollment. Hence, an opportunity for sustainability and growth of diverse populations at UCF is to align its strategic

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objectives to recruit, enroll, retain, and graduate more minority students (Hossler and Bontrager, 2014). Jones (2014) argued success is the result of overall improvements. Therefore, excellence should be what all organizations strive to accomplish. Moreover, to reach this high level of achievement, organizations must identify gaps in measurement systems to sustain and grow the institution (Jones 2014).

One setback of having a large campus is the safety and security of the UCF campus for all stakeholders at the institution. One way to ensure safety is to provide parking in lighted areas, security cameras, and visible on-campus security personnel to ensure safety and the welfare of all faculty, students, and staff. Suskie (2014) asserted the five dimensions of quality state a college of excellence support the goals and plans which are evidenced by the climate and culture of the campus. These dimensions of quality are characterized by collegiality, respect, and collaboration (Suskie, 2014). Therefore, the recommendation is to provide cutting edge technology and innovation, continue to work with local law enforcement on campus concerns, and engage in ongoing communication and transparency to all stakeholders and the surrounding community to ensure the safety of all stakeholders.

UCF understands that reaching its goals means institutionalizing a plan across campus that impacts faculty, staff, and students to meet the outcomes outlined in the institution's strategic policy. Adopted in 2016, the plan is focused on a length of five years (UCF n.d.-d). Some of the opportunities outlined in the strategic plan are for the institution to create a branding niche to attract, recruit and retain, the "best and brightest" students', faculty, and leadership. The priority metric is for student access, success, and prominence, which include a first-year retention rate of 92%, an average GPA of 4.0, an increase in student transfer percentages, and an SAT score of 1870 for incoming freshmen (UCF n.d.-d). A second metric is strengthening the

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faculty and staff to reach 1200 full-time tenure track faculty members, achieve a 25% increase in new hires of underrepresented groups, increase new hires from underrepresented administrative and professional new hires and increased endowed professorships (UCF n.d.-d).

A third metric to institute changes and opportunity at UCF is to increase the number of research and graduate programs. The goal includes an increase of 200 post-doctoral research appointees, achieving additional patents over three years, expand to 10,000 graduate students, and achieve 300 Ph.D. and M.F.A. degrees annually (UCF, n.d.-d). The fourth metric is creating community impact through partnerships which includes comprehensive arts and culture engagement plan, increased community awareness such as hunger, homelessness, quality of life, and public health, etc. (UCF, n.d.-d). And the fifth metric is leading innovation in higher education which includes building a \$175 endowment, increasing alumni giving donors from approximately \$15,000-\$30000, increase new sources of funding by \$100 million, and develop effective and improved online programs (UCF, n.d.-d).

Distinguishing Characteristics

Moreover, UCF has 220-degree programs in 13 colleges. The top 15 undergraduate degree programs are listed (see Appendix B) and the top fifteen graduate (master's) programs (see Appendix B). As of August 2018, there were 329, 616 degrees conferred (see Appendix C). According to the publication *Affordable Colleges Online*, UCF rankings in the following degree programs are as follows (see Appendix C). UCF ranks second in Florida amongst state universities with 324 National Merit Scholars enrolled (UCF, n.d.-b). The online program at UCF support over 21 undergraduate and 32 masters and 3 doctoral programs in various disciplines (UCF, n.d.-l). UCF online is ranked by U.S. News & World Report as one of the top online undergraduate programs in the nation (UCF, n.d.-l).

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The University's research impact attracts more than \$100 million annually in grants, donations, gifts, and awards (UCF, n.d.-dd). In 2017-2018, \$183 million in research funding was awarded, 34 licenses, 925 patents, and UCF was ranked 21 among public universities for the number of patents granted in 2016 (UCF, n.d.-dd). In 2016 the UCF College of Medicine received recognition as a nationally certified Patient-Centered Medical Home. The recognition supports evidence-based, patient-based care. Only 10% of the patient care facilities have received this honor (UCF, n.d.-k).

According to UCF (n.d.-c), the University provides affordable, best value education. Students are interested in value and quality this makes UCF desirable with first time students entering college nationwide. 50% of first-time entering college students graduate without debt. Comparatively, 32% of students nationally graduate without debt. *Kiplinger's* magazine and *Forbes* rank UCF among the nation's best educational values (UCF, n.d.-b). The institution provides a variety of quality programs to support a diverse population at a competitive price for tuition. The average cost of attendance for in-state students is \$17,000 a year (room and board included), and out-of-state students the average yearly costs to attend UCF is \$33,689 (UCF, n.d.-b). UCF (n.d.-b) stated the financial aid opportunities are endless at UCF: \$57 million awarded to Bright Futures students (3rd in the state of Florida), seventy-two of students receive financial aid, \$539.5 million of financial aid awards and 324 recognized National Merit Scholars.

UCF has over eleven connected campus sites throughout the Central Florida area and six specialized locations outside of the main campus (UCF, n.d.-b). UCF's campus housing supports over 12,000 students, which include fraternity/sorority housing, the Rosen campus, affiliated housing and managed housing (UCF, n.d.-b). There are over 13,000 employees across campuses of which 9,000 employees are considered full time (FTE) (UCF, n.d.-b). Over 2000 (FTE)

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teaching faculty and adjuncts (UCF, n.d.-b). 76% of faculty have doctoral degrees, 39% faculty are tenured, 44% non-tenured track, and 17% non-tenured on track (UCF, n.d.-b). During the 2015-2016 academic school year, the UCF faculty members published over 100 books, 302 book chapters, 2,242 journal articles, 1889 conference proceedings and 2947 peer reviewed publications (UCF, n.d.-k).

Institutional Decision-making

The internal factors at UCF which influence decision-making with the University as a whole and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion are correlated with the assertions Tierney (2011) makes that administrators should understand higher education institutions as cultural entities when decision-making becomes complex, and when populations and costs increase. Tierney (2011) emphasized that HEIs lack an understanding of the cultural organization, it inhibits their ability to understand the challenges of higher education. Therefore, leaders must have a full understanding of the organization's culture. At which point, decisions can be made that are inclusive of all represented stakeholders and speaks to the needs of all involved and fosters engagement (Tierney, 2011).

To add, understanding organizational culture is not a "cure-all" for leadership decisions however an understanding of culture can provide insight on how for example to increase enrollment for a particular diverse stakeholder group, to offer institutional strategies to garner an inclusive environment or bring more money for the institution that impacts a multiplicity of stakeholders. Hence, the scale and composition of UCF's student enrollment growth in the past decade and the promises of stakeholder diversity are made in the institution's mission, the sustainability of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and strategic plan. The timely and relevant research of increasing the diversity and inclusion of African American students at UCF

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is appropriate due to the current enrollment rate for the African American student sub population is 11% (7535 students) of the 66,000-student population (UCF n.d.-c).

Moreover, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at UCF has positioned the mission of the department to be the cornerstone of decision-making for diverse and inclusive populations campus-wide and to be nationally recognized and a higher education model for diversity and inclusion practices, policies, and culture (UCF n.d.-j). Therefore, the research question is: *What strategies and programs can be provided for the retention and graduation of Black undergraduate students at the University of Central Florida?*

As a result of choosing this research question, the goal is to increase diversity and inclusion opportunities at UCF for the purpose to enhance student services and to specifically increase the recruitment, retention, and persistence of minority students. UCF stated in the mission, vision and strategic planning documents for the institution that the school will be targeted as a model university in the 21st century charged to make a better future for their students from diverse populations and society (UCF, n.d.-d).

The following strategies will also enhance UCF as a result of the diversity and inclusion initiatives: increased resources, financial aid opportunities, and diverse community partnerships (UCF, n.d.-b). Further, the research on diversity and inclusion will provide other higher education institutions with data and strategies for furthering the mission of diversity and inclusion at HEIs nationwide and globally.

Section 2

Characteristics of a Degree-Granting Post-secondary Institution

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The post-secondary institution is the official authority on academic matters (U. S. Department of Education, n.d.) There are about 4000 degree-granting institutions in the United States (U. S. Department of Education, n.d.). There are approximately 2407, 4-year institutions offering varying Bachelor of Science and higher degree programs (NCES, n.d.). The focus of enrollment for in degree-granting institutions is typical for first-year undergraduate students (NCES, n.d.). Some general trends of post-secondary schools include chartered institutions and categorized as nonprofit or for-profit institutions (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Most 4-year and 2-year institutions are similar because of their mission statements and a broad range of instructional programs (NCES, n.d.). Post-secondary institutions are governed by elected officials, public appointees, with significant financial support from public funding sources (NCES, n.d.).

In the U.S. there are approximately 1100 public two-year institutions or community colleges. Two-year institutions graduate the largest number of undergraduates (Eckel & King, n.d.). Community colleges award associate degrees and prepare students in various areas including vocational and industry related careers (Eckel et al., n.d.).

Issues, Challenges, and Successes of Post-secondary Institutions

Despite the increasing faith and trust, in higher education institutions, there are a plethora of concerns and issues from the student movements of the 1960s to relevant topics that are on the forefront today. There are several issues and challenges that institutions face. The first challenge is the rising cost of tuition is pivoted against the value of quality education. Even though there are benefits for attending college, most students consider cost when they evaluate its usefulness and worthiness to attend a post-secondary institution. The second challenge is the declining

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graduation rates as many as one and three students do not complete their degrees and eventually drop out of college (Allaire, 2018).

A third challenge is a decrease in public funding for public colleges and universities. The decline in federal funding has forced institutions to seek out alternative ways to fund their institution from private funding sources (Allaire, 2018). The fourth challenge is institutions who are faced with outdated curriculum and facilities which lack innovation and technological equipment (Allaire, 2018). And the final problem is exercising free speech. The current political issues in the nation are relevant at some higher education campuses.

The purpose of post-secondary institutions is for learners to enter college, take the appropriate coursework to prepare students to graduate and be successful in the careers in which they embark upon (Barr & Tagg, 2004). Therefore, the main goal of higher education is to provide a rigorous curriculum during study in which a person selects based on a career goal or objective (Barr et al., 2004). The first few years of college are dedicated to general education courses in which one would learn the foundational skills. These skills are prerequisites for the preparation of the specialized courses in which a person will complete in the last two years of college (Barr et al., 2004).

The model for higher education is an instructional framework that supports the purpose of higher education. The use of higher education is to provide successful learning opportunities for all stakeholders-students, faculty, and administrations. The university setting is a community of learners and reflective learners (Barr et al., 2004). The primary objective is to provide optimal learning opportunities that deepen the knowledge of the students, in turn, provide reflective thinking for the instructors (curriculum planning). The investment supports the school's mission and goals for graduating students to successfully pursue their career goals (Barr et al., 2004).

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Moreover, UCF promises to work with students from enrollment through graduation and until they had attained employment. Therefore, UCF supports the goals of its students by adding value to its quality programs, state of the art facilities, and offers an array of financial aid opportunities (UCF, n.d.-b).

State Roles in Higher Education

The U.S. News & World Report has once again ranked Florida as the best state in the nation for higher education (as cited in Cohen, 2018). The 2018 rankings weigh several factors: the time it takes students to complete two and four-year higher education programs, the cost of tuition and fees, and the burden of debt for college graduates. Florida ranked No. 1 on the 2017 list, too (as cited in Cohen, 2018). The high ranking is an important asset to UCF's marketing strategy that bigger is better, and the school's promise of value (UCF, n.d.-o). Former Governor Scott has been a key figure in higher education for the past seven years. In an interview, Governor Scott stated "It is great news that Florida has again ranked first in the nation for higher education. Over the past seven years, we have made major investments in our higher education system and challenged colleges and universities to become more affordable while fully preparing students to be ready for a great job upon graduation," Scott said in a statement released by his office (Cohen, 2018, para. 2). A leading higher education system helps strengthen our state as the best place for families, students and job creators to succeed. We will continue to work together to hold the line on tuition and support our state colleges and universities, so families and students can continue to achieve their dreams in Florida," the governor said (as cited in Cohen, 2018, para 3).

The Florida college system serves more than 800,000 students which includes UCF. The recent challenges include an extra \$232 million that was awarded to state colleges in the spring

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of 2018. Cohen (2018), contended that state legislators have invested more in Florida's biggest universities, they've also cut funding for the 28 state colleges— colleges like Miami Dade College and Broward College — that serve students who are most in need. Last year, state lawmakers cut \$25 million from the budget for the 28 schools. At the same time, they gave an extra \$232 million to the big universities like the University of Florida and UCF (as cited in Cohen 2018, para. 4). Because of the extra funding to larger Florida state institutions, UCF has the financial support of the state to offer incoming minority students to attend the university.

For instance, some stakeholders believe the extra money is a windfall to Florida's overall higher education system, however, some Florida state colleges oppose the legislative decision--- there were some disparities in its share of the funds to select colleges. Cohen (2018) argued that the stark difference in funding priorities was received as a decisive insult to institutions like Miami Dade College and Broward College — and the tens of thousands of students they serve: That they don't matter as much as the bigger universities.

Moreover, the downward shift of state appropriations has become apparent in some areas of the budget. However, merit-based scholarships, such as: The Bright Future Scholarship have seen an upward shift in funding from the state, primarily correlated with institutions that attract many of the Bright Future Scholarship recipients, like the larger universities. The increase in funding for UCF will be a “game changer” in attracting qualified high school minority students from the state of Florida. It is apparent the Florida Legislative budget has shifted to support programs and universities with a specific criterion.

The Florida Legislature bases its HE cuts on complex categories and formulas and the need to push institutions to use their own revenue, a “bargaining tool” used to slow funding, so schools can expend their own budgets. Archibald et al. (2011) argued that schools should spend

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revenue of their own, and it should namely be generated from tuition. The tuition revenue potential is one that has had a great impact on the state's budget by reducing its involvement with schools and one that lawmakers tend to wrangle over with colleges, special interest groups, lobbyists, and families of students who attend college.

A financial funding “game changer” and contemporary trend in Florida's state funding model for HE has been the performance funding model. The Florida Performance Model is a recognized Florida Statute (law) that awards a performance-based incentive to Florida College System institutions using performance-based measures adopted by the State Board of Education. The law requires the model include four measures: (1) Retention Rates, (2) Completion Rates, (3) Job Placement/Continuing Education rates, and (4) Entry-Level Wages. It also requires the State Board of Education to adopt a rule to administer the program, develop benchmarks for evaluation of institutional performance, establish minimum requirements to receive state investment funds, and monitor colleges with performance improvement plans (The Florida College System, 2018).

The current rule for the legislation was approved by the State Board of Education on July 17, 2017. For the 2017-18 year, the Legislature and Governor provided \$60 million of General Revenue for performance funding. Of this \$60 million, \$30 million is the result of additional state investments in the Florida College System and \$30 million in institutional investments is provided by withholding a proportional amount of revenue from each college's base funding (The Florida College System, 2018).

UCF's support from the Florida State Legislature fits “a rigorous mold that can withstand the accountability measures of the performance funding model set forth by the Florida College System. The model provides some latitude of support to schools that do not have the score by

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providing a program improvement plan. Moreover, Florida Legislators will continue to wrangle about which HE institutions who receive funding and schools that receive the least funding, as long as there are tighter restrictions and criteria to receive funding. The fight over the state's higher education funding budget is a reminder of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution "survival of the fittest" (Than, 2018). Overall, UCF has the funding capacity to offer financial aid scholarships to minority students, a strategy that will increase the minority enrollment and offer a diverse population a higher education opportunity.

Financial and Budgetary Considerations

U.S. News & World Report ranked Florida as the best state in the nation for higher education. The 2018 rankings weigh several factors. 1. The time it takes students to complete two and four-year higher education programs 2. The cost of tuition and fees. 3. The burden of debt for college graduates (as cited in Cohen, 2018). The recent challenges include an extra \$232 million that was awarded to state colleges in the spring of 2018 (Cohen 2018). Cohen (2018), contended that state legislators had invested more in Florida's prominent universities, they've also cut funding for the 28 state colleges. Last year, state lawmakers cut \$25 million from the budget for the 28 schools (Cohen 2018). At the same time, they gave an extra \$232 million to the larger universities in the state of Florida (as cited in Cohen 2018). The Florida Legislative budget has shifted to support programs and universities with specific criteria.

Therefore, HEI's are challenged to effectively enact cost-saving strategies as a plausible low-risk financial solution to the crisis that most colleges have found themselves in (Zumeta, Breneman, Callan, & Finney, 2012). Critics argued that schools should spend revenue on their own, and it should namely be generated from tuition (Archibald et al., 2011).

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The rise in tuition cost across HEIs nationwide is a growing concern (Zumeta et al., 2012). In 2015 UCF raised its tuition cost by 15% (Wolkenfield, 2015). UCF experienced hikes with tuition in 2012 by 15%, the increase of tuition in recent years is due to the continuation of state budget cuts. These monetary changes in tuition cost have occurred over the past decade (Wolkenfield, 2015). Even though tuition cost at Florida's public universities is the lowest in the country, families have coped with severe state budget cuts (Gilmartin, 2012).

Based on the 2018-2019 UCF's academic school year, the in-state cost of tuition and fees was \$6,379 and \$22,479 for out of state tuition and fees (UCF, n.d.-b). The data indicated in the United States, 432 million people owe more than \$1.3 trillion in student loan debt (Gilmartin, 2012). The average student owed approximately \$37,000 in debt (Gilmartin, 2012). The data suggest that most of the student debt is generated from institutions similar to for-profit schools (Hernandez, 2017).

On the other hand, the students who primarily hold more student loan debt are transfer students (Hernandez, 2017). Despite the incremental changes in tuition cost over the past few years at UCF, 44% of the students graduate with no debt (UCF, n.d.-b). UCF offers many different types of financial assistance, such as scholarships, grants, college work-study, and non-resident waiver. Gifts include the UCF Scholars' award, Florida Bright Futures, Student Assistance Grant, to name a few (Office of Student Financial Assistance, n.d.).

