

# Impact of Race on Business Students' Perceptions of Business Careers

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**D**emographers reported that 85% of all new entrants to the workforce in 2000 would be members of a minority group (American Demographics, 1997; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1993). Because of this increased diversity in the workforce, interest in the impact of race on students' business career perceptions has revived (DeLVecchio & Honeycutt, 2000). Attracting more students from diverse racial groups to business careers, and thus creating a more diverse pool of business employees (Jamieson & O'Mara, 1991), has become a goal of both business academicians and practitioners. To implement programs to serve this purpose, business professionals must understand better how different groups perceive business careers.

In 1991 and 1995, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) conducted two national studies of students' attitudes toward accounting as a career. Relying on their results, they launched a recruiting campaign to attract top-quality students to the accounting profession (Brown, 1994; Hermanson, Hermanson, & Ivancevich, 1995). Two other national studies on students' interest in business careers were carried out, by the American Council on Education and Gamma Iota Sigma, a national collegiate insurance fraternity (Hofmann, 1987; *New*

**ABSTRACT.** This study examined the degree to which racial differences affect business students' perceptions of, and preferences for, several business career options. Because the conceptual and empirical literature is split on the effect that race has on a student's major selection, our study was exploratory. We used MANCOVA analysis to compare African American with Caucasian business students and found no racial differences in preference for accounting, finance, or market research careers. African American students in this sample did express a higher preference for career paths in human resource management. This difference held true even when the effects of age, academic standing, and work experience were statistically controlled.

*York Times*, 1991). In addition, studies were done on students' interest in international business, sales, management information systems, and production and operations management (DeLVecchio & Honeycutt, 2000; Desai & Inman, 1994; Hill, Tillery, & Kenneth, 1992; Neubaum, 1997; Rifkin, 1987).

Conceptual writings on racial differences in career choice and some empirical studies have generally indicated a lack of agreement on the impact of race on students' perceptions of business careers (Borgen & Harper, 1973; Carter & Swanson, 1990; Grant & Breese, 1997; Tomlinson & Evans-Hughes, 1991; Whetson & Hayes, 1975).

Because of the lack of consensus among scholars in the field, the quest for better understanding of the issue continues. The purpose of our study was to determine if racial differences influence college business students' perceptions of business careers.

Not all researchers agree that racial differences in vocational preference are pervasive (see Table 1). One argument against race comparisons claims that a more important source of variability originates within rather than across racial groups (Cox & Nkomo, 1990; Nkomo, 1992). Not all members of any one racial group react similarly to their minority status, and this source of variability is more meaningful than variance attributable to racial minority or majority status (Grant & Breese, 1997). If these arguments apply to career choice, as some suggest they may, the appeal of various business careers (in accounting, finance, marketing, or management) may vary substantially from one Black student to another, or from one Caucasian student to another—and may not be dependent on racial group membership. Conceptual arguments have been proposed both for and against the existence of racial differences in business career perceptions.

The results from empirical studies are likewise mixed. In their review of vocational studies, Carter and Swanson