Fundraising and Philanthropic Giving

In 2018, UCF received \$81 million in charitable gifts and commitments (UCF, n.d.-aa). Over 30,000 donors raised the contributions during the academic school year 2018-2019 (UCF, n.d.-aa). The donations helped propel the university in raising over \$400 million in an eight-year-

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long campaign called IGNITE (UCF, n.d.-aa). The IGNITE campaign is a vital part of UCF's Foundation. UCF's Foundation is supported by past alumni, professional alumni, staff, executives, and volunteer leadership (UCF, n.d.-bb). The mission of the Foundation is to encourage stewardship and giving with its alumni, and friends in support of UCF (UCF, n.d.-bb). The UCF Foundation, Inc. was founded in 1969 and is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization. The Foundation is governed by a group of volunteer Board of Directors and the Foundation staffs over 100 employees (UCF, n.d.-bb).

The donations from alumni, friends, and partners range over \$5 million. The current fundraiser IGNITE is a multi-year campaign. The goal of the IGNITE campaign is to infuse the institution with private monetary support through the end of 2019 (UCF, n.d.-g). The chair of the IGNITE campaign is a volunteer and alumni Rick Walsh. Walsh previously worked as an executive at Darden Restaurants and has brought his corporate professional experiences to the university as an enhancement to the school's fundraising efforts. Although the institution raised over \$4 million with the IGNITE campaign, UCF's colleges and departments support the university with their individual fundraising goals. These funds are corporately raised by alumni, friends, and corporations to support departments such as athletics, nursing, hospitality management, engineering, and research (UCF, n.d.-g).

Political and Governmental Factors

The University of Central Florida is governed by federal and state statutes, regulations of the Board of Governors, and university policies. The Board of Governors was established in 2003 to operate, regulate, as well as, the responsibility for the entire system of eleven universities (Florida Department of Education (FDOE), n.d.). The board is composed of seventeen members, Florida's Governor appoints fourteen members, and members serve a seven-year term (FDOE,

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n.d.). The additional members of the board are the advisory council of the faculty senate, the Commissioner of Education, and the president of the Florida student association (FDOE, n.d.).

Moreover, the university's administration and Board of Governors facilitates and guides the school's operations in policy and procedures when federal regulations and statutes are not detailed. Additional supports of governance at UCF include departments such as the offices of academic and student affairs, public affairs, budget, and finance (UCF, n.d.-b). UCF and other degree-seeking higher education institutions are authorized to operate and educate its students who are enrolled at the university. The state approval agency that charters, authorizes, licenses or approves UCF and its programs are the Florida Department of Education. UCF is one of the 12 State University System of Florida institutions.

There are 28 member colleges of the Florida College System (FCS) (FCS, n.d.). The mission of the FCS is to provide quality academic and career programs to increase student learning success and develop a global workforce that supports a diverse community (FCS, n.d.). Besides, UCF is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commissions on Colleges (SACSCOC) (UCF Academic program quality, n.d.). The SACSCOC is the regional accrediting agency for all higher education, degree-granting institutions in the southern section of the United States. The responsibilities of SACSCOC are to provide accreditation and guidance to the university and its academic programs. The mission of the SACSCOC is to ensure that quality education is offered to all students and improve the efficiency of higher education institutions governed by the agency (SACSCOC, n.d.).

Post-secondary institutions receive their accreditation, by maintaining compliance with the SACSCOC standards detailed in the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhance (SACSCOC, n.d.). Therefore, the accreditation standard qualifies UCF to administer

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degrees such as associates, bachelors, master's, specialist, and doctoral levels. In 2016 reaffirmed its accreditation status with SACSCOC. UCF's ongoing accreditation "good standing" status supports UCF in quality and improvement in upholding the school's mission (UCF, n.d.-z).

UCF's academic programs are governed by the regulations of the Board of Governors of the State University System of Florida (UCF, n.d.-z). The program process begins with a proposal to add programming and ends with including the new program to the State University System (SUS) (UCF, n.d.-z). There are several steps in the process to ensure new programs launched at UCF are aligned to the institution's strategic plan (UCF, n.d.-z). UCF has a remarkable reputation with the Board of Governors. U.S. News & World Report recognized UCF as one of the nation's top five "up-and-comer" universities (FDOE, n.d.). The institution's accolades and highlights are supported on the SUS website and publicized through the marketing efforts of the university.

Historical Legal Issues

Affirmative Action is an essential aspect of the research that I propose in the area of advancing diversity and inclusion of African American students at UCF. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s was intended to provide equality, diversity, for members of minority groups, women in education, and employment. Further, the Equal Protection Clause included in the 14th amendment ensures that no state shall deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. Affirmative Action policies in HEI's is a way to increase a diverse and welcoming campus for all ethnic groups. The importance of these actions for HEI's and UCF are to attract and to retain students from various backgrounds and cultural experiences.

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Moreover, social and economic inequities have existed over 100 years in the United States and still exist today. Dorling (2015) asserted that social inequality occurs when resources are unevenly distributed. The richest 1% of people in the world will, within a few months, own more than the other 99% put together. In the world's richest countries, social inequality is not caused by having too few resources for everyone, instead it is driven by beliefs that perpetuate the inequality. The evidence shows that these beliefs are unfounded, but they provide (false) justification for those who benefit most from inequality.

Dorling (2015) stated there are five social evils that loom over inequalities in the U.S. – elitism, exclusion, prejudice, greed and despair – and the myths that support the relentless rise of social and economic inequality. The idealism of meritocracy in the U.S., espouses that students are rewarded according to their ability and not according to their lack thereof. It is the belief of some critics that all levels of education should be based on merit, and not on social class or family environment. Higher education professionals should support students who possess the gifts and talents, and work hard academically, those students are vital assets to our society and to our future leadership.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the signing of the Higher Education Act of 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson created the world of “university education” as we know it today, it has impacted a new generation of students from all walks of life (Texas State University (TXST), 2015). Migrant and minority students were given funding to attend the college of their choice. The Higher Education Act of 1965 made it easier for all students to attend college from rural areas and not how big their parents’ wallets were (TXST 2015).

Access without resources is an empty promise (TXST 2015), higher education institutions need more financial opportunities for all students to lessen the likelihood of

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economic inequalities as well as programs at schools like state university of New York, Stony Brook University. The EOP (Educational Opportunity Program) helps graduate 65% of its Latino students and more than 70% of its Black students. This is more than any other public university in the U.S. (PBS, 2010). It is important for institutional leaders at UCF to support equality and diversity programs to increase the support African American students.

UCF: Legal Issues in Higher Education

The law's presence on campus and its impact on the daily affairs of postsecondary institutions are substantial. Litigation and government expose college and universities to jury trials and significant monetary awards to courts injunctions affecting institutions' internal affairs, to government agency compliance investigations and hearings and even to criminal prosecutions against administrative officers, faculty members and students (Kaplin & Lee, 2014). Some of the current issues impacting higher education institutions are increases in tuition and fees, financial aid, affirmative action in admissions and employment, religious and individual groups, ADA compliance, student-athletes, and plagiarism/cheating, the list of examples continues to grow. Kaplin et al. (2014) asserted that law and litigation have extended to every corner of campus activity.

Thus, some factors contribute to law matters at HEIs such as an increasingly adversarial mindset, decreased values, and a diminishing level of trust in societal institutions have made it more acceptable to assert legal claims at the drop of a hat (Kaplin et al., 2014). It is imperative leaders stay abreast of the changes in policies and understand the components to thrive in the academic arena to make effective decisions for the institution. Therefore, UCF is supported by an Office of General Counsel. The Office of General Counsel offers legal advice and represents the university in the area of administrative and judicial matters (UCF, n.d.-cc).

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The top legal issues at UCF are 1. Copyright and fair use include guidelines for classroom copying and the legal requirements for exhibiting movies. 2. The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) limits the disclosure of information from student education records and issues relating to the safety of students and campus security. 3. Sunshine Law Open Meetings Requirement states that all meetings of the legislature are open and noticed 4. Email Retention requires that public documents, including email, be retained for some time 5. The Code of Ethics for Public Employees consist of laws prohibiting actions or unlawful conduct of federal employees (UCF, n.d.-cc).

In addition, the Office of General Counsel approves all contracts, and affiliation agreements entered in by the university (UCF, n.d.-cc). The office reviews and processes all subpoenas and public records. The Office of General Counsel is not authorized to give personal advice to faculty, staff, or administrators. The department is not permitted to support or provide legal advice to students attending UCF (UCF, n.d.-cc).

UCF: Enrollment & Competing Institutions

UCF's student population is over 66,000 and is the largest university by enrollment and one of the most significant post-secondary institutions in the United States (UCF, 2019). The demographics for the institution, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2017), UCF's total undergraduate enrollment was 66,059, the racial and ethnic composition of UCF 49% of the students are White, 47.8%, American Indian/Alaskan native 0.2%, Hispanic/Latino 26%, Asian 6.3%, African-American (Black) 11% , multi-racial 3.7% unknown race 1%. (NCES, 2017). The largest group are White students, Hispanic students are the second largest, and African American students are the third-largest student group. The other

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racess make up smaller groups which are comprised of multi-racial, unknown race and American Indian/Alaskan native.

Table 1

UCF Undergraduate Demographics

Race/ethnicity breakdown	Number of Students	Percentage %
White	32,754	47.8%
Hispanic/Latino	17,832	26%
African American/Black	7,535	11%
Asian	4,309	6.3%
American Indian/Alaskan	111	0.2%
Multiracial	2,510	3.7%
Race and Ethnicity unknown	697	1%

NCES, 2017

Once admitted to UCF, students are engaged and connected to the admission office through graduation (UCF, n.d.-dd). The Student Development and Enrollment Services (SDES) serves as a support and resource for enrollment, wellness, housing, academic advising, and mentoring services (UCF, n.d.-dd). The programs and services that SDES offers contribute to the increase in the school's competitive edge and partnerships (UCF, n.d.-dd). UCF Connect offers support, program development, innovation, and collaboration to ensure quality, inclusion, and

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diversity (UCF, n.d.-ee). SDES contributes to the success of UCF by providing services and programs that are suited for each student from enrollment through graduation (UCF, n.d.-ee).

Table 2

UCF Online Enrollment: Total: 5007

Undergraduate	2897
Graduate	2110

UCF, n.d.-b

There are over 2,719 international students from 48 countries. UCF is ranked at number 63 out of 1,204 universities for providing value to the international students' population (UCF, n.d.-b). The UCF Connect data supports UCF's campaign that bigger is better (UCF, n.d.-o). UCF's general population of online and international students gives expansive global opportunities to students from all over the world (UCF, n.d.-o). The data supports the research study question in strategically utilizing enrollment and marketing strategies with its online programs to attract and retain minority students.

Moreover, there are several competing public state universities (University of Florida (UF), and Florida State University (FSU) comparatively to UCF. Based on the comparisons in Table 3, UCF has the highest student undergraduate enrollment. However, UF has the most significant percentage of students who return after the first year. Hence, UCF has the lowest graduation rates of the three. All three universities have a small percentage of African American undergraduate students. Therefore, the data sheds light relative to the research question. Thus,

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the purpose of the research study is to provide strategies and programs to increase enrollment for African American students at UCF as well as other HEIs.

Table 3

State University Competitor's Undergraduate Student Demographic Data

Universities	White	Hispanic	Black	Full-time Enrollment	Students Returning after First Year	Graduation Rate	Average Annual Cost
University of Central Florida (UCF) Grad. Rate	47% 73%	26% 68%	11% 72%	66, 000	89%	69%	\$15, 286
Florida State University (FSU) Grad. Rate	62% 70%	20% 69%	8% 63%	32, 614	93%	80%	\$14, 582
University of Florida (UF) Grad. Rate	55% 88%	22% 91%	6% 77%	33, 655	96%	88%	\$12, 345

Scorecard, n.d.

UCF: Partnerships

DirectConnect is an innovative partnership that grants admission to students who graduate with their Associate Arts or Associate Science degrees. The program guarantees acceptance from area state colleges (Valencia College, Seminole State College, Eastern Florida

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State College, College of Central Florida, Daytona State College, and Lake Sumter State College) (UCF, n.d.-ff). DirectConnect provides admissions support, orientation, academic guidance, and financial aid services. DirectConnect students receive one-on-one counseling and comprehensive academic advising (Success Coach) (UCF, n.d.-ff). The Success Coach provides a high level of support, coordination and guidance for UCF students (UCF, n.d.-ff). The Success Coach helps students to stay on track to graduate, provides academic and nonacademic resources, and develops career goals with assigned students (UCF, n.d.-ff). The benefits of a Success Coach (see Appendix D).

UCF provides industry partnership opportunities within its collegiate departments. UCF facilitates collaboration with industry leaders and forges relationships in Central Florida as well as globally (UCF, n.d.-m). Some of the industry's partners include Siemens, Harris Corporation, Florida Hospital, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Walt Disney, Duke Energy, NASA, Nemours, Verizon, and U.S. Department of Energy to name a few (UCF, n.d.-m). UCF's administrative team creates a consortium of partnerships to enable UCF to develop in areas outside of the classroom setting for its students.

Moreover, the partnerships provide nurture, alliances, networking opportunities, and financial support to the University and its students. For example, Lockheed Martin is an excellent example of a partnership. Lockheed Martin provides STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) opportunities in classroom and lab settings at the University (UCF, n.d.-m). The partnerships are unique in assisting minority students in providing mentors, financial-aid grants and scholarships, on the job training, and after graduation career opportunities (UCF, n.d.-m). UCF's partnerships and alliances will be pivotal in providing support in enhancing programs and strategies for the advancement of minority students at UCF.

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UCF: Marketing

Moreover, Diamond (2002) asserted marketing identifies the intended audience. The mission, vision of the institution assists with identifying stakeholders. UCF's marketing strategies are consistent throughout the campuses (UCF, n.d.-b). The motto: "speaking with one voice and one message" resonates throughout all departments and campus wide. The marketing and branding strategies support the mission and vision of the institution (UCF, n.d.-n). "Promoting our brand with unity, clarity, and consistency helps everyone associate UCF with credibility and quality." (UCF, n.d.-n, para.1) The marketing niche that UCF has created is more than a logo and school colors, but a message that is reverberated with everything they say and do (UCF, n.d.-n). A theme that has resonated throughout the research is that bigger is better (UCF, n.d.-n). The marketing strategy of scale supports the pillars: 1. Access-providing access to anyone who may want to pursue a higher education degree (UCF, n.d.-n). 2. Innovation- pursue thought leaders globally to support students and academic programs (UCF, n.d.-n). 3. Impact-create a reputation in the Central Florida Area, the nation, and worldwide (UCF, n.d.-n).

The UCF brand is about student outcomes and access for all students. The product is the experiences and overall services provided by the institution such as entertainment, course offerings, financing, dining, and healthcare (Diamond, 2002). UCF offers a variety of courses and services that are attractive to multiple audiences (a diverse population not limited to African American students) in the field of technology, sports medicine, medicine, culinary arts, business management, and engineering. The UCF brand tailors its course offerings to newly enrolled first-year students to graduating seniors (UCF, n.d.-n). Throughout the course at the university, students explore a variety of career options in his/her major — for example, project-based assignments, hands-on job shadowing, and career fairs.

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UCF features brand strategies on billboards, TV, print media and social media platforms, emphasizing a variety of course offerings, value, and a promising career after graduation.

Therefore, the research study supports the school's mission, vision, and marketing strategy.

UCF's has made promises of diversity and inclusion, and those sentiments are a common thread in their publications, website, actions, and physical spaces (UCF, n.d.-n.). UCF stands behind a "big promise" in its marketing position in higher education. UCF stands by the following statements: "we are bold, we are modern, we are youthful, we are entrepreneurial, and we are energetic." (UCF, n.d.-n. para. 7)

Section 3

Student Affairs Functions

The Student Development and Enrollment Services (SDES) division at UCF offers multiple programs and services. SDES support a plethora of services including enrollment, wellness, housing assistance, academic advising, and mentoring, to name a few. The main goal of SDES is to enhance student engagement from enrollment to the moment of graduation (UCF, n.d.-i). SDES utilizes the UCF Creed principles-integrity, scholarship, community, creativity, and excellence as a foundation for developing learning objectives and student outcomes (UCF, n.d.-i). Therefore, student outcomes are the foundation of the department. SDES works hard to align services to develop results which enable students to become successful and productive citizens (UCF, n.d.-i).

The mission of SDES is "To create and cultivate an innovative and inclusive learning experience that helps students reach their academic, personal and professional aspirations; to advocate for social awareness and change, and to commit to lifelong learning." (UCF, n.d.-p., p.

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2) The department's vision is to prepare students to become globally competitive and lifelong learners. The department accomplishes its goals by providing transformative learning experiences (UCF, n.d.-p). The top priorities of SDES: Student Well-being; Student Access and Opportunity; Student Learning and Success; Student Career Readiness and Post Baccalaureate Success, and Student Advocacy Equity and Inclusion (UCF, n.d.-p).

The department is divided into nine functional groups. 1. **The first-year transition-** which supports the high school student to the end of the first-year college. Upon entering UCF, all freshman and transfer students are required to attend an orientation session to learn about campus life. The Knighting kickoff event is held every year for new and transfer students. 2. **Enrollment services-** includes admissions, financial assistance, and outreach services. Enrollment opportunities such as high school, state college, and career fairs are held at strategic times throughout the year. 3. **Learning support-** supports students and provides learning services. UCF offers intervention assistance for students, such as Supplemental instruction (SI), which is an academic and retention program aimed at students who need extra academic support.

4. **Student life-** student involvement includes campus activities, Student Union, and Greek life. The Student Union is the heart of campus where students can eat, relax, attend meetings, and enjoy campus life. 5. **Wellness-** supports the physical health and mental wellness of all students. UCF Cares is a program geared toward crime prevention, safety, mental health and diversity, and inclusion. 6. **Support Services-** which serves career planning and Registrar office services. 7. **Housing and Resident life-** which includes student housing and student living services. 8. **Student Rights and Responsibilities-** which covers any legal and dispute services. 9. **Community Support-** is a division which includes diversity and inclusion (UCF, n.d.-o).

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Programs and services listed under SDES are highlighted in (see Appendix E). The initiatives and priorities of SDES provide students with many holistic, comprehensive programs and services to assist students in their personal and academic success. The research will enhance the Community Support division of SDES to aid plans and strategies for the advancement of African American students.

UCF's Student Body

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2017) stated the UCF total undergraduate enrollment was 66,059, and the racial and ethnic composition of UCF 49% of the students are White, 25% Hispanic, 11% African American (Black), 4 % two or more races, 1% unknown race, and 4% alien unknown. UCF has an array of nationalities and ethnicities represented at the University. UCF had an online enrollment 5,007, and 22% of the student population was over the age of 25. With over 2,052 international students from 154 countries, UCF is ranked at number 63 out of 1,204 universities for providing value to international students (UCF, n.d.-c).

One of the most competitive areas for colleges and universities is the recruitment of international students (Hanover Research, 2014). The top U.S. schools and countries abroad are competing for the same students (Hanover Research, 2014). Hanover Research (2014) argued the international student debacle between the U.S. and other countries had caused an imbalance in program availability to the number of students in the market. While the market has enabled students to become more selective in which school to attend, many universities have resorted to competing for international students (Hanover Research, 2014). UCF's top five foreign countries outside of the U.S. represented in the school's demographics are Venezuela, China, United Kingdom, Brazil, and Colombia (UCF, n.d.-v).

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UCF provides English language support for international students. The English-Language Institute-Intensive English Program (IEP) offers a highly engaging curriculum to increase English proficiency for limited English speakers. The key feature of the IEP program is tutor support, and Student Success Day (tutors and instructors are available to students all day) Friday evenings are devoted to cultural activities geared toward international students (UCF, n.d.-v). UCF attracts international students with an increased social media outreach presence, job fairs, recruitment campus events, lucrative financial aid packages, and web-based marketing (UCF, n.d.-v).

Moreover, another critical audience for HEIs is the number of adults and nontraditional learners returning to higher education. The National Center for Education Statistics stated students 25 years, and older has increased more than the number of younger students (Hanover, 2014). The increase of students over 25 years will continue to grow in the coming years (Hanover, 2014). 22% of the students are over the age of 25 (nontraditional students) and are seeking an undergraduate degree (UCF, n.d.-c). UCF's nontraditional students participate in online classes (UCF, n.d.-c). UCF Online offers a diverse program format for traditional and nontraditional students seeking undergraduate, graduate, and certification programs. The online program is one that will be starred as a targeted strategy to increase its minority population. Distance learning offers opportunities for minority students to take online courses and provide educational experiences through UCF's continuing education programs.

UCF students represent 67 counties in Florida, 50 states, and 154 countries (UCF, n.d.-v). Therefore, the gains for students attending the University is more than a big university and statistics but the inclusion of a diverse student population, innovative classrooms and labs, and

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inclusive campus life (UCF, n.d.-o). UCF produces over 16, 000 degrees and is well known for producing the top graduates among public universities (UCF, n.d.-c).

Co-curriculum Student Experiences

Co-Curricular activities are learning activities that support the primary curriculum at HEIs. UCF has several programs which support and complement the formal curriculum at the institution (see Table 4). These programs encourage students in the areas of adaptability, decision-making skills, teamwork, leadership, and civic virtue, to name a few (UCF, n.d.-w). Overall, these programs are correlated with supporting African American students while attending UCF.

Tinto (2017) suggested in his theory on student success that minority students benefit from co-curricular learning experiences. The following factors help minority students and underserved students succeed and grow at HEIs which include: peer culture, close friends interactions, Greek organizations, student unions, informal contact with faculty, positive interracial/intercultural environment, and self-confidence and motivating type activities (College Student Retention, n.d.). Therefore, the researcher's data will provide links to existing co-curricular programs at UCF that support minority student growth and achievement.

Table 4

UCF: Co-Curriculum Learning Experiences

Programs	Description	Programs	Description
Registered Student Organizations	Programs which support students' development and growth.	Supplemental Instruction/Peer Tutoring	Peer sessions directed to the student's course work.

All-Knight Study	Interactive Study Space, available 24 hours.	Club, Sports, Recreation and Intramurals	Participate in competitive individual and team sports.
Student Government Association/Student Leadership Programs	Programs which promote decision-making and challenge students to be civic minded and social change agents.	Social Justice and Advocacy	Promote equal access to resources, programs and campus opportunities.
Mentoring and Academic Coaching	Regularly scheduled meetings with peer coach and mentor.	Community Service and Volunteering	Promote students to serve in the community.
Work Experience	Provide students with real life work experiences.	Residence Life Curriculum	Promote students to be active global citizens.
Personal Wellness and Exercise	Provide students with nutrition, wellness and exercise programs.	Living Learning Communities	Students are placed together on a floor or within a building based on a common major, interest or program.
Alternative Break Programs	Provide students with culturally immersed programs.	Internships and Assistantships	Provide students with on the job training.

UCF, n.d.-w

Faculty Leadership and Academic Freedom

In higher education, most of the faculty's energies are devoted to the institution for which they work. UCF is one of the leading four-year institutions in the United States and fashions its leadership strengths with an outstanding faculty (UCF, n.d.-c). The institution has over 2, 500 faculty, 76% of the faculty have doctorate degrees, 39% percent are tenured, 925 patents since 2005, and \$136 million research operation (UCF, n.d.-q). The institution has top-ranked academic programs, 13 colleges, and over 200 undergraduate and graduate majors (UCF, n.d.-c).

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UCF welcomes the support of the institution's faculty and students in the formation of knowledge and new ideas. 1. Teaching: is the primary purpose of the both undergraduate and graduate levels. 2. Research and scholarship: Is an integral part of understanding the world, the intellect, and senses. 3. Service: The University shares the benefits of its research, knowledge, and to the public good (UCF, n.d.-q). The three interlocking elements — teaching, research and scholarship, and service — span all the University's academic disciplines and represent the University's commitment to lead and serve the state of Florida, the nation and the world by pursuing and disseminating new knowledge (UCF, n.d.-q).

Hence, UCF's faculty promotion criteria include a collective bargaining agreement. The University's measures include granting tenure, promotion, and permanent status shall be predicated on satisfactory work and performance of his/her duties and the responsibilities of the University's community after six years of continuous service (UCF, n.d.-r). There are three categories of academic engagement: 1. Teaching: includes instruction, distant learning, and directions on theses and dissertations. 2. Research: research on peer-review publications, which includes time devoted to studying. 3. Service: Professional and service (UCF, n.d.-r). Tenure and promotion require distinction in two areas: Teaching and Research. UCF prides its promotion criteria by providing a nomination for tenure no later than the beginning of the last year of the tenure probation period (UF, n.d.-r).

Overall, the UCF tenure process is explicitly outlined in the faculty contract, on the institution's web pages, and throughout UCF's professional community. UCF's plans and goals are threaded throughout to support a collegial environment that promotes teaching, research, and service, which is an expectation outlined to all faculty as well as students (UCF, n.d.-r). The impact of the teaching, research, and service are enhancements to the UCF community as well as

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in the lives of world citizens (UCF, n.d.-r). Moreover, UCF has done an exceptional job outlining its tenured promotion criteria. Additionally, tenured faculty should be highly intra-motivated and successful members of a collegial environment; therefore, the promotion standards are set in motion as a guideline to his/her professional and personal goals and aspirations. On the other hand, 44% of UCF's faculty represent non-tenured track faculty; these instructors are held at the same standards as tenured faculty except for the research requirement (UCF, n.d.-q).

Academic Freedom

Hence, it is the responsibility of the institution to encourage full academic freedom (Academic Freedom, 2018). Academic freedom is freedom to teach, in and out of the classroom (Academic Freedom, 2018). UCF's Academic Freedom's policy states "employees shall have freedom to present and discuss their own academic subjects, frankly and forthrightly, without fear of censorship, and to select instructional materials and determine grades in accordance with University policies." (Academic Freedom, 2018)

Academic freedom promotes an employee to participate with a liberal spirit of inquiry and scholarly criticism (Academic Freedom, 2018). An important point about academic freedom and governance has broad consequences. It means, for example, that members of the academic community have profound responsibilities to each other and to the larger mission of the institution that require them to participate in those collective forums.

Scholars and educators have an academic responsibility and are obliged for the following: uphold ethical standards, adhere to their roles as teachers, researchers and counselors, respect teachers and staff, contribute to their academic unit, observe the regulations of the University, be

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forthright and honesty, and not act as institutional representative unless authorized to do so (Academic Freedom, 2018).

Thus, faculty generally regard their primary obligations to be to their professional communities, their students, and the larger public rather than to political edicts or ideologically biased mandates from above. “The protection of the academic freedom of faculty members in addressing issues of institutional governance, is a prerequisite for the practice of governance unhampered by fear of retribution” (American Association of University Professors, para. 13)

Organizational and Administrative Structures

John Hitt, UCF’s 5th president, retired June 30, 2018, after serving twenty-six years at the University (UCF, n.d.-x). The Chronicle of Higher Education recognized the former president as “one of the biggest success stories in higher education” (UCF, n.d.-x). Much of the president’s success has been through forming partnerships and alliances at the University (UCF, n.d.-x). His contributions at UCF include widening access to students from diverse populations and attracting high achieving students (UCF, n.d.-x). Since Hitt’s retirement, UCF is in the process of finding a new leader. The Board of Trustees has been instrumental in making decisions as to the governing authority over the University.

The University supports a shared leadership or collaborative approach in its decision making. Shared leadership is about making choices that support stakeholders throughout the organization. Shared leadership is a distributive form of leadership which promotes multiple leaders within an organization and how those in leadership positions can delegate authority (Holcombe & Kezar, 2017). UCF demonstrates a shared leadership style that supports training

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individuals across campus by enrolling in professional development, access to information in all departments, and a team-based approach to solving problems (Holcombe et al., 2017).

Therefore, shared leadership at HEIs and mainly UCF utilizes task forces or university-wide committees to make decisions and solve problems within a particular department. The office of the Provost and Academic Affairs supports the collaboration of faculty, staff, and students in the school's decision-making process. For example, within UCF's SDES department, multiple initiatives support the Student Affairs division at the University; meanwhile, these individual task forces oversee and manage issues at different levels within SDES.

Shared Governance

Porter-O'Grady (2001) stated shared governance is a way of conceptualizing empowerment and building structures to support it and embodies four principles: partnership, accountability, equity, and ownership (as cited in Anthony, 2004). Shared governance is much more complicated; it is a delicate balance between faculty and staff participation in planning and decision-making processes, on the one hand, and administrative accountability on the other (Olsen, 2009). Although, shared governance may look different in different settings the outcomes are the same: a feeling of having been heard and included in decisions that directly impact the stakeholder whenever possible (Vanderbilt University Medical Center, n.d.).

Shared governance gives voice, but not necessarily ultimately authority. Moreover, shared governance attempts to balance maximum participation in decision-making with clear accountability (Olsen, 2009). UCF supports a highly involved shared governance accountability structure through the Faculty Senate. The Faculty Senate provides a forum between the faculty

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and the administration for shared decision-making and an advisory to the President of UCF (UCF, n.d.-t).

UCF has a shared governance process for its students through the Student Government Association (SGA). The SGA makes decisions on behalf of the students modeled after the United States government, three branches: Executive, Legislative, and Judicial (UCF, n.d.-t). The SGA is an organized student-led group with a \$20.4 million budget generated from student fees (UCF, n.d.-t). SGA creates new services and acts as the voice for the students. However, the most vital role for SGA is the protection for the interest of students in the decisions made by administration at the University and State level (UCF, n.d.-t). UCF facilitates a supportive culture of shared decision-making for its community partners via the community council (UCF, n.d.-u). An administrative committee manages the shared decision process for the community council. The council duties include strategic planning and decision-making (UCF, n.d.-u).

Institutional Decision-making

The institutional decision-making is administered through the President, administration, and the Board of Trustees. Legon, Lombardi, & Rhoades (2013) asserted a governing board that appropriately exercises its fiduciary authority is engaged in meeting the new challenges confronting higher education and overseeing change at the institution it manages—whether proactively or in response to a crisis. It also is careful not to intrude into management and faculty prerogatives. It operates with openness and transparency, building trust across the institution. Such a board cultivates a culture of inquiry within the boardroom. The members of the board are administered through the State University System of Florida (SUS) and typically come from outside of the organization (UCF, n.d.-dd). Governing boards work collaboratively with the school's administration and faculty (Legon et al., 2013).

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The best governing model works collaboratively in a spirit of transparency and engagement. However, students, parents, partners, news media, and policy leaders often gauge the board's affairs (Legon et al., 2013). UCF's Board of Trustees make policy decisions, maintains and implements educational programs, financial management, and compliance (UCF, n.d.-dd). The board works collaboratively on the following committees for the betterment of the University's affairs: Advancement, Audit and Compliance, Compensation and Labor, Educational Programs, Executive, Finance and Facilities, Nominating and Governance and Strategic Planning (UCF, n.d.-dd).

Weak Links: Functional Areas and Individuals

One of the weak links at UCF correlates with the research question: *What strategies and programs can be provided for the retention and graduation of Black undergraduate students at the University of Central Florida?* The importance of increasing the diversity and inclusion of African American students at UCF are appropriate due to the current enrollment rate for the African American student subpopulation is 11% (7535 students) of the 66,000-student population (UCF n.d.-c).

Moreover, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at UCF has positioned the mission of the department to be the cornerstone of decision-making for diverse and inclusive populations campus-wide and a higher education model for diversity and inclusion practices, policies, and culture (UCF n.d.-j). The low AA student enrollment is also reflected at five other comparison universities in Florida: Florida Atlantic University 20%, Florida International University 12%, Florida State University 8%, University of Florida 6%, and University of South Florida 10% (College Scorecard, n.d.). Therefore, the research in this area will positively affect other HEIs.

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UCF is a large university and provides a plethora of SDES and co-curricular programs for its students. Therefore, an increase in minority enrollment can benefit from the support of these services. The goal of the research is to increase diversity and inclusion opportunities at UCF for the purpose to enhance student services holistically and to specifically increase the recruitment, retention, and persistence of minority students. UCF states in the mission, vision and strategic planning documents for the institution that UCF is a model university in the 21st century charged in making a better future for their students from diverse populations and society (UCF, n.d.-a).

Student support services are a strategic way to provide support to minority and low-income students. Tinto (n.d.) stated without support in the following areas: academic, social, and financial aid, and many students struggle to meet the expectations of the university and succeed in college (Tinto, n.d.). Academic support is useful when it is aligned to specific course work when supplemental instruction is generic and disconnected from the course work objectives students struggle to keep up with the demands of the coursework (Tinto, n.d.). Therefore, SDES should include specific course alignment to learning centers that provide support strategically to courses offered by UCF.

The research in the area of increasing AA programs is to create an atmosphere where students can grow, (interpersonal/intrapersonal) while in college, provide quality racial/ethnic programming that enhances growth (mind, body, and soul) and the development of growth will help students (stakeholders) achieve academically and ultimately succeed by graduating from UCF. Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito (1998) argued that student affairs professionals should proactively identify and address student needs, design programs, develop policies, and create healthy college environments that encourage growth in students.

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Therefore, connecting theory to practice will enable the student affairs community at UCF (SDES) to have “think-tanks” with staff-students and find those “aha moments” by observing students (daily lives, and decision making) and provide pertinent counseling sessions. UCF can become a “fishbowl” (practicing research labs) to customize programming and enhance school culture (climate) based on student needs and not institutional tradition. Thus, while past research and theories are necessary for colleges to analyze the work over the years, it will be vital for post-secondary institutions to consider evolutionary changes in (student development) identities such as gender, sexual, social, disability, race, and ethnicity.

Consideration of Human Factors within the Institution

Moreover, human factors such as how UCF campus leaders perceive and address the achievement gap issues for minority students entering post-secondary institutions. The lack of campus support could affect the progression of programs slated for minorities. Even though many theorists have identified differences in achievement with minority students, many researchers have not provided longstanding solutions or strategies to address and monitor the problem.

Therefore, the goal of the research is to provide programs and evaluation monitoring techniques that will be beneficial to minority students' retention and graduation at the post-secondary level. Because there are varying needs of all student stakeholders who attend UCF, barriers at the campus could exist explicitly addressing the needs of AA students over the needs of all students. Further, regularly scheduled program evaluation of minority programs at UCF is vital in providing ongoing feedback. The SDES department will be critical in supporting and implementing successful programs which aid in the success of AA students' physical, emotional, and academic wellbeing while attending and graduating from UCF.

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Overall, support services are a significant marker in minority student success (Tinto, 2005). Tinto (2005) asserted improvement in undergraduate retention at HEIs; institutions must offer easily accessible academic, support services, and enrichment programs (as cited in Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). The research findings will target specific programs that promote success in the following areas: developmental education; courses, tutoring; study groups; counseling; mentoring; ethnic student centers; and academic support programs (Tinto, 2005). I aim to share the research findings with UCF, to narrow the achievement gap and to aid students in becoming productive citizens after graduation. Therefore, the SDES department plays an essential role in the success of increasing minority enrollment at UCF.

Proposed Research Question and Discussion

McNiff (2013) stated research is comprehended as the creation of new knowledge that supports new theories. Therefore, in commencing the methodologies as a researcher in higher education, I am tasked with identifying and researching a critical area which addresses the diversity and inclusion practices in higher education institutions, particularly in the selection of the institutional study at the University of Central Florida.

Thus, in 2016, President Obama's administration alongside with the U.S. Department of Education "challenged institutions nationwide to attract and admit students from various backgrounds and experiences as well as, support and retain these students once on campus." (Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education 2016, p.1).

Moreover, in the initial stages of research for the institutional study at UCF, I discovered a problem within the University of Central Florida's mission statement regarding diversity and inclusion in relation to the organization's minority student's 11% (7535) enrollment for African-

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American students in comparison to UCF's overall student population of 68,571 (UCF, 2019).

This phenomenon sheds light on creating the initial research question: *What strategies and programs can be provided for the retention and graduation of Black undergraduate students at the University of Central Florida?*

As a result, diversity and inclusion opportunities will be provided at UCF to enhance student services holistically and to specifically increase the recruitment, retention, and persistence of minority students. UCF stated in the mission, vision and strategic planning documents for the institution that UCF will be targeted as a model university in the 21st century charged in making a better future for their students and society (UCF, n.d.-a). Also, the following strategies will enhance UCF as a result of the diversity and inclusion initiatives: increased resources, financial aid opportunities, and diverse partnerships (UCF, n.d.-a). Further, the research on diversity and inclusion will provide other higher education institutions with data and strategies on furthering the mission of diversity and inclusion at HEIs.