**TABLE 1. Summary of Race-Comparative Business Vocational Studies**

Study	Sample	Differences	No differences
Nazfiger et al. (1974)	Ages 14–24	Black respondents tended to express less interest on items measuring “enterprising” (i.e., business) dimension.	Extrinsic and intrinsic career rewards are the same.
Andrisani & Milius (1977)	Males ages 14–24	Racial differences in preference for various aspects of work emerge in older men (ages 45–59).	No differences between proportion of respondents who prefer intrinsic aspects of work in the age group under 45.
Westbrook, Sanford, & Donnelly (1990)	Ninth graders		Appropriateness of career choice and degree of career maturity were the same.
Dillard & Campbell (1992)	High school students	Blacks tend to place a higher career value on salary than Caucasians.	
Howell, Frese, & Sollie (1984)	High school and college students		Occupational aspiration predicted the degree of occupational achievement for both groups.
Hager & Elton (1970)	College males		Interest in business not correlated to racial group membership.
Borgen & Harper (1973)	College graduates		Interests expressed in college predicted career choices similarly for all racial groups.
Alper (1975)	Newly hired college graduates w/ IBM	Starting salary was less of a factor for Blacks than Caucasians in accepting job offer.	No difference on the career salary potential as a reason for accepting job offer.
Whetson & Hayes (1975)	College students	Blacks express stronger interest in business occupations and social service occupations.	
Doughtie, Chang, Alston, Wakefield, & Yom (1976)	College students	Blacks scored higher than Caucasians on the “enterprising” (i.e., business) dimension.	
Brenner & Tomkiewicz (1982)	College seniors—business majors	Degree of importance of job attributes differ. Blacks value long-range career objectives and the ability to work independently.	No differences in the rank of job attributes. Both groups rank income and work conditions in the same order.
Tomlinson & Evans-Hughes (1991)	College students		Interest on items measuring “enterprising” dimension (i.e., business) were similar.
Bonett & Stickel (1992)	College students	Attitudes toward careers differed. Factor structure developed on Caucasian sample did not fit Black sample.	
Steward, Gimenez, & Jackson (1995)	College students	Preferences in job autonomy higher for Caucasian females than Black.	No difference among males’ preferences for various job attributes

(1990) concluded that Black respondents tend to express a higher level of interest in business occupations. Unfortunately, the studies reviewed by Carter and Swanson (1990) included respondents who had not graduated from college and made no distinction between

types of business careers (i.e., accounting, finance, marketing, or management). However, if the studies involving only college level respondents are considered (see Table 1), the conclusion that Blacks express a higher level of interest in business careers is not sup-

ported. In some studies, college education eliminates any racial differences (Borgen & Harper, 1973; Hager & Elton, 1970; Tomlinson & Evans-Hughes, 1991). Still others indicate that racial differences exist among college-educated students (Whetson & Hayes, 1975).

## Research Questions

Those who have found racial differences claim that they exist because of the social experiences associated with being Black in America. Others claim that the experiences of members of a particular racial group can vary substantially. Despite the academic debate, some recruiters operate on the assumption that racial minorities find specific business careers less appealing. Because academic arguments are split and managerial practices are assumptive, in our study we questioned those assumptions.

Exploratory Question 1: What, if any, are the differences between racial majority and racial minority students' perceptions of business career options?

Lack of information may influence a minority group's perception of various business careers. Studies at both the college (Lucas, 1993) and high school levels (Howell, Frese, & Sollie, 1984) have found that minority students felt that they lacked adequate career information. If, for example, the African American managerial community holds sales in lower esteem than other career paths, any lack of career information may be especially crucial. We can create a more complete picture of racial differences by understanding and comparing students' knowledge of job attributes and how it affects career choice. We discuss three job attributes: starting salary, autonomy, and required education level.

Though starting salary levels tend to be of primary importance to both Black and Caucasian students (Alper 1975; Brenner & Tomkiewicz, 1982; Nazfiger, Holland, Helms, & McPartland, 1974), both groups may not share the same knowledge base concerning salary levels. For example, Black students may lack occupational role models or work exposure (through internships, etc.) in a particular business area, which could affect their perception of starting salaries. Studies in vocational advising suggest that Black college students are more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to express concerns over acquiring and using career planning information (Hendricks, 1994).

If the exposure gained in college is equal across racial groups, then one might expect no racial differences in

perceived starting salary levels. If, however, Black students are alienated from this college experience, racial differences may emerge (McCollum, 1998). Because no study to date has provided solid empirical evidence to support either the existence or lack of such racial differences, in our study we posed the following research question:

Exploratory Question 2: What, if any, are the differences between racial majority and racial minority students' estimates of starting salaries offered by business career options?

Though salary levels certainly take a priority in attracting students to sales, autonomy frequently is cited as a close second. Autonomy, or personal freedom, occupies an important role in general career choice (Pryor, 1987) and may take on even more importance in a race-comparative study, given the weight placed on it by Black college students in past studies. Black MBA students studied by Nowell (1976) tended to be individually oriented and relied principally on their own resources. This tendency appeared in both graduates and undergraduates: Kane (1998) found that Blacks placed more importance on personal autonomy than did other racial minority groups. This emphasis on autonomy does not stop at the college level but affects the priorities of the newly hired Black graduate (Brenner & Tomkiewicz, 1982). Because of autonomy's importance in career choice decisions, we examined students' perceptions of autonomy levels associated with various business careers (in accounting, finance, marketing, and management).

In their comparison of African American and Caucasian college freshmen, Pelham and Fretz (1982) found that though all freshmen suffered from the same degree of career unrealism, Black students were more likely to score lower on scales measuring occupational information. Murry and Mosidi (1993) proposed that some of the causes may include a lack of culturally validated predictive models and a lack of Black career counselors and mentors. If these obstacles are applicable at the college level, we might expect that racial differences exist in students' assessments of job attributes. Still others contend that when socioeconomic

status and educational levels are held constant, racial differences are not significant (Hansen, 1987). Because of the contradictory evidence and the strong logic supporting both viewpoints, we posed our third question:

Exploratory Question 3: What, if any, are the differences between racial majority and minority students' perceptions of the autonomy associated with various business career options?

One of the major issues concerning sales is the perception that this career choice lacks status and prestige. Occupational prestige is based on several factors, one of which is salary. The other factor indicating occupational prestige is the amount and level of education required (Parker, 1995). Results from previous research do indicate, however, that selecting a career that makes use of educational background is important to African Americans. Racial minorities rely on educational credentials to gain entrance into nontraditional careers. Black women who planned careers in male-dominated professions tended to plan more education than necessary (Murrell, Frieze, & Frost, 1991). This same rationale may be applicable to Black males majoring in business: Brenner and Tomkiewicz (1982) found that the students they studied would select an employer and career path based on the relevance of their educational background. Not only do African Americans apparently seek employment that uses their college education; they also use that education to overcome barriers. Studies by Cohen (1993) indicate that this occurs in public sector occupations more frequently than in private sector occupations (e.g., in accounting, finance, marketing, and management). This may imply that racial differences exist with respect to the importance or effectiveness of educational requirements.

Though some authors contend that Blacks use academic achievement to gain entry to more prestigious and economically rewarding careers, still others claim that African American students have disengaged themselves from the education process (Ogbu, 1998). According to this argument, African Americans have responded to discriminatory policies by mentally withdrawing and

reflect this withdrawal by characterizing the striving for academic success as culturally "subtractive" (Ogbu, 1998, p. 177). Ogbu's cultural deficit model states that Black college students avoid careers in which educational advancement and achievement are required. Further, Ogbu argues that Black students may simply withdraw from occupational striving and not seek out accurate information concerning certain career paths. To examine both contentions—that Blacks use education to achieve and that they withdraw culturally from higher achievement levels—we posed the following research question:

Exploratory Question 4: What, if any, are the differences between racial majority and minority students' perceptions of the education level required by various business career options?

## Method

Our sampling frame consisted of students enrolled in two traditionally Black collegiate institutions (TBIs) and three predominantly White institutions (PWIs). This appears to be an appropriate sample, because past research found no difference between PWIs and TBIs in students' career planning (Cheatham, Slaney, & Coleman, 1990; Kemp, 1990). All five participating universities were AACSB accredited, with enrollments of 18,000 or less, and located in the southeastern United States. At each university, classes were divided into entry and advanced levels. Randomly selected sections of each division made up the sampling frame. Consequently, we were able to analyze responses from business students matriculating at or beyond the sophomore level and for whom career decisions were imminent and relevant. Instructors of the selected sections administered the survey during class time to those students present that day.

This collection method resulted in 597 completed surveys, 525 of which were usable. The unusable responses can be attributed to one of three categories: (a) missing demographic information (31 cases); (b) missing answers to five or more nondemographic questions (29 cases); and (c) an obvious lack of respondents' consideration (i.e., 11 cases in which respondents rated all

careers the same for every attribute throughout the survey). The effective response rate of usable surveys, therefore, was 88%.