Moreover, there are some ethnic student populations and the reasons why minority students do not attend college will not be covered in this study. Maxwell (2013) argued research questions that are too general creates ambiguity, confusion for the researcher, therefore, narrowing the scope of the research and knowing what data to collect is vital to strengthening the goals of the research. Hence, one of the areas that may not be answered in this study are the social and psychological reasons why minority students do not attend post-secondary institutions.

Bowan (2010), discussed trends of 1st-year college students and the psychological effects of transitioning from high school to college. Ryff (1989) refined some of the earlier theorists and coined the concept of mental well-being, also known as PWB (Psychological Well Being) (as cited in Bowan, 2010). While I think the PWB concept of minority students is worthy, the

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research in this area will not be included in this study and most likely will be stripped away and unanswered.

Overall, it seems reasonable to conclude the research of increasing diversity and inclusion of African-American students at the UCF will continue to provide growth and development opportunities for other minority students and the outcomes of the study at UCF and will positively impact higher education institutions throughout the nation. The researcher selected to research minority students to further their studies at HEIs because as an educator for a K-12 school district in Central Florida, I can make a positive impact, for the next generation of qualified students within diverse populations to support their collegial goals in completing an advanced degree at higher education institutions like the University of Central Florida.

Significance of the Study

The importance and relevant research of increasing the diversity and inclusion of African American students at UCF are appropriate due to the current enrollment rate for the African American student subpopulation is 11% (7535 students) of the 66,000-student population (UCF n.d.-c). Moreover, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at UCF has positioned the mission of the department to be the cornerstone of decision making for diverse and inclusive populations campus-wide and a higher education model for diversity and inclusion practices, policies, and culture (UCF n.d.-j).

The goal of this research is to increase diversity and inclusion opportunities at UCF for the purpose to enhance student services holistically and to specifically increase the recruitment, retention, and persistence of minority students. UCF stated in the mission, vision and strategic

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planning documents for the institution that UCF is a model university in the 21st century charged in making a better future for their students from diverse populations and society (UCF, n.d.-a).

This research will contribute to the work of educational diversity and inclusion at UCF and throughout the nation. Jeannie Oakes, Director of Educational Opportunity and Scholarship at the Ford Foundation, stated in the AERA annual address that the challenges in America over the next 100 years is to create an equitable and inclusive democracy (American Education Research Association, 2016). Moreover, this research may cause tension with some critics because of historical issues of minorities trying to break through the barriers of inequity and exclusion at post-secondary institutions (AERA, 2016). Even though challenges exist in inclusion practices; they should not hinder the success of innovative, diverse programs and strategies at the institution (UCF, n.d.-a).

Gaps in the Knowledge the Study Addresses

A gap in existing theories and research is addressing the achievement gap for minority students entering into post-secondary institutions. Even though many theorists have identified differences in achievement with minority students, many researchers have not provided longstanding solutions or strategies to address and monitor the problem. Therefore, the goal of this research is to provide programs and evaluation monitoring techniques that will be beneficial to minority students' retention and graduation at the post-secondary level.

Support services is a significant marker in minority student success (Tinto, 2005). Research stated there are three areas which enhance support of minority achievement: academic, social, and financial (Tinto, 2005). The research findings will target specific programs that promote success in the following areas: developmental education; courses, tutoring; study

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groups; counseling; mentoring; ethnic student centers; and academic support programs (Tinto, 2005). The researcher will share the research findings with UCF, to narrow the achievement gap and to aid students in becoming productive citizens after graduation.

Importance of Study to Stakeholders and the Field of Education

The findings expressed in the research will help augment the inequalities and disparities that minorities have experienced in our society (AERA, 2016). The researcher hopes to add to the existing research and especially in support of the work of Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure, academic difficulties of minority students, and the failure of minority students to become or remain in the academic and social setting of HEIs. Therefore, sharing the findings to the Public and the field of higher education will be research that will influence the thinking in others, and replicate successful programming at other HEIs (McNiff, 2013).

Conclusion

In conclusion, UCF provides services that enhance the campus, community, culture, environment, and economic development of the Central Florida area. The entire premise of the institution's existence is based on UCF's Creed: integrity, scholarship, community, and creativity (UCF n.d.-a). These characteristics guide the conduct, performance, and decisions of the institution (UCF n.d.-a). These values are what create the cultural dynamics for all students, employees, and stakeholders to reach their full potential. Furthermore, the research on diversity and inclusion will provide other higher education institutions with data and strategies on furthering the mission of diversity and inclusion at HEIs nationwide and globally.

More importantly, the external context factors at the institution help engage, enhance, and support the University's mission in creating one of the "best value" institutions in the nation

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(UCF, n.d.-c). Every area discussed in this paper tells the story of UCF and how every institutional decision, goal, and the outcome is strategically interwoven in the University's mission and vision. UCF is competitive with other Florida state universities and has room to improve, but specifically in the following areas: increase minority enrollment; increase retention rate; and provide programs and strategies that support diversity and inclusion of all students.

As a result of the research, the goal is to increase awareness and opportunities that support diversity and inclusion opportunities at UCF for the advancement of Black students. The goal of this research is to inform programmatic changes at UCF, and to ultimately increase access and utilization of diversity and inclusion opportunities for Black students at UCF. The purpose is to enhance student services holistically and to specifically increase the recruitment, retention, and persistence of minority students. In other words, UCF stated in the mission, vision and strategic planning documents that the institution will be targeted as a model university in the 21st century, charged in making a better future for its students from diverse populations and society (UCF, n.d.-o).

Furthermore, the research study is relevant throughout the higher education community because student persistence produces benefits to institutions that are beyond numbers (Tinto, 2007). The research in this area lies in the heart of the researcher and UCF to collectively increase awareness and promote retention and completion for those students who have been historically underserved in tertiary institutions (Tinto, 2007). Moreover, the student integration model of Tinto (1975) denoted the start of a national discussion on undergraduate retention.

Although Tinto's model has been debated and revised over 40 years, it is worthy of continuing the research in this area of minority student retention and persistence at post-secondary institutions. Arguably programs and strategies that address minority retention at UCF

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should encompass formal and informal experiences in and out of the classroom. Habley (2004) stated the people (faculty, staff, advisors, and peers) students interact with on campus are the influencers of retention (as cited in Demetriou et al., 2011).

Furthermore, the connections minority students make on campus with individuals, faculty, staff, and support centers can influence the students' ability to assimilate to the climate and culture of the university, meet expectations, and graduate (Demetriou et al., 2011). Post-secondary institutions that foster student engagement and academic success for students are institutions that most likely will cultivate the growth of minority students (Demetriou et al., 2011).

Student success is also dependent on academic preparation before attending a post-secondary institution. Therefore, the research will highlight high school bridge programs that can target minority students at UCF like Upward Bound (UCF, n.d.-y). The research will highlight ways that UCF can make academic connections such as mentoring, developmental instructional support, relationship building, and help with financial aid before students graduate from high school. Bean (1980) argued that a student's pre-college preparation could significantly influence whether or not they will succeed in college (as cited in Demetriou et al., 2011). Research stated that students who complete a rigorous high school curriculum, grade point average, and class rank are highly likely to attend college and graduate (Demetriou et al., 2011).

Therefore, the researcher will gather research data to support the policies and culture at UCF that promote graduation. BSU (Black Student Union) on Wheels is another way to reach minorities before attending college. It works by sending current African American students to high schools in the area, up to a range of 600 miles. There, they share their college experiences with younger students (Musto, 2018). Also, minority students mentoring younger minority

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students is a student-centered initiative created to increase student engagement and persistence with minority students.

Further, critics' state schools have done little to solve the specific problems of minority students at HEIs as it relates to the level of student engagement and mentoring (Musto, 2018). One of the most significant issues for the recruitment of minority students is geographic (Musto, 2018). Most African American families live in large cities, and HEIs are located in small, urban communities as the case of UCF (Musto, 2018). Therefore, programs like the Black Student Union (on wheels) reaches (recruitment) students in their communities (Musto, 2018).

Overall, institutions must take into consideration preexisting concerns, as Tinto (2017) suggested in his student success model, which stated that many minority and nontraditional students have issues before entering college. Subsequently, problems with finances, childcare, a support team, and social adjustment to the new campus environment are factors that hinder students' success and will be considerations in the research. Gurin et al. (2002) and Milem (2003) argued enrolling a diverse population is not enough; HEIs must institute policies and practices which facilitate engagement if the goal is to make campus culturally more inclusive (as cited Hossler et al., 2015).

This research will contribute to the work of educational diversity and inclusion at UCF and throughout the nation. Though Jeannie Oakes, Director of Educational Opportunity and Scholarship at the Ford Foundation, stated in the AERA annual address that the challenges over the next 100 years is to create an equitable and inclusive democracy in America (American Education Research Association (AERA), 2016). Oakes asserted, it will be challenging "trying" traditional approaches of research to break through the barriers of inequity and exclusion which mars our democracy (AERA, 2016) Inclusion practices will not be changed by useful data alone

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or traditional approaches of research—changes will be made by as John Dewey stated by social policy making- such as public opinion, public perceptions, and politics (AERA, 2016).

Overall, this research is the beginning of the “next generation” of researchers that will make a positive impact regarding diversity and inclusion practices at UCF and HEIs nationwide.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Historical Overview of Black Students in Higher Education

Early in American history, Blacks were prohibited from attending school and, therefore, had limited educational experiences in learning to read and write (Irons, 2002). Many efforts of enslavement and submission were led by white slave owners (Institute for Higher Education-IHE, 2010). After a turn of events and several uprisings, slavery ended in 1865. Three constitutional amendments passed to grant Blacks free from bondage: The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery, and the Fourteenth provided citizenship. The Fourteenth Amendment stated the equal protection clause establishes that not no child should be denied equal access to schooling. The Fifteenth guaranteed the right to vote (The Library of Congress, n.d.).

Even though the amendments and civil rights were in place, the Supreme Court nullified the work of Congress during the Reconstruction period (Library of Congress, n.d.). In 1896 the Supreme Court ruled the legal separation of races by ordering the H.A. Plessy v. J. H. Ferguson's separate but equal facilities such as schools and places of businesses separating whites from blacks did not violate the U. S. Constitution's 14th Amendment (Library of Congress, n.d.). Blacks were separated from Whites in southern and northern states by law and public places such as transportation, prisons, armed forces, and schools. The beginning of Jim Crow schools was

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established, which continued to segregate schools and all daily interactions between whites and blacks. Jim Crow schools primarily taught skills that were needed for farming, agriculture, and fit the needs of the white society and the economy (Irons, 2002).

Although the plight of educating Blacks was limited and separate from Whites early on in America, pioneers such as Nat Turner, the Quaker community, and other abolitionists secretly provided tutoring and learning sessions to educate slaves (IHE, 2010). Decades later, racial segregation continued to plague the U.S.; hence the Supreme Court ruled when a state starts a public school that no child will be denied equal access to schooling.

Moreover, in 1951 a class action lawsuit was filed against the Topeka, Kansas Board of Education. The suit was established to overturn the 1879 law of Kansas law that allowed districts to maintain separate but equal schools for black and white students (Glass, 2016). However, in 1954, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that separate but equal educational facilities were unequal and that racially segregated schools violate the U.S. Constitution (Glass, 2016).

Despite the resistance from white slave owners to educate Blacks in the 19th century the following HEIs were formulated such as Dartmouth College established in 1824, Oberlin established in 1833, and the Institute for Colored Youth established 1837 is today known as Cheyney University the oldest historically Black college and university in the nation (IHE, 2010).

Hence, the 2014 U.S. Census report stated 42,158,238, or 13% of the population in the U.S. (Eakins & Eakins, 2017); 5 million Blacks had obtained a four-year degree (Wilson, as cited in Eakins et al., 2017). Therefore, enslavement over the years has impacted the psyche of many Black people and their ancestors from generation to generation (Hays & Erford, as cited in

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Eakins et al., 2017). The historical events such as slavery still have effects on the Black community today (Eakins et al., 2017). Moreover, the purpose of Historical Black Colleges and Universities was to provide educational opportunities for Blacks.

The Emergence of Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States

The aftermath of the Civil War (1861-65) led to a proliferation of historically Black Colleges and Universities, with more than 200 founded before 1890 (Brown, 2013). HBCUs were financially supported by philanthropic associations, churches, local communities, missionaries, and private donors (Brown, 2013). However, the end of the Civil War brought a new founder and funder of HBCUs—state governments (Brown, 2013). Hence, southern states were required by law to respond to the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments by providing public education for former slaves and other Black Americans (Brown, 2013). Additional, federal support came with the passage of the Morrill Act of 1890 (Brown, 2013).

Following the Civil War, public support for higher education for black students was reflected in the enactment of the Second Morrill Act in 1890 (Brown, 2013). The Act required states with racially segregated public higher education systems to provide a land-grant institution for black students. After the passage of the Act, public land-grant conventions specifically for blacks, were found in each of the southern and border states.

Much new public and private black institutions were under U.S. federal control. Subsequently, the Morrill Act of 1890, established 19 black institutions as land-grant colleges (Department of Education, 1991). They are as follows: 1. Alabama A&M. 2. Alcorn State University (Mississippi). 3. Central State University (Ohio). 4. Delaware State University. 5. Florida A&M University. 6. Fort Valley State University (Georgia). 7. Kentucky State

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University. 8. Langston University (Oklahoma). 9. Lincoln University (Pennsylvania). 10. North Carolina A&T State University. 11. Prairie View A&M University (Texas). 12. South Carolina State University 13. Southern University (Louisiana). 14. Tennessee State University. 15. Tuskegee University (Alabama). 16. The University of Arkansas Pine Bluff. 17. The University of Maryland Eastern Shore. 18. Virginia State University. 19. West Virginia State University.

HBCUs are a unique institutional cohort in the American higher education system. These colleges have been celebrated for their achievements and critiqued for their composition at differing points during their history. There are 101 HBCUs in the United States, including public and private institutions (Anderson, 2017). Many HBCUs closed their schools, and HBCUs have struggled with financial distress and challenges which have plagued institutions for over 100 years (Anderson, 2017). Despite over 21 school closings and economic issues, HBCUs have been pivotal in educating minority students with 101 institutions in existence today (Anderson, 2017).

Black Students at Predominantly White Institutions

Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) have failed to provide minority students with diversity on campus and that minority students are not receiving the proper support to be successful at the university level (Chen & Hamilton, as cited in Eakins & Eakins, 2017). However, there is not substantial research that state HBCUs provide minority students with the proper support either. Grier-Reed et al. (2011) asserted minority students are academically lagging their white peers and are at risk of dropping out of college (Eakins et al., 2017).

Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) stated a college degree enhances a student's life, which in turn improves the socioeconomic status of students who complete a post-secondary degree

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(Eakins et al., 2017). Students who complete their degree earn 17% more money than students with a high school diploma (Ashton, n.d.). Besides, individuals who complete an advanced degree have an even more significant earning potential of 28% more than a high school graduate (Ashton, n.d.). Three factors affect student' success at post-secondary institutions: cultural differences, environment, and social class (Eakins et al., 2017).

The competition system which surrounds universities puts Black students at a disadvantage to their education. Therefore, school administrators are thrust to add academic programming to support minority students to aid them in persisting at their university (Eakins et al., 2017). Many minorities at PWIs feel isolated and alienated; as a result, students do not raise their hands or participate in class activities (Jones, 2015). These feelings of isolation often result in minority students participating less in class, lower grades, and some instances dropping out of college (Jones, 2015). Allen's study (1985) indicated that campus racial composition influenced the outcomes of the following: academic achievement, social involvement, and career aspirations.

On average, Black students do not perform academically as well as White students at PWIs (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, as cited in Allen, 1992). Poor performance for Black students at PWIs has been the center of the debate; the focus has been on academic achievement, lack of faculty support, and the absence of tutorial and remedial programs (Allen, 1992).

Moreover, Allen (1986) stated two-thirds of Black students at PWIs felt the campus activities were not related to their interests. Harris and Nettles (1991) indicated race and gender play a significant role in the interactions of Black students engaged in campus activities.

Historical Trends of Retention and Persistence Strategies in Higher Education Institutions

During the 1960s, the civil rights movement was at the forefront in the United States. The response to the change across America was to address the wrongs imposed on Black Americans. As a result of the history of slavery, an increase of Black students had access to HEIs as a solution to address racial inequality (Allen, 1992). Soon after the civil rights movement, HEIs provided expansion commitments in enrollment for minority students to push for equality at higher learning institutions (Allen, 1992). Before the civil rights movement, colleges and universities serving a typical homogenous population of privileged individuals who attended college, currently, post-secondary institutions serve students from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Seidman, 2012).

However, 30 years later, after the movement, Black students maintained an interest in HBCUs compared to non-HBCUs (Allen, 1992) (See table 5). Research studies have shown there are differences in student experiences at HBCUs as opposed to students attending PWIs. According to Seymour and Ray (2015), a Gallup study in 2015 revealed that black student graduates of HBCUs were consistently thriving in different areas of their life. The most notable regions in progression for Black students were in the areas of financial and purpose being (See Table 1). The Gallup report stated that Black students who attend HBCUs are more likely to have experiential learning experiences in college more than Black students who attend PWIs (Seymour et al., 2015). The Gallup study discovered that Black students at PWIs were less likely to participate in campus activities (Seymour et al., 2015).

Table 5*HBCUs compared to non-HBCUs*

Black HBCU Graduates and Well Being Status	HBCU	Non-HBCU	Difference
Well Being Status	%	%	(pct, pts.)
Purpose Well Being	51	43	-8
Social Well Being	54	48	-6
Financial Well Being	40	29	-11
Community Well Being	42	38	-4
Physical Well Being	33	28	-5
Thriving in all five elements of well- being	7	7	--

These trends of minority student's college choice preferences have led HEIs to study retention among underrepresented groups and different institutional contexts (Seidman, 2012). The institutional settings include HBCUs, PWIs, and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) (Seidman, 2012).