This sample included 250 responses from Caucasian students, 238 from African American students, and 37 from students from other racial or ethnic groups (such as Asian American or Native American). The African American students were younger than their nonminority counterparts, with an average age of 21 compared with 23 for the Caucasian students (see Table 2). Similarly, as seen in Table 2, more minority students were represented in the sophomore and junior levels of matriculation.

## Measures

The survey instrument included items that measured students' perceptions of various careers. The career choices listed in this study included accounting, financial analysis, marketing research, and human resource management. Students rated each career option on a 5-point,

Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*very unappealing*) to 5 (*very appealing*).

To provide a more precise measure of racial group differences regarding appeal, we included background factors believed to affect the appeal of business careers (in accounting, finance, marketing, and human resource management) as covariates. These covariates included age, academic standing, grade point average, parental background, and internship experience. The strong effect of parental influence on career choice and aspirations has recently been emphasized (Chung, Loeb, & Gonzo, 1996; Osipow, 1990; Solorzano 1992).

Controlling for these five covariates allowed us to provide a more precise measurement of racial group differences. For this information, respondents indicated the highest level of education achieved by each parent. If one or more parents attended college or had completed a college degree, the respondent was not categorized as first-generation college. According to this categorization, 23% of the African American and

**TABLE 2. Sample Demographics, in Percentages**

Characteristic	Caucasian (%) (N = 250)	African American (%) (N = 238)
Type of school		
Traditionally Black institution (TBI)	1	81
Predominantly Caucasian institution (PWI)	99	19
Academic level <sup>a</sup>		
Sophomore	2	5
Junior	41	48
Senior	56	47
Other	1	0
Age <sup>a</sup>		
18–20	14	34
21–23	59	52
24–26	13	11
27–29	4	1
30–32	4	1
≤ 33	6	1
Grade point average <sup>a</sup>		
0–2.00	4	8
2.01–2.5	21	24
2.51–3.0	38	45
3.01–3.5	24	14
3.51–4.00	13	8
Parental education level <sup>a</sup>		
Neither attended college	16	23
College	84	77

<sup>a</sup>Served as covariate.

16% of the Caucasian respondents in our sample were deemed the first generation in their family to attend college.

Respondents also evaluated the career choices in terms of perceived autonomy, salary, and education level. Students were asked to evaluate the degree to which each career allowed the employee freedom in making job-related decisions. The perceived salary ranges were measured through students' estimates of the starting salary range for each of the listed careers (see Appendix A). The categories of salary ranges were based on information provided by the National Association of Colleges and Employers Salary Survey (1996). Perceived education requirement was operationalized as the highest level of education required for entrance into each of the listed occupations (Parker et al., 1995).

We compared the racial groups' assessments of the four career areas through multiple analyses of variance (MANOVA). MANOVA was appropriate because this method controls for the correlations between dependent variables. In addition, MANOVA provides a single test of four careers and as such reduces the type 1 error rate (Hair, Anderson, & Tatham, 1987). The dependent variables were the appeal scores for the four careers, and the independent variable was racial group membership. To obtain a more precise measure of racial group differences regarding the appeal of careers, we also conducted a multiple analysis of covariance (MANCOVA). The effects of each covariate (age, academic standing, grade point average, internship experience, and parents' education) on the appeal of each career was adjusted through general linear regression methods. To examine the potential effect of each covariate (and because it is highly likely that covariates will share a significant intercorrelation), we conducted a separate MANCOVA for each covariate. Additional analyses, including MANOVA, compared racial group perceptions of the salary, autonomy, and education levels associated with the careers.

## Results

Exploratory Question 1: What, if any, are the differences between racial

majority and minority students' perceptions of the appeal of various business career options?

The overall MANOVA statistics indicate that racial differences did exist (overall MANOVA significant at the  $p$  level of .0072) but only for one of the four business careers—human resource management. The appeal of human resource management was rated higher by African American students ( $AvgAA = 3.69 > AvgC = 3.39$ ). The univariate ANOVA  $F$  statistic was 8.67 with an associated  $p$  value of .0034. No differences were found in the appeal of accounting, finance, or marketing career paths (see Table 3). The overall MANOVA and the ANOVA clearly indicate that African American students in this sam-

ple found careers in human resource management more appealing than did their nonminority counterparts, and the MANOVA results held true when the effects of the covariates age, academic standing, and so forth, were controlled for. Each of the MANCOVA analyses showed that overall statistics were significant (at the .05 or less level), and these overall statistics were driven by the differences between each racial group's rating of human resource management careers.

Exploratory Question 2: What, if any, are the differences between racial majority and minority students' perceptions of the starting salary offered by business career options?

Both the overall MANOVA and the

**TABLE 3. Perceived Appeal of Business Careers**

<i>MANOVA: Appeal of career</i> (Wilks' Lambda = .9710, $F = 3.55$ , $p = .0072$ )						
	Caucasian		African American		ANOVA	
	Average	SD	Average	SD	F-stat	p value
Accounting	2.51	.089	2.37	.091	1.26	.2621
Financial analysis	2.96	.086	2.90	.084	.23	.6296
Market research	3.48	.074	3.38	.082	.85	.3578
Human resource management	3.39	.071	3.69	.075	8.67	.0034
<i>MANCOVA: Appeal of career</i>						
Covariate	MANCOVA results			Comparison of MANCOVA to MANOVA		
	Wilks	F stat	p value			
Age	.9726	3.31	.0108	Conclusions similar to MANOVA Human resource management 3.69 > 3.38 African American > Caucasian		
Academic standing	.9865	3.84	.0044	Conclusions similar to MANOVA Human resource management 3.70 > 3.38 African American > Caucasian		
Grade point average	.9735	3.10	.0155	Conclusions similar to MANOVA Human resource management 3.66 > 3.37 African American > Caucasian		
Internship experience	.9693	3.75	.0052	Conclusions similar to MANOVA Human resource management 3.70 > 3.38 African American > Caucasian		
Parental education	.9741	3.15	.0142	Conclusions similar to MANOVA Human resource management 3.68 > 3.40 African American > Caucasian		

univariate ANOVA results indicate differences between racial minority and majority students' assessments of starting salary levels. These differences applied to all four business career areas and went in the same direction: Racial minority students tended to rate the business careers as offering higher starting salaries. Because Black students in this sample estimated higher starting salaries for human resource management than did Caucasian students (see Table 4), these results may shed light on why African American students may find careers in management more appealing.

The MANOVA results were unchanged when the averages were adjusted for age, academic standing, GPA, internship experience, and parental education level.

Exploratory Question 3: What, if any, are the differences between racial majority and minority students' perceptions of the autonomy offered by business career options?

A different pattern emerges concerning perceived autonomy levels. The overall MANOVA statistics indicated racial differences on this question, and the univariate *F* statistics showed this difference in the overall comparison to be attributable to one career path, financial analysis. Racial majority students tended to believe that more autonomy was offered by this career path (average 2.86) than did African American students (see Table 5). The individual ANOVAs indicated the group differences to be significant at the .0016 level.

Unlike salary levels (which Black students rated as higher than did Caucasian students), autonomy levels of finance careers were rated lower by Black students than by their racial majority counterparts. Adjusting for the five covariate effects led to the same racial difference in the same direction.

Exploratory Question 4: What, if any, are the differences between racial majority and minority students' perceptions of the education level required by business career options?

Similarly to the results regarding perceived autonomy and appeal levels, the overall MANOVA regarding required educational level was significant and was driven by differences in just one of the four business careers—market

research in this case. Caucasian students tended to rate the required education level for market research positions lower than did racial minorities. The average education level estimated for market research was 2.89 for African American respondents and 2.67 for Caucasian students. Both groups shared similar perceptions of the required edu-

cation levels for accounting, finance, and management. These MANOVA results were the same when the five covariates were considered (separately, as noted in Table 6).