Seidman (2012) defined retention as the ability for colleges and universities to graduate the students who enroll at that institution successfully. Tinto (1975, 1993) and Astin (1993) have provided over 20 years of research in the area of retention. Vincent Tinto's theory focused on the

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importance of student interactions and their learning environment (Leppel, Milem & Berger, as cited in Connor et al., 2012). Tinto's theory emphasized that the more students learn academically, the more likely they are to graduate (Leppel, as cited in Connor et al., 2002). Later, Tinto revised his theory to focus on the behavior and perception of students as they move toward greater cohesion between their academic and social environments (Connor et al., 2012).

Astin's theory is closely matched to Tinto's approach, which stated that student retention is associated with positive student engagement and campus environment (Milem & Berger, as cited in Connor et al., 2012). Both theories suggest that institutions provide activities and strategies that promote student engagement and an inclusive, diverse campus environment.

There are more than 3600 institutions nationwide that attract different types of students. Some HEIs are highly selective in recruiting students. Therefore, those institutions are more likely to enroll students from prestigious backgrounds and who are educationally prepared to graduate from college (Seidman, 2012). In contrast, some HEIs attract students who are less likely to be retained due to the students' background (Seidman, 2012). Racial/ethnic context-oriented institutions are more likely to promote retention models that support underrepresented students (Fisher, as cited in Seidman, 2012).

Women's colleges and HBCUs have been more successful in recruiting female and Black students; this has been mainly due to the type of institution and the campus environment (Austin, as cited in Seidman, 2012). Austin (1990) asserted that colleges should have their own set of retention standards, as "one size does not fit all." Therefore, colleges and universities should tailor the school's retention efforts to suit the needs of the students and the campus environment. Furthermore, retention efforts have increased over time due to the economic, socio-economic, and political platforms at colleges and universities.

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The economic and demographic shifts have contributed to the increased discussion of retention and persistence strategies at post-secondary institutions (Seidman, 2012). The attention on retention and persistence strategies has centered on students from diverse cultures and underrepresented students (Seidman, 2012). The upward and downward shifts in the economy have impacted how colleges spend money, and institutions are subjected to keep students enrolled to offset costs of new recruitment efforts and finding new students.

Models of Retention

Retention has been around for years, and research contributors such as Tinto (1975, 1993), and Astin's theories (1984) have laid the groundwork for many of the studies today. Tinto (1987) found that student attrition is centered on three factors: academic difficulties, career choice, and educational and social integration on the college campus. Tinto (1987) studied these factors and, as a result, created the Model of Institutional Departure. The Model of Institutional Departure states that college students should be involved in academic and extracurricular activities as well as develop relationships with peers and faculty (Tinto, 1987).

Tinto (1975) continued to refine his work with retention models to include the reasons why students dropped out of school. Therefore, Tinto and Pusser (2006) continued their studies to focus on retention models that support students from low socio-economic backgrounds and academic-social integration on campus. Closely linked to Tinto's Theory of retention is Astin's Theory of Involvement on college campuses. Astin's Theory stated retention support is favorable when students are academically and socially integrated on campus (Milem & Berger, 1997). Cabrera, Nora, and Castenada (1993) argue that external factors, such as financial and support affect whether a student will graduate.

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Much of the current retention research focuses on institutions implementing productive curriculum strategies that support students in coping with the pressures of the college and the campus environment (Seidman, 2012). Many institutions have implemented freshman seminar (First Year Experience, FYE) classes. However, the curriculum may look different from campus to campus- these programs have enabled students to understand themselves better, the transition from home life, and acclimate to the new campus surroundings (Folsom, as cited in Seidman, 2012).

Another current retention strategy focuses on students understanding their purpose in life and selecting careers that support their calling. A university on the west coast formulated a holistic course based on increasing self-knowledge, increasing knowledge of the world of work, and integrating the experience to make a decision (Seidman, 2012). The course enabled students to make decisions about career decisions and vocational choices (Johnson et al., as cited in Seidman, 2012).

The overall themes in student retention and persistence models discussed are student engagement (classroom and extracurricular activities), campus interaction, developing relationships among students and faculty, financial support, and career planning (Conner, Daugherty, & Gilmore, 2012). Academic preparedness is also a concern amongst Black students attending post-secondary institutions. According to Schneider & Saw (2016) stated that in earlier studies Black students were unaware of college requirements and programmatic offerings. Since, Schneider et al. (2016) added that recent research suggested that low income minority students in high school are offered information on college and the admission process.

Schneider et al. (2016) argued that most of the college preparatory programs offered to assist Black students fail to evaluate whether college preparatory exposure translates to minority

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college enrollment and retention. The research suggests that minority students who enrolled in advanced coursework in high school (i.e., Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate, etc....), come from affluent two-parent households, and have advantaged resources are more likely to acquire higher ambitions to attend and graduate from college (Schneider et al., 2016). Bryant (2015) stated that the primary reason minority students lag behind their peer is due to inadequate curricula, resources and support.

UCF: Overview

The University of Central Florida is a public multi-campus, metropolitan research university, dedicated to serving its surrounding communities with their diverse and expanding populations, technological corridors, and international partners. The mission of the university is to offer high-quality undergraduate and graduate education, student development, and continuing education. To conduct research and creative activities; and to provide services that enhance the intellectual, cultural, environmental, and economic development of the metropolitan region, address national and international issues in critical areas, establish UCF as a significant presence, and contribute to the global community. (UCF, 2019)

Mission

The institution's core values are quality, integrity, and teamwork (UCF, n.d.-d). The strategic plan for UCF outlined several areas in which the university stated that it would become a transformational leader in the market (UCF, n.d.-d). UCF's strategic plan is committed to students and society and supported by the following five promises: (a) Harness the power of scale to transform lives and livelihoods. (b) Attract and cultivate exceptional and diverse faculty, students, and staff whose collective contributions strengthen us. (c) Deploy our distinctive assets

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to solve society's most significant challenges. (d) Create partnerships at every level that amplifies our academic, economic, social, and cultural impact and reputation. (e) Innovate academic, operational, and financial models to transform higher education (UCF, n.d.-d). The mission of UCF supports the promises:

The mission of the university supports the operational factors of the institution through the collective efforts of the school, society, and the board of trustees. The planning process was coined as Collective Impact (UCF, n.d.-d). The strategic plan involved more than 800 internal and external stakeholders across Central Florida (UCF, n.d.-d). The diplomatic planning commission created the program to support three critical dimensions of focus: (a) Philosophy establishes a culture, identity, and its role within the community (UCF, n.d.-d). (b) Value is the ratio of quality to cost. "Universities that provide high value clearly define quality, diligently constrain unnecessary costs, and ensure that advance value will meet demand. To achieve this, UCF must foster a cost containment culture." (UCF n.d.-d, p. 6) (c) The distinctive impact which includes distinguishing from other higher educational institutions (HEIs) such as recruiting scholars, relevant partners, modeling simulation, an advanced research center, and a plethora of hospitality and management models (UCF, n.d.-b). These powerful concepts have guided UCF over 50 years, which means "big is better," and the institution has the potential to become better in years to come.

Demographics

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2017) total undergraduate enrollment for the University of Central Florida was 66,059, with the following racial and ethnic composition: 49% of the students are White, 25% Hispanic, 11% African American (Black), 4 % two or more races, 1% unknown race, and 4% alien unknown. The total

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number of female students' is 36, 266, and 29, 793 male students. 8% of the students have out-of-state residency, and the average age is 24 and under (NCES, 2017).

Gaps in Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Central Florida

One of the significant differences in diversity and inclusion at UCF correlates with the research question: *What strengths and opportunities can be provided for increasing retention and graduation for Black undergraduate students at the University of Central Florida?* The importance of increasing the diversity and inclusion of Black students at UCF are appropriate due to the current enrollment rate for the Black student subpopulation is 11% (7535 students) of the 66,000-student population (UCF n.d.-c).

Moreover, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at UCF has positioned the mission of the department to be the cornerstone of decision-making for diverse and inclusive populations campus-wide and a higher education model for diversity and inclusion practices, policies, and culture (UCF n.d.-f). The low Black student enrollment is also reflected at five other comparison universities in Florida: Florida Atlantic University 20%, Florida International University 12%, Florida State University 8%, University of Florida 6%, and University of South Florida 10% (College Scorecard, n.d.). Therefore, the research in this area will positively affect other HEIs.

Retention and Enrollment Strategies at UCF

The Student Development and Enrollment Services (SDES) division at UCF offers multiple programs and services. SDES supports a plethora of services, including enrollment, wellness, housing assistance, academic advising, and mentoring, to name a few. The main goal of SDES is to enhance student engagement from recruitment to the moment of graduation (UCF, n.d.-e). SDES utilizes the UCF Creed principles-integrity, scholarship, community, creativity,

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and excellence as a foundation for developing learning objectives and student outcomes (UCF, n.d.-e). Therefore, student outcomes are the foundation of the department. SDES works hard to align services to develop results that enable students to become successful and productive citizens (UCF, n.d.-e).

The mission of SDES is “To create and cultivate an innovative and inclusive learning experience that helps students reach their academic, personal and professional aspirations, to advocate for social awareness and change, and to commit to lifelong learning.” (UCF, n.d.-h., p. 2) The department’s vision is to prepare students to become globally competitive and lifelong learners. The department accomplishes its goals by providing transformative learning experiences (UCF, n.d.-h). The top priorities of SDES: Student Well-being; Student Access and Opportunity; Student Learning and Success; Student Career Readiness and Post Baccalaureate Success, and Student Advocacy Equity and Inclusion (UCF, n.d.-h).

The SDES department provides supplemental retention support by providing academic advising, supplemental instruction (tutoring) and Academic Coaching and Engagement (ACE) services which provides one on one academic coaching for students in need of course selection help, financial aid and career planning (UCF, n.d.-h).

Student success is also dependent on academic preparation before attending a post-secondary institution. There are several pre-retention initiatives that UCF supports and that is Upward Bound UCF and the Florida Community School Model. The goal of Upward Bound UCF is to increase the rate of high students attending post-secondary institutions and hopefully recruit and retain students participating in the program upon graduation from high school (UCF, n.d.-i). The UCF leadership team and the Children's Home Society in 2009, joined forces to develop the first community school in the state of Florida. UCF's community school's purpose is

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to provide academic, social, emotional, mental, physical, and financial assistance to students while attending select Florida public schools (UCF, n.d.-j).

The Community Partnership™ (CPS) community school model focuses on targeted K-12 students and their communities. The community school model aims to bring awareness and support in the following areas: parental involvement, student engagement, physical, social, behavioral, health, and dental services (UCF, n.d.-j). UCF has bridged additional resources to support the community school, which include programs such as nursing, education, behavioral health, and medicine (UCF-j).

Moreover, the SDES department is divided into nine functional groups. (a) The first-year transition-which supports the high school student to the end of the first-year college. Upon entering UCF, all freshman and transfer students are required to attend an orientation session to learn about campus life. The Knighting kickoff event is held every year for new and transfer students. (b) Enrollment services- include admissions, financial assistance, and outreach services. Enrollment opportunities such as high school, state college, and career fairs are held at strategic times throughout the year. (c) Learning support- supports students and provides learning services. UCF offers intervention assistance for students, such as Supplemental Instruction (SI), which is an academic and retention program aimed at students who need extra academic support. (d) Student life- student involvement includes campus activities, Student Union, and Greek life. The Student Union is the heart of campus where students can eat, relax, attend meetings, and enjoy campus life. (e) Wellness- supports the physical health and mental wellness of all students. UCF Cares is a program geared toward crime prevention, safety, mental health and diversity, and inclusion. (f) Support Services- which serves career planning and Registrar office services. (g) Housing and Residence life- which includes student housing and student living services. (h)

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Student Rights and Responsibilities-which covers any legal and dispute services. (i) Community Support- is a division that includes diversity and inclusion (UCF, n.d.-g).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Black students have encountered issues with access, retention, and academic achievement in HEIs in the United States (Allen, 1992). These problems have existed over time and have continued to be a topic of interest for school administrators and educational researchers across college campuses. Even though Black students have partaken in educational opportunities and success at HBCUs, there have been more setbacks with HBCUs closings and financial hardships than celebrations (Allen, 1992).

A significant challenge facing post-secondary institutions is how to increase the success of Black students at HEIs successfully. HBCUs and PWIs are grappling with growing effective measures in recruitment, retention, and graduation of Black students (Allen, 1992). Future research must address how to effectively retain minority students and share models that can be adopted by other schools (Allen, 1992). Hence, institutions like UCF can revitalize and use existing student success models, combined with new retention models. Besides, UCF can assist K-12 educators in improving the quality of education for Black students before their arrival at college campuses.

The research has suggested HEI's use the outcomes of existing research and put them into action (Allen, 1992). For example, the importance of retention is evident in the recruitment of Black students at HEIs. (Allen, 1992). Therefore, best practices might suggest colleges should provide supplemental instruction opportunities and make a tailored plan of interventions available to students before their arrival on UCF's campus. This charge is not just for UCF, but

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all universities must responsibly understand the complexities of Black students entering and graduating from college and map out an academic plan that targets interventions that yield results and share those results with other colleges.

Overall, while there have been some successes and challenges at UCF and U.S. colleges and universities as it pertains to minority achievement, there is still work and research that should be targeted and acted upon to achieve the high promise of equality in a democratic society. Allen (1992) argued, "If we fail to respond creatively and effectively to this challenge, not only will history judge us harshly, but this country will also continue to suffer the negative consequences, such as the loss of its competitive edge in the world market." (p. 72)

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine the strengths and opportunities for increasing retention and graduation opportunities for Black undergraduate students at the UCF. This chapter presents the paradigm of inquiry, research design, conceptual framework, recapitulation of research questions, population and sample, instrumentation and data collection, data preparation, data analysis, design issues, human subjects and ethical considerations, and timeline for the project.

Paradigm Inquiry

The qualitative paradigm based on the ontological assumption questions the nature of reality. Therefore, qualitative means subjective and the reality can be viewed by different participants' perspectives. In qualitative research reality is formulated by the individuals who participate in the study. According to Darlington and Scott (2002), qualitative research can be classified as "in-depth interviewing of individuals or small groups; systematic observation of behavior or analysis of documentary data." (p. 2)

This study was centered with a constructivism research philosophy. Constructivism is a philosophy that understanding is formed via reflection of participants and personal experiences relating the new knowledge to the existing knowledge they already know (Crotty, 2004). The paradigm of constructivism supports the ideology that we construct our understanding of the world we live in and how our experiences shape us. An example, of this happens when participants are interviewed and provide responses based on their interpretation of the questions and their background knowledge and experiences.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was utilized for this study. Qualitative studies are best supported by a systematic subjective approach used to illustrate the life experiences of the participants and give them meaning. This study consists of six interviews and appropriate supporting documentation.

Qualitative Research Design

Creswell (1994) contended “Paradigms in the human and social sciences help us understand phenomena” (p. 1). He also stated a qualitative study “is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (Creswell 1994, p. 1). In qualitative research the researcher is able critically synthesize, analyze, and organize the data from the participants.

The qualitative methodology is ideal for this project for various reasons:

- It allows for investigation of a current problem relevant to the participants and to the institution’s school mission.
- The researcher gains an in-depth understanding of the problem (Creswell, 2014; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011).
- Qualitative research allows for flexibility and research to occur in a natural setting (Merriam, 2009)
- Qualitative research allows for gathering research from multiple sources with sensitivity to individuals, context, and meaning (Creswell, 2007; Merriam 1998).

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According to Crotty (2004) research methodology is a comprehensive strategy that facilitates a choice of specific methods relating them to the anticipated outcomes. Moreover, qualitative research strengthens the project (Creswell, 2007; Merriam 1998). The project requires a straightforward approach due to the nature of the study, therefore a qualitative research design was selected.

Interview Research Design

Interviews are designed to collect rich sources of information from a small number of people in the areas of attributes, behavior, feelings, attitudes, opinions, and knowledge (McCracken, 1998). Interviews are most effective for qualitative research (McCracken, 1998). The interview is best outlined with a set frame of questions for the participants and is recorded with a set of outcomes. Even though interview research design has structure and an outcome, individuals can voice their opinion and provide meaningful experiences. During the interview phase participants were given semi structured interview questions where the participant had to answer a preset of open-ended questions.

By utilizing the qualitative method of interviewing the researcher examines the participants' responses and thought process in order to answer the research problem (Jamshed, 2014).

Type of Interview Design

There are many qualitative interview methods, however for this study the following methods were used: exploratory, and descriptive interview design. The main reason to select the above qualitative interview methods was due to the nature of the qualitative study conducted.

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Exploratory Interview design. An exploratory interview design was conducted for this project because of the financial, academic, and social reasons minority students are not persisting at the university. Though the theory of student departure was discovered years prior by Tinto (1993) the student success phenomenon is applicable to higher education and UCF as the university desires a diverse student population. The exploratory portion of the study allowed the researcher to explore the reasons minority students persist at UCF.

Descriptive Interview design. The descriptive research described the characteristics of the population of the study. The target audience was selected for the study to explore the recruitment and persistence behavior of minority students at UCF. Therefore, describing the demographics was vital in gathering appropriate data pertinent to the study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework utilized in this dissertation is discussed in chapter 2 and operationalized throughout chapter 3. The transformative framework, according to Mertens (2003), stated that knowledge is neutral, which reflects the power and social relationships within society (as cited in Creswell et al., 2018).

Moreover, the purpose of the transformative framework is to improve the community. Individuals in this group include, minorities, and societies that need psychological and resilient support (Creswell et al., 2018). The phenomenological study reported a narrative study of several individuals. The study explored measures to increase the retention and persistence strategies for Black students at UCF. The study amplified the voices of Black students and welcomed their point of view to better understand the perceptions of these students.

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The study provided an opportunity for Black students to voice their personal perceptions, opinions and feelings about how they were able to matriculate at UCF to complete the undergraduate degree requirements. The use of the phenomenological approach provided a framework for understanding the students' perception of the strategies and programs at the UCF that support academic student learning and success. The research was created for the advancement of minority students and create a monumental transformative change of equality and purpose and a call for change for Black students attending UCF and higher education institutions.