Three interesting patterns emerge from these three sets of MANOVAs. First, when differences existed, the patterns were unaltered by any covariate.

**TABLE 4. Perceived Starting Salary of Business Careers**

<i>MANOVA: Starting salary</i> (Wilks' Lambda = .9260, <i>F</i> = 9.45, <i>p</i> = .0001)						
	Caucasian		African American		ANOVA	
	Average	<i>SD</i>	Average	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i> stat	<i>p</i> value
Accounting	3.12	.069	3.59	.075	20.35	.0001
Financial analysis	3.49	.069	3.82	.079	9.97	.0017
Market research	2.94	.077	3.50	.073	28.43	.0001
Human resource management	2.29	.061	2.57	.059	11.05	.0010

  

<i>MANCOVA: Appeal of career</i>						
Covariate	MANCOVA results			Comparison of MANCOVA to MANOVA <sup>a</sup>		
	Wilks'	<i>F</i> stat	<i>p</i> value		Cauc.	Af. Am.
Age	.9414	7.27	.001	Accounting	3.15	3.55
				Financial analysis	3.49	3.83
				Market research	2.96	3.49
				Human resource management	2.29	2.58
Academic standing	.9302	8.83	.0001	Accounting	3.13	3.57
				Financial analysis	3.48	3.81
				Market research	2.94	3.49
				Human resource management	2.30	2.57
Grade point average	.9311	8.38	.0001	Accounting	3.12	3.55
				Financial analysis	3.47	3.79
				Market research	2.92	3.49
				Human resource management	2.26	2.57
Parental education	.9288	9.87	.0001	Accounting	3.11	3.60
				Financial analysis	3.49	3.82
				Market research	2.93	3.51
				Human resource management	2.29	2.58
Internship	.9277	9.16	.0001	Accounting	3.12	3.59
				Financial analysis	3.48	3.83
				Market research	2.93	3.50
				Human resource management	2.29	2.56

Note. Cauc. = Caucasian. Af. Am. = African American.  
<sup>a</sup>Means adjusted for covariate.

**TABLE 5. Perceived Autonomy of Business Careers**

*MANOVA: Autonomy*  
(Wilks' Lambda = .9710, F = 3.55, p = .0072)

	Caucasian		African American		ANOVA	
	Average	SD	Average	SD	F stat	p value
Accounting	2.25	.048	2.38	.068	1.66	.1987
Financial analysis	2.86	.068	2.59	.063	10.12	.0016
Market research	3.37	.059	3.31	.066	.33	.5652
Human resource management	3.04	.062	3.11	.054	.44	.5054

*MANCOVA: Autonomy*

Covariate	MANCOVA results			Comparison of MANCOVA to MANOVA <sup>a</sup>
	Wilks'	F stat	p value	
Age	.9653	4.19	.0025	Conclusions same as MANOVA Financial analysis 2.86 > 2.59 Caucasian > African American
Academic standing	.9606	4.80	.0008	Conclusions same as MANOVA Financial analysis 2.86 > 2.59 Caucasian > African American
Grade point average	.9636	4.28	.0021	Conclusions same as MANOVA Financial analysis 2.87 > 2.59 Caucasian > African American
Parental education	.9624	4.58	.0012	Conclusions same as MANOVA Financial analysis 2.86 > 2.59 Caucasian > African American
Internship	.9579	5.18	.0004	Conclusions same as MANOVA Financial analysis 2.87 > 2.58 Caucasian > African American

<sup>a</sup>Means adjusted for covariate.

When the effects of age, academic standing, grade point average, internship, and parental education were controlled empirically, the results were similar. The second interesting pattern concerns perceived appeal, autonomy, and education levels. In all of the cases, only one of the four careers was perceived differently by a racial group. In all of these analyses, only one career was so strongly different that it affected the overall MANOVA results. Not only were the univariate *F*s significant (as one may expect), but this one comparison was strong enough that it caused the overall MANOVA (i.e., a comparison of four simultaneous dependent variables) to be significant. Finally, the third pattern indicates that racial minorities tended to rate the appeal and starting salary

of some careers higher than did their racial majority counterparts—but the reverse was true for perceived autonomy level. We discuss the implication of these patterns.

### Conclusions and Discussion

Our findings suggest that African American and Caucasian students do not differ regarding how appealing or unappealing they find the majority of business careers. Thus, the cultural deficit model supporting racial differences in career aspirations (Ogbu, 1988) is not applicable. In fact, the assumption that African Americans find business careers less appealing can undermine efforts to provide equal access to career opportunities. Our

study's finding is of major importance to recruiters who otherwise may (a) bypass qualified minority candidates who they expect will respond negatively or (b) provide them with unnecessary or condescending information. It is far too easy to attribute differences in recruitment practices to a lack of interest on the part of the candidate. It is more complex and even uncomfortable to question the assumptions we make about college recruits.

Black students in this sample were aware of the benefits offered by a business career in the areas examined. Black students rated all four business areas as offering a higher starting salary and one of them as requiring a higher level of education, compared with their nonminority counterparts. These higher ratings persisted even when the effects of grade point average and work experience were controlled. Students attending traditionally Black institutions may be gaining exposure to a wider array of both formal and informal sources of information concerning professional selling and other business careers (through alumni networks, on-campus recruiting, and mentoring programs). As a result, their perceptions of positive job attributes in these areas may have been heightened. Our results run counter to the perception of the Black college student as harboring negative images of a business career.

Though Black students in this sample rated salary and educational requirement levels higher than their Caucasian counterparts did, fewer differences were found in perceived autonomy levels. In the few instances in which Black students' perceptions differed in this area, they tended to rate autonomy levels as lower. This suggests that the students may not be fully aware of the challenges and everyday realities in the accounting, finance, and marketing career paths. If racial minority students are relying on the alumni and student network, they may be well aware of the education needed to enter a business career and of the starting salaries but may be less informed about what occurs after the job offer is accepted.

Providing both Black and Caucasian students with a more realistic picture of the challenges and benefits regarding



**TABLE 6. Perceived Education Requirement Level of Business Careers**

MANOVA: Education level  
(Wilks' Lambda = .9697, F = 3.62, p = .0065)

	Caucasian		African American		ANOVA	
	Average	SD	Average	SD	F stat	p value
Accounting	2.88	.039	2.85	.038	.25	.6200
Financial analysis	3.07	.034	3.00	.039	1.58	.2087
Market research	2.67	.046	2.89	.045	11.07	.0009
Human resource management	2.37	.048	2.44	.052	.84	.3600

MANCOVA: Education level

Covariate	MANCOVA results			Comparison of MANCOVA to MANOVA <sup>a</sup>
	Wilks'	F stat	p value	
Age	.9687	3.69	.0057	Conclusions same as MANOVA Market research 2.89 > 2.69 African American > Caucasian
Academic standing	.9708	3.45	.0086	Conclusions same as MANOVA Market research 2.44 > 2.37 African American > Caucasian
Grade point average	.9650	4.028	.0032	Conclusions same as MANOVA Market research 2.45 > 2.37 African American > Caucasian
Internship	.9741	3.0617	.0165	Conclusions same as MANOVA Market research 2.88 > 2.68 African American > Caucasian
Parental education	.9681	3.8012	.0047	Conclusions same as MANOVA Market research 2.44 > 2.38 African American > Caucasian

<sup>a</sup>Means adjusted for covariate.

autonomy in business careers in general should be a continuing goal.

**Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Though this study compared the perceptions of racial minority and majority students and provided information to dispel erroneous assumptions, it does, like any inquiry, raise yet other questions. If Black students rate business jobs' positive attributes higher, then why do they not also rate their appeal higher? One possibility is that these job attributes do not carry the same weight for Black students as for Caucasians. Evaluating the different utility functions across racial groups, though beyond the scope of this study, may offer some explanations. The level of starting

salary or required education may simply not play as important roles in Black students' career choices. Some studies suggest that racial minority students' career choices are influenced by a desire to "give back to the community" (Steward, Gimenez, & Jackson, 1995). We used a different, and perhaps more ethnocentric, model to originate the attributes in this study. Expanding the attributes to include those that may be more relevant to racial minorities and testing for the effects of cultural or racial differences in utility functions would be a promising area of inquiry.