This transformative framework provides an orienting lens that addresses a social issue for a marginalized or underrepresented group (Creswell et al., 2018). The representation of Black students is lower compared to the overall mission and goals of the university, which states the need to provide diversity and inclusion to a diverse student population (UCF, n.d.-b). This research study provides a catalyst that will provide awareness and hopeful an upward change for improved academic opportunities for Black students at UCF.

Research Purpose and Research Question

As addressed in chapter 2 the research problem discussed the diversity and inclusion practices at UCF as related to Black students. The research question: *What strategies and programs can be provided for the retention and graduation of Black undergraduate students at the University of Central Florida?* The purpose of the study was to examine the phenomenon of minority students and their experiences as told through the participants' narratives including their experiences matriculating at UCF. The study will also include the students' perceptions of programs and strategies they believe foster diversity and inclusion at UCF.

Population and Sample

The primary target group for this study is six undergraduate students at UCF. This section describes the population and criterion-based sample in order to secure the sample.

Population

The research population represented a cross section of the Black students at UCF. The population was undergraduate students.

Criterion Based Sampling Strategy

The sample for this study was identified through the criterion-based sampling strategy. A random selection of participants was selected from UCF utilizing purposeful selection sampling. Criterion based sampling includes selecting participants who share similar characteristics.

Sample Size

The sample size for the study was six participants which supported the theory of Creswell (2012) utilizing small interview groups. In this situation, the participants provided their viewpoints to the researcher. The interviews were one-on-one, and the participants were anonymous. Even though the sample size of six participants allowed deeper inquiry and fulfilled the purpose of the study.

Participant Identification Process

The participants met the following criteria: African American, undergraduate, and full time UCF students. The process for identifying participants included receiving approval from the institutional review board (IRB) and approval from UCF. Participants were selected through various on-campus platforms including email, social media, and message boards on campus. An

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email and follow-up phone call were made to each participant to ensure they received the correspondence. After initial contact a confirmation email was sent identifying the date, time, and the location of the interview. The day prior to the interview, the researcher followed up with a phone call and sent a reminder email to the participants.

Summary

The sample included six undergraduate Black students (from a range of majors and gender) from UCF which were selected using criterion-referenced sampling. The communication process during sample selection included phone calls, emails, follow up communication, and thank you letters.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

This section explores the instruments such as the interview protocol and checklist used to collect data from the participants in this study. The interviews were the main source of documentation for this study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi structured interview is a qualitative strategy where the researcher can ask the participant open ended questions. This section provides an overview of why semi structured interviews were used for the purpose of the study and provide the interview instrument and data collection process.

Justification for Semi-structured Interviews

Semi structured interviews provide an opportunity for the researcher to probe and expound on the researcher's responses. Therefore, the interviewer can facilitate discussion,

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negotiation, and the expansion of the participants' responses (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). The advantage of semi structured interviews, the interviewer can follow up with leads from responses and probe for additional questions. This type of interview style allows an in-depth interview with the participants. Each respondent was provided a set of open-ended questions that were similar in nature to encourage consistency in data collection.

The semi structured interview process was selected for this study as it allowed the participants to answer the questions with details ensuring the original research question was addressed.

Design of the interview instruments

The study consisted of utilizing an interview protocol and checklist. The interview checklist was used throughout the research process. The participant's interview questions were created to support the research question (See Appendix F for Interview Protocol). There were three types of interview questions used: main questions, focus questions, and follow up questions. The researcher utilized the same open-ended questions to the participants. The purpose of asking open-ended questions was to ensure the credibility of the study. The recording and researcher notes provided additional relevance to the research project.

The questions were a foundational support in answering the research question. The probing questions were used to dig deeper and provide further analysis. Further, the follow up questions were used to provide clarification and emphasis on understanding the respondents' answers. Throughout the interview the researcher used a conversational tone, employed active listening skills to engage the participants which enabled crucial information to be gathered. The interview guide provided a thorough process to ensure the data was collected properly.

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Data collection

The data collection process was carefully planned to ensure the interviews with the participants were effective. The following steps were followed: 1. Telephone interviews were planned well in advance with electronic notices. 2. Participants were given the option on select interview dates and time. 3. Participants were provided a copy of the interview protocol in advance of the scheduled interviews.

In conclusion, semi structured interviews were conducted which allowed understanding the dynamics of minority students' perception of programs and services at UCF.

Data Preparation

Systematic data was important to ensure the study was organized to accomplish the goals of the project. There were several steps which ensured accuracy and validity (Creswell, 2005).

Transcribing Interviews

The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. The transcribing services were handled by an outside service. Each interview was listened to in its entirety to ensure accuracy.

Preparing Transcripts for Analysis

Data was analyzed by Quirkos qualitative data analysis software. The audio recordings were analyzed utilizing measures such as reading, annotating and analyzing the data by an outside service- along with transcribing the interviews verbatim. The recordings were received from the outside service via signature receipt. For accuracy, each interview was listened to in its entirety and matched by the recording.

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The Microsoft Word program was used to convert the recordings into plain text with the support of Quirkos software. This software was used to support analyzing electronic memos and the management of code and transcription. The software allows for systematic and comprehensive to categorize information into another document for publication.

Data Organization

Throughout the study, the data was organized in a systematic manner. The numbered system coded each individual document and the interview included the participant's name or document title, date, and location.

Data Security

The audio videos were saved on a USB drive and hard drive. Transcripts were saved, electronic copies were password protected and hard copies printed. The electronic copies were secured, and password protected on the researcher's home computer. Steps were adhered to ensure data analysis and rigorous procedures were followed throughout the research.

Within-Interview Analysis (Individual Interviews)

The within-interview analysis stated that each interview was unique and comprehensive within and of itself (Merriam, 1998, p. 194). The purpose of utilizing the within-interview analysis was to establish a foundation and understand the basis and details of the interviews. The following processes were used: memos, coding, pattern matching, and code development.

Memos-memos were used to engage the researcher with the research (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2015). Memos were used throughout the research study. The three strategies utilized are self-reflective memos, analytical memos, and theoretical memos (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

- Self-reflective memos are the first reactions of the researcher during the data collection and coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During this stage the emphasis was on not interpretation therefore, it was vital to note the reflections and the observations throughout the categorization process. The Quirkos software program helped to facilitate the storage of the reflections and the use of memos throughout the coding process.
- Analytic memos included questions, speculations, conjectures, emerging themes, and interpretations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The analytic memos were collected and utilized as cross referencing and interpretation tools during the data analysis process.
- Theoretical memos were created to support the interpretation of data. The researcher utilized these memos for the purpose of recording poignant thoughts and relationships in theory. The use of the three memo types supported descriptive details throughout the research study.

Coding-there were several steps in the coding process which included identifying data (Merriam, 1998), level one coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and descriptive coding (Patton, 1990). This was accomplished to discover generalizations and board concepts in the interviews and the documents. The interview documents were read numerous times to ensure accuracy in the coding process. This process however did not involve interpretation. The primary purpose was to discover descriptive data however, the researcher also started the informal interview analysis and cross-case analysis with the support of memos.

Pattern matching-each interview was read through to find patterns, details, and codes in the interview. The researcher linked codes and patterns to support interpretive analysis. During

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this phase interpretative concepts were formulated. Therefore, the researcher grouped characteristics, behaviors, and related data into thematic categories with the purpose of identifying within-case patterns. When patterns emerged, the researcher reviewed the transcripts to make sure coding was categorized and consistent throughout the data collection phase.

Illustrative displays of data: Concept networks-pattern matching was used using illustrative data displays. The Quirkos software supported the process by identifying patterns and later transcribed in a cross-case analysis which helped the researcher understand the data. Subsequently, the data provided support to the researcher in identifying data linkages.

Cross-Interview Analysis

The next section discusses across interviews (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). This section supports the strategies that explain cross interview analysis.

Pattern-matching-the researcher identified patterns by categorizing groups of codes and networks with the support of the meta-code in Quirkos. The pattern matching process is outlined in Creswell (1994). Patterns of the within-interview analysis were identified and compared as well as network views created in the coding phases. These comparisons allowed the researcher to reach a new level of perspective and constructs in the research process. Subsequently, the researcher was able to develop themes and prepare for interpretation of the data.

Illustrative displays of data Matrices-the matrices utilized were useful in providing a foundation for the cross-interview examination. Miles & Huberman (1994) stated that matrices are useful when exploring a new domain and key components. Each participant's interview was

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categorized along dimensional lines. The basis of this work formulated the data displays presented in chapter 4 & 5.

Thematic coding-After completing within-interview and cross-interview analysis the researcher created themes that supported the participant's interview collection. After the themes were identified, the researcher engaged in interpretation, explained implications, and made declarations about the data as well as, made connections with the coding, findings, theoretical framework, and research questions (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The Quirkos software helped the researcher with the process of coding and the network which supported the researcher in coding large cross-case themes. The data was organized in categories to provide a visual display of the coding.

Unique or contradictory coding-Each transcript was examined to ascertain the common themes and findings. The transcripts were reviewed again to code the observations and identify contrary emerging themes. The contradictory observations were reported to identify biases that are found in data.

Summary

The data analysis for this exploratory, descriptive, multiple-interview study included within the cross-interview process was conducted consecutively. The steps of analysis included memos, coding, and pattern matching and theme development. Quirkos software was used to support the streaming process. The data displays procedures allowed the researcher to examine retention concerns and strategies for Black students at UCF.

Design Issues

To ensure the qualitative study was credible the researcher considered ethical procedures and regarded the spirit of trustworthiness to the utmost. Trustworthiness is highly regarded in educational studies as it may directly impact the lives of many people (Merriam, 1998). Throughout the study, guidelines were followed to ensure a trustworthy design. The next section examines issues that contribute trustworthiness, credibility and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility involves establishing results which the research is credible and believable. In this qualitative study credibility was established by following three measures: revealing the investigator's position, triangulation, and peer examination (Merriam, 1998).

Investigator's position- The researcher brought several assumptions to this research project. The researcher is employed at a public school in Central Florida. I worked in different capacities in the educational arena from teacher to administrator at affluent and urban schools over a span of twenty-eight years. It is appropriate to identify these assumptions to identify any distortions in the findings as well as biases toward the participants and the work of the research project.

While some subjectivity is identified in qualitative research the first step is identifying the biasness (Toma, 2006). The researcher worked through preconceived notions and beliefs by following the procedures as outlined by Miles & Huberman (1994). (a) Use of an audit trail, providing clarity and details and on how data was collected and (b) Awareness of personal biasness, worldviews, values, and assumptions. The researcher-maintained memos and a tracking

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system to reflect an open and honest approach and for the purpose of avoiding biases and loose interpretations.

Triangulation-supported the use of multiple sources and methods for consistency and credibility. Merriam (1998) stated triangulation is the validation of research findings using multiple sources and processes. In addition, methods to support the research from biases were utilized throughout the project. Therefore, the study was supported throughout by use of triangulation.

Elements of triangulation utilized by study- Denzin 1989 stated there are four ways to incorporate triangulation into a study: investigator, data sources, theory, and methodology. The data achieved triangulation by incorporating interviewing six Black students currently enrolled at UCF. The study achieved theory triangulation by researching and finding supporting literature and theorists in the field of minority student retention and persistence in higher education.

Methodologically, this research supported the following methodological paths- a qualitative, exploratory, descriptive, and interview research design which incorporated four design structures. The participants 'interviews were anchored and analyzed using following processes: open coding, pattern matching, concept networks, and data matrices.

There are three reasons for using triangulation in this study: 1. the researcher acquired rich and robust descriptive text from the participants on how students are affected by the curriculum, culture and climate at the institution. Therefore, the interviews allowed the researcher to probe deeper with thought provoking questions and allowed cross theme analysis to support the findings. 2. The researcher was able to control biases using triangulation (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1989, 1994). Neutrality was achieved by employing various sources of triangulation

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to enhance validity and reliability of the research project (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990; Stake, 1995).

Limitations of a triangulation research design-there are some limitations to using triangulation in a study Triangulation can be costly and time consuming (Patton, 1990). The researcher should report any conflicting information or supporting evidence (Yin, 2003). It is important to see trends in the data as well as, outliers or incidental findings. Limitations should be considered in research and awareness will aid the researcher in ensuring the credibility and authenticity of the research project. In conclusion, the use of triangulation throughout the research study allowed for a credible reporting of minority retention and persistent issues at UCF.

Peer examination-is the process when the researcher asks colleagues to comment and provide feedback as the findings emerge (Merriam, 1998). The researcher was able to find peers through the university setting, the researcher's current professional educator's role, and with the dissertation committee. Most of the professionals that the researcher contacted for peer examination have terminal degrees and contributed significantly to research in the higher education arena. In addition, the researcher consulted with Dr. Brian Hamluk, associate professor in the higher education at the University of Pittsburgh and National Louis University. Dr. Hamluk was a former graduate student of Dr. Vincent Tinto, a theorist in the field of minority student retention and persistence issues in higher education.

Member checks-Merriam (1998) stated member checks are sharing findings and tentative interpretations with participants to ensure the reasonableness of the conclusions. The researcher presented the interview with transcripts of the interviews to check for accuracy. All interviewees acknowledged receipt of their transcripts. No students provided any clarifying

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feedback to the researcher. Therefore, the transcripts were deemed worthy to continue further research and review.

Summary

Confirmability of the research was accomplished by utilizing the following: member checks, peer examination, identified researcher bias, and triangulation. The use of the strategies ensured credibility and the research matched the reality of the context and the individuals presented.

Human Participants and Ethical Considerations

The use of human participants was highly achieved through a process governed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UCF. The rights and privacy of the six participants were observed and adhered to throughout the research study. The IRB at UCF granted approval for the study and the Informed Consent approval documents are in (Appendix G). In addition, all six participants signed consent forms granting permission for their names and institutions in this study.

The study is descriptive in nature and therefore the results were not intended to remain anonymous. The informed consent forms listed if the participant preferred anonymity and was given an opportunity for the participant to receive a pseudonym if requested. This process supports the notion that the participants are active students at the university and their privacy is a top priority throughout the research project.

Therefore, the participants were allowed discretion in reviewing all transcripts (members check process) and disclosed all documents to ensure an opportunity for the participants to

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express concerns or avoid any miscommunications that could impact the validity of the study or hinder the participants in any manner.

Conclusion

Trustworthiness is the cornerstone of dynamic research projects that are life changing and impact those as in this case in the field of higher education and increase the effectiveness of Black students attending UCF. This study carefully regarded all avenues of ethical considerations for the use of human participants. The researcher identified the following to ensure a successful journey: identified biasness, triangulation, audit trail, and addressed confirmability. In addition, the researcher employed methods such as member checks, peer examinations and ethical procedures. The researcher followed the protocol and procedures of the IRB for research at the University of Central Florida.

Chapter 4

Presentation of the Data

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the African American students' perceptions, and examine the phenomenon of minority students' experiences as told through the participants' narratives at UCF. The study focused on students' perceptions of academic programs and strategies they believe will foster equity, diversity, and inclusion at UCF. The study utilized a qualitative, exploratory, descriptive interview research design. The research question which directed the study was: *What strategies and programs can be provided for the retention and graduation of Black undergraduate students at the University of Central Florida?* The researcher conducted six interviews with Black undergraduate students at the University of Central Florida to answer the research question.

Profiles of the Participants

This section provides an overview of the demographics of the participants in this study which include age, gender, major, income status which is presented in Table 6. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the students.

Table 6

Demographics of UCF Black Students Who Were Interviewed

Name	Age	Gender	Major	Income Status
Jasmine	20	Female	Psychology	Unemployed/full time student.
Randy	20	Male	Biology	Unemployed/full time student.
Sandy	20	Female	Environmental Law	Part time employment/full time student

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Karen	19	Female	Biomedical Science	Unemployed/full time student.
Mary	20	Female	Kinesiology	Unemployed/full time student
Erin	20	Female	Health Science	Unemployed/full time student

Interview Data Analysis

This chapter include highlights of key quotations from the participant's ethnographic interviews as well as, additional information provided by the student participants to answer the research question. The themes emerged through data analysis by the researcher and factors contributing to the college student's perception of academic programs are discussed. This information will be cited by pseudonyms given to each participant in this study. The first area that was discussed with the participants was the rigor of the coursework at UCF. Many of the students explained how the coursework was challenging and requires discipline. Jasmine affirmed:

I would say the coursework challenges you. It's not the hardest thing, but it does challenge you to just be open minded and apply like the things you learn to like everyday life. I would say is you learn. You try to apply to life and after, but it's not the easiest but it's also not the hardest it's manageable.

Erin added that the coursework was intense and just a lot class work which varies depending on the teacher. Erin indicated some teachers are flexible about when assignments are due. Therefore, Erin stated she had to pace herself so she didn't feel like the teachers where bombarding her with work. Overall, Erin added that she had to learn an organization system to stay organized.

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The students expressed concerns regarding campus environment challenges and feelings of isolation. Sandy indicated:

I would say, especially since you know my major it's mostly white students that are in it, I'll definitely say I had a lot of instances where I was either like the only student of color in my classes or like one of the five out of like probably like 100 students.

The participants shared their sentiments on managing time and developing personal relationships on campus. Karen summed up her opinions about the campus environment and her perception about developing personal relationships on campus:

I felt like last semester, coming to UCF, I guess, I didn't really know what to expect. So, I did struggle a little bit with the first couple of weeks or so. But after like really, learning how to manage my time and learning, like how the professors, you know, do their tests and their assignments, I kind of got a better understanding. And I when I made a better study schedule, and study plan, and use all my academic resources, my grades did improve a lot. I feel like I'm having the online classes was very hard. Not having a personal relationship with my classmates and with my teachers is very hard to get used to it. Managing my time is usually going to class you know; you have a schedule and it was easy. But being home I didn't have any in person classes last semester or this semester. So, it's kind of hard to manage your time. So usually like there was nothing to do and it was very hard to make friends. I feel like I was like really in my room instead of like making friends and meeting new people.