The sampling frame was designed to identify students for whom the career choice was imminent. The perceptions of junior and senior level business students at this point in their careers provided insight into how business students

would soon react to decision options. This gain in realism, of course, comes at a cost. The cost, for example, may include the students' lack of understanding of how the industrial product sales environment differs from that of consumer products or of the demands surrounding international sales. If this problem existed, it is unlikely that it was more pronounced with one racial group than another. The inclusion of covariates (such as level of marketing course and attending special seminars) in such studies should reflect any differences in a student's ability to accurately describe one type of sales.

The majority of racial minority students in this sample attended one of two traditionally Black institutions, and future studies should compare the perceptions of minority students attending TBIs with those of minority students at more heterogeneous educational institutions. Though the career aspirations of African American students at TBIs and at more heterogeneous institutions are similar (Dillard & Campbell, 1982), approximately 27% of all African American students in higher learning attend traditionally Black institutions. Thus, one limitation of this study may rest with possible differences between these two groups. Though Mitchell and Fandt (1995) found few career choice differences, they did find that students attending TBIs scored higher on self-esteem scales than did African American students at other institutions. To the degree that self-esteem increases self-efficacy and confidence, one might expect that African American students at traditionally Black schools would feel that their opportunities are not curtailed by their minority status, and thus would be more aware of career options and hold preferences similar to those of other racial groups.

**Summary**

Racial differences may exist, but not in the expected areas. Black students do not find business careers in accounting, finance, or market research any more or less appealing than their Caucasian counterparts do. However, our results indicate that human resource management occupies a better image among



African American students than previously assumed. Unfortunately, researchers have little in the way of developed conceptual models to use in finding the reason for such a difference. Given the importance of demographic diversity in the workforce, the lack of theoretical basis for examining the effect of race on vocational choices (Cook 1991; Osipow, 1990) is surprising. Results of this study suggest that theories concerning career stages may be useful because racial differences tended to be less pronounced when the age of the respondent was considered.

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**APPENDIX A. Measures of Students' Perceptions of Business Careers**

*Education*

Indicate the highest level of education required for entrance into the listed occupations with a check mark. The required education level is the minimal level needed to successfully enter each occupation.

Listed careers include:	Completed high school	Associate degree (2 years undergraduate)	Undegraduate degree (BA or BS)	Graduate degree (e.g., master's)
Accounting				
Financial analysis				
Market research				
Human resource management				

*Autonomy*

What is your personal opinion concerning the degree to which each occupation allows the employee freedom in making job-related decisions (such as scheduling their time, selecting a method of performing tasks, setting priorities, etc.)? Please circle the value that best gives your own personal opinion of the autonomy or personal freedom each occupation would offer on a scale ranging through 1 (*very little freedom*), 2 (*below average freedom*), 3 (*average freedom*), 4 (*above average freedom*), and 5 (*very high levels of freedom*).

*Salary*

What would you estimate as the average starting salary ranges for *entry-level* positions for each of the following occupations? Please check the column you feel best represents the range for the starting salary.

Career:	< \$20,000	\$20,000–\$25,000	\$25,000–\$30,000	\$30,000–\$35,000	\$35,000–\$40,000	\$40,000–\$45,000	> \$45,000
Age							
Academic standing							
Grade point average							
Internship							
Parent's education							

*Covariate*

*Scaling of covariate*

Age	See Table 2 for ranges
Academic standing	Freshman to senior (undergraduate)
Grade point average	0–4.0
Internship	0 = No internship position held. 1 = Internship position held.
Parent's education	1 = Neither parent's education exceeds completion of high school. 2 = One or more parents have attended college.