The students shared their experiences regarding the tutoring programs and interventions at the university. Some notable interventions to help struggling students were the use of the

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tutoring programs which are called Supplemental Instruction (SI) leaders and the Student Academic Resource Center (SARC). Both services were helpful for students even while studying online. Karen affirmed:

We have a tutoring lab, that is now virtual, so we would go on zoom, it's open, six days a week, so they have someone graduate or teacher's assistant there, who is knowledgeable on certain subjects, and we can go and ask for help with homework, or maybe a topic that we're not really understanding, we can go there and ask for help.

The students expressed how much the SI tutors made the classwork information easier to comprehend and retain. Randy stated the SI leader is just basically making it easier for students to learn because they teach it in a way where they're teaching from a student to student as opposed from a teacher to student. The students stated how the tutors integrate their services into the course curricula. Erin added:

Services like each class, they email you with tutoring schedules or review sessions. Like when I would go they definitely went over everything on the test or most things and like going there you will get more of an understanding so it's not like you're studying for the test you're studying to really learn it.

Overall, the students expressed through the struggles of juggling classes online due to the COVID-19 pandemic most were able to sustain decent grades and maintain honor roll status.

Mary stated:

I've made the Dean's list every semester thus far, so that's successful. So while attending the university the students felt that despite the challenges, they were able to overcome and maintain their grades and persist.

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However, the students shared their recommendations for enhancing academic programs and interventions. Erin discussed having more coordinated study groups and peer sharing sessions. Sandy stated the following:

I think that would be like the only issue UCF is not bad at paying attention to Black students and making sure that they have their needs met. more resources for the Black students like they do have a couple of them now but as far as resources meaning like maybe having more black therapists and like the CAP which is the, which is a therapy for UCF students having more black therapists, they're also just trying to hire and recruit more black faculty and staff to just be in UCF and make us feel comfortable.

Emergence of Themes from Data Analysis

There were fifteen themes and 171 codes which emerged from the analysis of data (See Table 7). The fifteen themes were categorized into three major themes: interpersonal skills, campus environment and academic support.

Table 7

Themes from Data Analysis

Themes	Codes
Clubs/Organizations	21
Tutoring	19
Challenges	15
Successes	14
Financial Aid	12
Campus Climate/Culture	11
Academic Strategies	10
COVID	10
Recommendations	8
Academic Counseling	7
Academic Coursework	7
Study Groups	7
Psychological Counseling	5

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Teaching Assistants	4
UCF Student Resources	2
Total: 15 Themes	Total: 171 Codes

Creswell (2007) stated coding is a process of breaking down text and organizing text to create explanations or comprehensive themes in the data. Through the analysis of data, there were three major themes that emerged. The themes are as follows: Interpersonal Skills, Campus Engagement, and Academic Support.

Interpersonal Success Skills (ISS)

The participants' discussed motivation, self-reliance, discovery, drive, overcoming challenges, and focusing on the successes as the main reasons to remain, to persist, and graduate. The participants were asked during the interview to describe the attributes which contributed to them remaining in college, describe the challenges, and successes while attending UCF. Most participants stated how they learned how to manage time/finances, created study plans, and managed their social life and the ability to stay focused. All the characteristics are ISS skills that were highly regarded as noted throughout the interviews from the participants. Karen stated:

I felt like last semester, coming to UCF, I guess, I didn't really know what to expect. So, I did struggle a little bit with the first couple of weeks or so. But after like really, learning how to manage my time and learning, like how the professors, you know, do their tests and their assignments, I kind of got a better understanding. And I when I made a better study schedule, and study plan, and use all my academic resources, my grades did improve a lot. At the end, I know the goal I want to reach.

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Acquiring the necessary interpersonal skills are a necessity to surviving college life. Erin shared the following:

Sometimes things become overwhelming. You're balancing everything, getting around errors. And then there was the COVID everything with that opened me. So, everything became a lot harder like doing the classes online everything was just different. The coursework varies from teacher to teacher. Um, I've had teachers who they're very flexible with when their work is due, or they give you a lot of time they'll give you the whole week to do an assignment so it's not bad. Um, if you pace yourself, and I've also had teachers that bombard you with assignments, and you just really must stay organized to get through it all.

Campus & Cultural Engagement (CCE)

The second theme which emerged from the data analysis was students staying actively engaged in Campus & Cultural Engagement (CCE) activities. Throughout the students' time in college most participants made a point to volunteer or connect with cultural organizations, peer groups, and sporting organizations. The participants were asked about the campus climate, culture, and if they were actively engaged in CCE activities. Based on the findings, cultural campus involvement was one of the largest areas in which to participants commented on in keeping the students glued to campus life. Jasmine shared:

They're always, there's always something not even before COVID every day in certain areas of campus wouldn't have as a free speech on, which basically people can go and just express like they believe their views on certain things a mall where organizations would set up and just try to promote as much as we can. There is a very active very

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inclusive and diverse, like for example today. I was walking to class, and it was just different like tables that organizations are trying to promote. There's always something not even before COVID every day in certain areas of campus wouldn't have as a free speech, which basically people can go and just express like they believe their views on certain things a mall where organizations would set up and just try to promote as much as we can.

The students expressed their sentiments on cultural diversity and the importance of assimilating with peers from their culture. Sandy stated well there's a lot of different cultures, but as far as like the black group of students. I would say that it's very family oriented and a lot of us are like very close with each other. Um, and the black Caribbean, you know, like black American black Caribbean, we're all like close with each other.

Targeted Academic, Social, & Financial Support (TASFS)

The third theme that emerged from the data collected was the need for Targeted Academic, Social, & Financial Support (TASFS). Participants were asked to describe the academic and social/emotional/financial support on UCF's campus and specifically the resources they utilized and explain why these programs, scholarships/grants, and interventions were helpful to their matriculation at the university. As well as, how the participants were coping with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following participants noted tutoring and having a mentor as one of the major themes that contributed to their academic and social/emotional success. As noted in the research, the Supplemental Instruction (SI) tutoring (targeted to the curricula and aligned to the standards within the coursework), mentors, psychological services, receiving financial aid, and academic

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advisement were highly regarded by the participants during the interviews. Mary shared insight on the academic support at UCF:

I've been using tutoring, since my freshman year. And for social that was excellent. I will go to tutoring they will break it down, and you could like ask her a question because it wasn't as many people in tutoring, as there was in class or, she actually had time to answer everyone's question. So, SARC tutoring is like a strand of students teaching other students. SI tutoring is kind of similar like students who lead the tutoring. I know there's a writing center, where you can go and take your papers there and they can like read it over.

Hence, receiving financial aid was an area where the students expressed their financial concerns and the desire to obtain good grades in order to receive financial support. Moreover, another area of concern was mentorship, psychological services, and academic advising in which the students expressed the need to have more mentors available, psychological services, and opportunities to meet with their academic advisor. Jasmine stated:

I applied for a mentor. I am a psych major but the program didn't have enough mentors to match or mentee so unfortunately, that didn't go as planned. I have a mentor for one of my organizations, I'm part of the collegiate mentor/mentee program inside of the previous Student Association organization.

UCF provides psychological services which help students to cope with stress and other emotional issues. Sandy stated the importance of getting therapy while attending school.

I would say one of the first ones would be CAPS, which I think stands for Counseling and Psychological Services, so they have like free therapy sessions. And let's see what

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else for CAPS I started using cat, the therapy sessions I started using that fall 2019, but then I stopped but I'm going to start that again so it was for about I would say two months. So now I'm going to start doing that again.

Participant's Recommendations on Academic Programs, Interventions, and Support

The participants shared their recommendations for successful academic programs, interventions, and support during the interview and data collection process. Karen stated:

I guess for the professors to be more engaged in our learning. I guess assignments and more things to help us, like really make sure we understand the material, we're not just you know, just learning it, just to like, take a test and forget about it, but actually the learning and have it stick with us. Because most classes that I'm taking with science, you know, you can't just forget about it, you must learn it for future courses. And I would say for like the advisors to like reach out more because the only time they would reach out for when it's registering for classes, but they really wouldn't make sure that you had all of your requirements for graduation and things like that. And maybe also, when it comes to financial aid some students don't have that much financial aid. So, I think that will help a lot some students.

Another student discussed the availability of resources and advertising of those resources to reach more students. Erin shared:

I feel like a lot of the students don't know as much as they should, about the resources. So maybe like publicizing them more. I'm sure a lot of ease for a lot of things, or fees for a lot of things though get things free with student government. Um, there is a lot of extra fees on things and so it's like you're paying for it you should know about it. I know what

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it is, um, I'm not sure what else maybe making things more group oriented because I know a lot of people are just going through classes by themselves not knowing what to do.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 discussed the participant's demographics, the coding of data, highlights of participant's quotes, data analysis of the findings, and the chapter provided details regarding the three themes which targeted the research question: Interpersonal Success Skills (ISS), Targeted Academic, Campus & Cultural Engagement (CCE), Social and Financial Support (TASFS) and the participant's academic support recommendations. Specific findings indicate the need for students to have interpersonal and coping skills while attending college, and the frequency in which the students relied on tutoring, peer study groups and teaching assistants to maintain academic success with the coursework.

Furthermore, the students stated they felt more comfortable assimilating with cultural organizations for academic support, mentorship, and managing social skills. Many of the participants were aware of academic advisement and psychological services however, the participants expressed they did not utilize the advisor or connect with the therapist to get emotional support. Therefore, there were some areas of concern as it relates to the three themes that will be elaborated on in the final chapter. Chapter 5, the final chapter of this study will discuss the findings as they relate to the literature, present implications for institutional improvements for UCF and other HEIs and discuss the recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5

Interpretations, Recommendations, & Summary

Purpose of Study

As addressed in Chapter 2 the research problem discussed the diversity and inclusion practices at UCF as related to Black students. The research question: *What strategies and programs can be provided for the retention and graduation of Black undergraduate students at the University of Central Florida?* The purpose of the study was to examine the phenomenon of minority students and their experiences as told through the participants' narratives including their experiences matriculating at UCF. The study included the students' perceptions of programs and strategies that they believe foster diversity and inclusion at UCF.

Response to Research Question

The section will review the findings and data analysis of the research question which guided this study. As stated in Chapter 1, this study included one research question which was supported throughout the research project. Building on Chapter 4 which presented research and cross case analysis of the research findings relating to the research question.

Research Question Overview

The research question that overarched the study: *What strategies and programs can be provided for the retention and graduation of Black undergraduate students at the University of Central Florida?* Based on the responses of the six Black undergraduate students at UCF who were interviewed for this. Table 8 provides a brief overview of the research question, themes- Interpersonal Success Skills (ISS), Campus & Cultural Engagement (CCE), Targeted Academic, Social, and Financial Support (TASFS), and a brief synopsis of the findings.

Table 8***Research Question, Theme and Findings***

Research Question	Theme/Findings
<i>What strategies and programs can be provided for the retention and graduation of Black undergraduate students at the University of Central Florida?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpersonal Success Skills threaded throughout college to overcome challenges, persist and graduate. (ISS) (TASFS) • Campus Involvement/Cultural Connection/& Relationship Building (CCE) • Targeted and Curricula Oriented Supplemental Support (TASFS) • Intrusive Advising and Counseling (TASFS) • Mentorship (Social & Academic) (TASFS) • Faculty Communication, Feedback, and Involvement (ISS) (TASFS) • Learning Center/Peer Study Groups (TASFS) • Early Career Intervention (TASFS) • Financial Support (TASFS) • Ensure UCF Resources reach students

Findings Related to the Literature**Interpersonal Success Skills (ISS)**

Tinto (1987) asserted that many students who leave college do not see themselves as failures, but those students understand their time in college was a time of individual self-discovery, and increased reliance on interpersonal skills and maturity. Therefore, to retain students, Tinto (1987) and Bean (1990) agreed that students should maintain focus while attending postsecondary institutions and have the desire and motivation to complete their educational goals. As Karen stated:

I did struggle a little bit with the first couple of weeks or so. But after like really, learning how to manage my time and learning, like how the professors, you know, do their tests

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and their assignments, I kind of got a better understanding. And I when I made a better study schedule, and study plan, and use all my academic resources, my grades did improve a lot. At the end, I know the goal I want to reach.

Students who attend higher education institutions without a sense of purpose exhibit lower levels of commitment and persistence. Martinez (1997) stated institutions that maintain and improve student motivation opportunities can lead to retention and achievement. The internal and external motivational factors are important to remember and often continued reasons students remained enrolled, overcome obstacles, and graduate from college. Read below regarding what Mary stated as it relates to transiting from home to college.

I will say just a transition from home to college. The independence having to manage everything. But no, not that's been really it hasn't been like a big challenge. I'm already here. And, like I've already started. So, like now that I know the work that I must do. And it seems attainable is not as hard as someone from the outside looking in, may think, and to I think it's important for me to finish getting my education to take the next step, because in order to pursue my career I have to have a college degree.

Tinto (1993) stated pre-entry attributes, and elements such as family background, post entry skills, and motivation contribute to how a student responds to his educational environment and persist. The Interpersonal Success Skills (ISS) were evident in the data of this study and shared extensively by all six participants.

Campus & Cultural Engagement (CCE)

Tinto (1993) stated more than 75% of students withdraw from school because challenges relating to skills, interests, institutional structures, resources, and patterns of an HEI. Further,

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Tinto (2017) suggested in his theory on student success that minority students benefit from co-curricular learning experiences. Wyatt (2011) stated the challenge for institutional leaders is not just student engagement, but how to engage in student diverse student populations.

The following factors help minority students and underserved students succeed and grow at HEIs which include: peer culture, close friends interactions, Greek organizations, student unions, informal contact with faculty, positive interracial/intercultural environment, and self-confidence and motivating type activities (College Student Retention, n.d.). There was strong evidence from the data collected in this study that engaging in campus and cultural organizations support Tinto's (1993) student persistence's model. Sandy stated the following comments below on how important campus cultural connections are:

Well there's a lot of different cultures, but as far as like the black group of students. I would say that it's very family oriented and a lot of us are like very close with each other. Um, and the black Caribbean, you know, like black American black Caribbean, we're all like close with each other. Um, as far as like other cultures like why or Indian. I'm not too sure about it because I know I'm not in it but from what I've seen it, it just doesn't seem like as close as our culture.

Braxton et al. (1995) stated institutional experiences and culture have both direct and indirect effects on the student's ability to be involved in campus activities. Tinto's model contended that informal and formal institutional experiences influence the departure decisions of students (Tinto, 1993). Those engagement experiences are governed and impacted by the influences of the institution and the campus environment to facilitate the activities (Clagget, 1992). Most participants for this study were engaged in campus social and academic organizations.

Targeted Academic, Social, and Financial Support (TASFS)

Moreover, Tinto (n.d.) stated without support in the following areas: academic, social, and financial aid, many students struggle to meet the expectations of the university and succeed in college (Tinto, n.d.). Academic support is useful when it is aligned to specific course work when supplemental instruction is generic and disconnected from the course work objectives students struggle to keep up with the demands of the coursework (Tinto, n.d.). The themes which emerged from this segment were tutoring, peer study groups, academic strategies, faculty help, counseling, campus resources, and financial aid. The participants share their sentiments regarding these areas. Sandy stated:

I've been using tutoring, since my freshman year. And for social that was excellent. I will go to tutoring they will break it down, and you could like ask her a question because it wasn't as many people in tutoring, as there was in class or, she actually had time to answer everyone's question. So, this SARC tutoring which is like a strand of students teaching other students. SI tutoring is kind of similar like students lead the tutoring). I know there's a writing center, where you can go and take your papers there and they can like read over it. Um, I think that's pretty much all I know about other than just going to your professor and just asking them for help in general. Okay, um, I have like, a group of friends who we all take the same classes so we kind of study together.

Psychological counseling was a theme which emerged by the interviews of the participants as a vital need to support the experiences.

I would say one of the first ones would be CAPS, which I think stands for Counseling and Psychological Services, so they have like free therapy sessions. And let's see what

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else for CAPS I started using cat, the therapy sessions I started using that fall 2019, but then I stopped but I'm going to start that again so it was for about I would say two months. So now I'm going to start doing that again.

Financial aid and mentorship were equally important to the participants and many shared they received financial support from various scholarships and grants. The students did not mention during the interviews, student loans for aiding in their financial support at the university. Rick stated Pell Grants and several scholarships supported him academically as well as living expenses.

Freeman (1999) stated that mentoring is vital to Black students' persistence to obtaining a degree at PWIs. Campbell & Campbell (2007) contended that effective mentoring encompasses the following areas class performance, major selection, and degree persistence. Research states that academic mentoring is correlated with student satisfaction and retention (Ishiyama, 2007; Strayhorn & Saddler, 2009). The study's data revealed that mentorship was important to the participants' matriculation at the institution, including social and academic mentorship.

Mentorship was very important to the participants; Rick stated his sentiments below.

You know, like every day and she's always asking me, you know, how are your grades? How's school going, how's this how's your day going and that keeps me on track because you know I tell her how things are going. And so, if my day isn't going well, or if it is going well, she'll tell me you know oh it is okay, or that's good. Keep going. And then definitely as far as my mentors, I definitely text my mentor like every day and he's always checking on me, to make sure I'm doing well academically and emotionally, and then also I have my friends around me too which are there were there for me to make sure I'm, you know, level headed and make sure I'm doing what I need to do

Delimiters

This section will outline the study's strengths and weaknesses in the following areas: sample size, selection, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and revisiting bias.

Sample Size and Selection

One of the strengths of this study was to find willing participants during the COVID pandemic, throughout the data collection process finding Black undergraduates students was a task the researcher took on in a vigorous way to ensure the selection process included in depth interviews. Despite the current conditions and limitations during the worldwide pandemic the researcher was able to interview current undergraduate students.

The resulting sample group was imbalanced in relation to gender. 83% of the participants for this study were female and 17% of the participants were male. The ages for the participants include 83% (five) were 20 years old and 17% (one) of the participants was 19 years old. Moreover, most of the participants majored in science, health, and law. If the study was replicated, solicitation for a balance of participants based on gender, age, and college majors should be considered.

Instrumentation

Additional there were strengths of the study using the interview protocol and procedures in the data collection process. The interview protocol and procedures were developed and guided by peer reviewers, the dissertation committee, and approved by the IRB board of National Louis University. These tools and protocols were used consistently and can be replicated for future studies for the goal of collecting and analyzing data of similar nature. In future studies, the modification of the interview guide, more in-depth questions to gather more detailed information

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about relevant and pivotal academic strategies and interventions for the retention of Black students at UCF and other HEIs should be considered. This can be done by extending the interview time or devoting another interview time to collect additional data.

These observations aid in the strength of the interview design as well as, the confirmability, and credibility of the study and thus to the enhancement of the findings.

Data Collection

One of the strengths of the data collection process was the deliberate and organized way the data was collected with the highest level of best practices for qualitative research. The methods used were identified for within-case and cross-case analysis were documented and can be replicated for future studies. The strategies include an audit trail and member checks. During the process all participants received a copy of the transcript and recoding of the interview. Subsequently, two out of the six participants provided clarifying comments as well as, slight transcription edits.

Triangulation

Merriam (1998) stated the use of multiple sources of information gives the researcher an opportunity to be consistent with data collected. Trustworthiness was established by the researcher's awareness of frequent bias checks and a multiple use of viewpoints, research and resources. There was only one researcher, therefore the researcher relied on the expertise of peer reviewers and drawing of conclusions. Data triangulation was achieved by using six Black undergraduate students who currently attend UCF. This process was done to ensure relative and current data was gathered and taken into consideration along with other timely data sources.

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Revisiting the Investigator's Position and Potential Biases

The researcher brought several assumptions to this research project. Because the researcher works in education and particularly in urban education in which I teach Black students, this is a strength of the study as well as a source of potential bias. Many of themes expressed by the participants I too, witnessed attending a HEI. However, these experiences allowed me to deeply understand the ideas expressed and probe deeper to understand the views of the participants. Throughout, the study, I maintained a level of integrity and objectivity to conduct research in the most detailed, informative, and unbiased manner.

Summary Regarding Credibility and Confirmability

Credibility and confirmability of the research was accomplished by utilizing the following: member checks, peer examination, identified researcher bias, and triangulation. All the considerations provided strength for the qualitative, exploratory, descriptive interview design. The use of these strategies ensured credibility and the research matched the reality of the context and the individuals presented.

Recommendations

This research focused on increasing academic programs, strategies, and interventions for undergraduate Black students at UCF. There are implications and outcomes from the data of the research that may be considered by higher education scholars in the future. Moving forward, the research discovered will provide further insight into existing literature regarding Black student retention and persistence at HEIs. Tinto (2008) stated access without support is not opportunity. It is within this context, I provide the following recommendations in relation to the research

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question presented in this study: *What strategies and programs can be provided for the retention and graduation of Black undergraduate students at the University of Central Florida?*

Interpersonal Success Skills (ISS)

- Provide Freshman & Transfer Seminar courses to include, transition opportunities, academic expectations, major/career exploration, time management, and coping skills.
- Incorporate cohort data, for longitudinal studies (follow up with midpoint data and long-term data) modify academic, interpersonal programs, and strategies as needed.
- Provide intensive and engaging preparation stations- for online courses, technology resources, and how to survive during a pandemic such as COVID-19.
- Vertical alignment with secondary schools for the preparation of recruitment, and retention of Black students, preparation of college life, and infusion of interpersonal skills.
- Recruit upperclassman (minority) students who have become more proficient in managing college life-ask those students to become peer mentors.

Campus & Cultural Engagement (CCE)

- The institution to maintain financial support opportunities, cultural activities, clubs and organizations.
- The institution to continue to actively recruit and maintain representation of minority students in academic organizations, career organizations including premed, and STEM organizations.
- To continue to organize and visibly advertise cultural events on campus as well as, intramural sports opportunities targeting minority recruitment.

Targeted Academic, Social, and Financial Support (TASFS)

- Continue to provide intrusive academic advising with periodic follow-up with the students. The research merited the need for students to connect with their academic advisor, and major advisor within the college to plan out coursework for the entire tenure while attending the institution. Some participants stated they only used the academic advisor once or did not use them at all to plan out coursework while attending the school.
- Early intervention to secondary level students, encouraging them to complete the FAFSA and apply for available scholarships and grants.
- Continue to provide financial aid resources from available scholarships and grants.
- Continue to communicate with students about upcoming events, mental health seminars and provide psychological services from CAPS. Follow up with students who attended therapy sessions prior. One participant from the study stated that she attended therapy sessions but stopped however, she had a desire to resume therapy sessions.
- Hire and maintain a diverse population of mental health therapists, including Black/minority therapists.
- Ensure the professors are engaged with the students' learning (face to face and online) including providing timely feedback and academic support. A participant stated that learning from a screen, I feel like I am by myself, I know I can email the professor but to coordinate free time with the professor is a challenge.
- Hire and maintain Black/minority professors throughout the interdisciplinary areas.
- Professors coordinate with academic tutors/study groups with intention and frequency.

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- Provide an intentional academic support regime segued with the curricula and across interdisciplinary courses such as labs, academic certified tutors, and learning center (writing and reading).
- Early intervention, of Academic and Career mentors throughout the matriculation of minority students attending the institution.
- Tinto (1993) stated research indicates peer study groups encourage retention and should be integrated in the academic setting.
- Conduct ongoing research/studies focused on the perceptions and experiences of minority students who have withdrawn and graduated with similar characteristics, and determine what factors impacted them to persist to graduate or withdraw from the university.

Summary

The research provided data in the areas of academic support and programming for Black students for the purpose of student retention and persistence at UCF and higher education institutions. As a result, findings from this study revealed that Black undergraduate UCF students' experiences suggest that academic programs, strategies, and interventions should continue to provide support to students. One highlight from the data showed, UCF's tutoring services are provided to help struggling students. However, many of the participants stated the need for tutoring and study groups to be conducted by specialized content area tutors. The coordination should occur alongside the course's scope and sequence, and the professor's lectures as well as, academic support services should be offered for each course.

Furthermore, the data revealed that rich cultural experiences and the balance of acculturation are important aspects to help minority students understand their past and move

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through societal inequities. Many of gaps in finding solutions regarding Black student retention and persistence have persisted because colleges have allowed stopgaps to blur their vision—they don't address long term solutions, or the “root issues” (St. Amour, 2020). In fact, institutions need to address the barriers Black students experience before they step on campus (St. Amour, 2020). Colleges can improve but they must be intentional (St. Amour, 2020).

Astin's Theory (1999) of Involvement and Tinto's Theory of Student Departure are very similar to the research found in this study which include: a highly involved student, spends time on campus, participates actively in campus activities, and interacts frequently with peers and teachers. In addition, Tinto views student departure as a longitudinal process because of how individual students process their interactions with the social, informal and formal dimensions of a college or university (Seidman, 2005). Hence, a foundation was laid in this study, for future research in the areas of specialized academic programs, and strategies for minority students.

Harper & Quaye (2009) stated Tinto's model points out that with social and academic integration students increased their goals and commitments to the institution and graduate from college. Therefore, both theories support the rate of retention at HEIs (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Moreover, the research found in this study correlates with both theories discussed above. The data from this study adds timeliness to the problems college student's face, such as the COVID-19 global pandemic, technology-online learning, and the prevailing social and economic disparities minorities have dealt with over time.

The University of Central Florida cannot address and solve every issue that this study revealed. However, Higher Education Institutions should look at existing academic programs, strategies, and interventions to support struggling students. It is also necessary to revise academic programs until there is a transformative plan that supports and uplifts the climate and

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culture of the institution. Because of the various dynamics that are intertwined within each institution's campus, fixing these problems requires more than a few minimal changes, it requires every college and university in the United States to go back to the mission, goals, and values of why the institution exists and how will it serve and support its diverse, ever evolving students and community in the 21st century.

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Appendix A

UCF

State University Competitor's Undergraduate Student Demographic Data

Universities	White	Hispanic	Black	Full-time Enrollment	Students Returning after First Year	Graduation Rate	Average Annual Cost
University of Central Florida (UCF)	47%	26%	11%	66,000	89%	69%	\$15,286
Florida State University (FSU)	62%	20%	8%	32,614	93%	80%	\$14,582
University of Florida (UF)	55%	22%	6%	33,655	96%	88%	\$12,345

(Scorecard, n.d.)

Appendix B

UCF

University of Central Florida: Top Fifteen Undergraduate Majors

1. Psychology BS
2. Health Sciences BS (Pre-Clinical)
3. Nursing Generic BSN
4. Finance BSBA
5. Hospitality Management BS
6. Health Services Administration BS
7. Interdisciplinary Studies BS
8. Criminal Justice BS
9. Sport and Exercise Science BS
10. Elementary Education BS
11. Integrated Business BSBA
12. Human Communication BA
13. Event Management BS
14. Biomedical Sciences BS
15. Mechanical Engineering BSME

(UCF, n.d.-c)

Appendix B (continued)

UCF

University of Central Florida: Top Fifteen Graduate Master's Programs

1. Business Administration MBA
2. Social Work MSW
3. Nursing MSN
4. Health Administration MHA
5. Comm. Sciences and Disorders MA
6. Accounting MSA
7. Criminal Justice MS
8. Interactive Entertainment MS
9. Computer Science MS
10. Hospitality and Tourism Management MS
11. Counselor Education MA
12. Engineering Management MS
13. Exceptional Student Education MEd
14. Educational Leadership MA
15. Nonprofit Management MNM

(UCF, n.d.-c)

Appendix C

UCF

State University Competitor's Undergraduate Student Demographic Data

Total 329,616

Bachelor's 270,881

Master's 52,722

Doctoral 4,857

Specialist 665

Professional (Medicine) 491

(UCF, n.d.-c)

Appendix C (continued)

UCF

University of Central Florida: Program Rankings 2018-2019

Publication: Affordable Colleges

Description	Program	Category/Rank
Best Online Bachelor's	Communications	National/3
	Engineering	National/21
	English/Humanities	National/1
	Healthcare/Admin.	National/1
	History	National/1
	Political Science	National/1
	Psychology	National/2
	RN to BSN	National/5
	Theology	National/13
Best Online Master's	Criminal Justice	National/21
	English	National/15
	Nurse Practitioner	National/4
	Nursing	National/4
	RN to MSN	National/1
Best Online PhD Programs	Nursing	National/1
Best Online Programs	Health Sciences	National/3
	Health Services	National/1
	Political Science	National/1
	Secondary Education	National/2

(UCF, n.d.-c)

Appendix D

UCF

Benefits of the DirectConnect Program

- Guaranteed admissions (consistent with university policy) with an earned A.A. or A.S. degree from one of the college partners.
- Assigned one on one Success Coach, who provides assistance with transfer process, strategies for success, and periodically connects with student while at state college.
- Fast track admissions consideration and transition services such as financial aid, orientation, immunizations, and enrollment.
- Online support from Pathway team.
- An online community with peers, advisors and resources.

(UCF, n.d.-k)

Appendix E

UCF

UCF Programs Listed Under Student Development and Enrollment Services (SDES)

Enrollment Services

High School & State College Recruitment Visits

College Fairs

Campus-Based Open House Events

OverKnight Showcase for High School Counselors

Daily Campus Tours and Information Sessions

Admission Counseling

Comprehensive Counseling on Student Aid Options

Efficient Delivery of Student Aid

Financial Literacy and Debt Management Counseling

Promote College Awareness to Underrepresented 6-12 Grade Students and Parents

First Year Transition

Orientation

First Year Experience

LINK-Freshman Engagement

Freshman Seminar

FTIC Academic Advising

Undeclared Advising

Transfer and Transition Services

Learning Support

Peer Tutoring and Mentoring

Supplemental Instruction

Sophomore Support Academic Services for Student-Athletes

Appendix E (continued)

UCF

Student Accessibility Services

Course Accommodations

Summer Bridge Programs

TRIO Programs

Student Life

Student Government Association

Registered Student Organizations

Volunteer UCF

Late Knights

Homecoming

Campus Activities Board

LEAD Scholars Academy

Student Union

Recreational Sports

Outdoor Adventures

Knights Helping Knights Pantry

Wellness

Student Health Services

Alcohol and Other Drug Programs

Individual and Group Counseling

Fitness

Lifestyle Assessments

Healthy Knights

Mental Health Assessment

Stress Management

HIV Testing

Clinical Dietician Services

Appendix E (continued)

UCF
Pharmacy
Dental Services
Safety Education
UCF CARES
Support Services
Career Development
Job Preparation
Career Fairs
Course Scheduling and Registration
Grades
Commencement
FERPA
Veteran Services
Creative School for Children
Pegasus Parent Resources
Student Neighborhood Relations
Articulation Agreements
Budget and Personnel
Information Technology
A&SF Business Office
Housing and Residence Life
Orlando Campus Housing
Rosen Campus Housing
Greek Housing and Development
Residence Life
UnionWest at Creative Village

Appendix E (continued)

UCF

Off-Campus Housing Services

Student Rights and Responsibilities

Student Complaints and Appeals

Integrity and Ethical Development

Student Conduct

Student Legal Services

Golden Rule

Crisis Response

Turnitin.com

Disciplinary Verifications

Death Notices

Admission Clearances

Community Support

Puerto Rico Educational Relief Efforts

Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives

Diversity Certification

Social Justice and Advocacy

LGBTQ+ Services

Multicultural Student Center

Multicultural Academic and Support Services

Fraternity and Sorority Life

Greek Student Involvement and Leadership

Spiritual Development

Just Knights Response Team

(UCF, n.d.-o)

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

1. What is your class status at UCF, (freshman, and sophomore, junior, senior) and major?
2. Do you live on or near the UCF campus?
3. Do you have a support system in the following areas academically, socially, or financially?
Explain.
4. Describe the coursework at UCF?
5. Describe the overall campus climate/culture at UCF?
6. What academic strategies (academic support programs or interventions) are in place at UCF to support struggling students?
7. Which academic strategies have you used, and for how long?
8. Were the academic strategies that you used at UCF helpful to you advancing academically?
Why or why not?
9. Are you receiving any financial aid, academic or athletic scholarships? Explain.
10. List the extracurricular activities you participate in at UCF? If not, why?
11. Do you have a mentor, or guidance counselor or have you received any Student Services while attending UCF?
12. What are some challenges have you faced since attending UCF?
13. Have you ever considered leaving college? Why or Why not?
14. What are some successes' have you experienced since attending UCF?
15. What academic strategies or interventions would you like to see implemented at UCF to support your learning?
16. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix G

UCF

Letter of Invitation

Dear Participant:

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in this study is to better understand academic programs and strategies which support student retention and persistence of undergraduate Black students at the University of Central Florida.

The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately 30 minutes for the interview and an additional 30 minutes for review of the interview transcript for accuracy. To confirm your interest in this study, please respond to this correspondence at your earliest convenience. I will also follow up with an email within the next week to gauge your interest.

Thank you in advance for your consideration in this process and I look forward to potentially working with you in the days ahead.

Sincerely,

Carla S. Morris, doctoral candidate
Higher Education Leadership Department
National Louis University

Appendix H

Informed Consent Document

My name is Carla Morris, and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education Leadership department at National Louis University. I am asking you to participate in this study, “Increasing Strategies and Programs for the Retention and Graduation of Black Undergraduate Students at the University of Central Florida” occurring from 2/2021-3/1/2021. This form outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

By signing below, you are providing consent to participate in a research project conducted by Carla Morris, doctoral student, at National Louis University.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to better understand academic programs and strategies that support student retention and persistence of undergraduate Black students at the University of Central Florida.

Description: To participate in this study, you will be asked to complete (anonymously) an interview regarding understanding academic programs and strategies that support student retention and persistence of undergraduate Black students at the University of Central Florida.

Completion of the interview should take approximately 30 minutes. And an additional 30 minutes for review of the interview transcript for accuracy. A recording and transcript will be emailed to each participant participating in this study. If transcript is not returned within two weeks with accuracy edits, investigator will assume the transcript is accurate and the analysis process will begin.

1. I understand the scope, aims and purpose of this research project, the procedures to be followed and the expected duration of my participation.
2. I understand that confidentiality of all data and records associated with my participation in this research, including my identity, will be fully maintained. I understand my identity will be kept confidential by the researcher. By doing so, through the use of pseudonyms, and by researcher reporting demographic data in aggregate.
3. I understand that my consent to participate in this research is entirely voluntary, and that my refusal to participate will involve no prejudice, penalty or loss of benefits to which I would otherwise be entitled.
4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. The results of this study may be published or otherwise reported at conferences, and employed to enhance minority academic strategies and interventions at University of Central Florida and higher educational institutions however, participants’ identities will in no way be revealed (data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants). To ensure confidentiality the researcher will secure recordings, transcripts, and field notes in a locked cabinet in her home office. Only Carla Morris will have access to data. There are no anticipated risks or benefits, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be useful to the University of Central Florida and other schools and school districts looking to initiate or refine academic strategies and interventions. Upon request you may receive summary results from this study and copies of any publications that may occur. Please email the researcher, Carla Morris at _____ to request results from this study

UCF

5. I confirm that no coercion of any kind was used in seeking my participation in this research project.

6. I understand the interview will be recorded for transcription and will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher.

7. I understand that if I have any questions pertaining to the research, I can call 1. Carla Morris at

2. Dr. Nate Cradit, National Louis University (NLU) Department IRB Chairperson, address: 1000 Capitol Drive Wheeling, IL 60090 email: _____
3. Dr. Brian Hamluk, Committee Advisor, address: 1000 Capitol Drive Wheeling, IL 60090 email: _____
and 4. NLU Institutional Research Board (IRB) Dr. Shaunti Knauth, Director of Engaged Research, IRB Chair address: 1000 Capitol Drive Wheeling, IL 60090

8. I certify that I have read and fully understand the purpose of this research project.

I, _____ CONSENT/AGREE to participate in this research project.

I, _____ REFUSE/DON'T AGREE to participate in this research project.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix I

UCF

Email Confirming Decline of Participation

Dear (Participant):

Thank you for your recent communication regarding my invitation to participate in my dissertation project to better understand programs and strategies for the purpose of retention and persistence of Black students at the University of Central Florida.

While I understand you will not be able to participate in my study, please know I appreciate you taking the time to consider my request. I do hope that the ultimate result of my project will be of benefit to the field of higher education and student affairs.

Sincerely,

Carla S. Morris, doctoral candidate
Higher Education Leadership Department
National Louis University