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## Peer Counseling/Mentoring and its Impact on the Academic Success and Retention of African American Students at a Predominantly White Institution

Eva Maria White

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Peer counseling/mentoring and its impact on the academic success and retention of  
African American students at a predominantly white institution

By

Eva Maria White

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of  
Mississippi State University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in Instructional Systems and Workplace Development  
in the Department of Instructional Systems and Workforce Development

Mississippi State, Mississippi

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2018

Peer counseling/mentoring and its impact on the academic success and retention of  
African American students at a predominantly white institution

By

Eva Maria White

Approved:

---

Linda F. Cornelious  
(Major Professor)

---

James H. Adams  
(Committee Member)

---

Debra Prince  
(Committee Member)

---

Pamela Scott-Bracey  
(Committee Member)

---

Committee Member's Name  
(Committee Member)

---

Chien Yu  
(Graduate Coordinator)

---

Richard L. Blackburn  
Dean  
College of Education

Name: Eva Maria White

Date of Degree: May 3, 2018

Institution: Mississippi State University

Major Field: Instructional Systems and Workplace Development

Major Professor: Linda F. Cornelious

Title of Study: Peer counseling/mentoring and its impact on the academic success and retention of African American students at a predominantly white institution

Pages in Study: 152

Candidate for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The purpose of this study was to examine the peer counseling/mentoring experiences of African American students involved in a formal undergraduate Peer Counseling/Mentoring program at Mississippi State University. This study specifically examined the Peer Counseling/Mentoring experiences of undergraduate African American students at a predominantly White institution to determine if a relationship existed between peer counseling/mentoring, retention and academic performance.

The research design for this study was descriptive, correlational and casual comparative. A pilot study was conducted to detect any problems that should be remedied before conducting the actual study. Based on information gathered in the pilot study, no revisions were required for the survey instrument.

Participants in the research study completed a three-part survey instrument. Part I of the survey instrument collected demographic and enrollment data with one question pertaining to participants' utilization of their peer counselor/mentor. Part II, the Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale, collected data that examined the participants' peer

counseling/mentoring experiences, the factors that contributed to their persistence, the relationship between grade point average and academic performance, and the difference in grade point average of those who did or did not utilize their peer counselor/mentor. Part III of the survey instrument, an open-ended questionnaire, gathered information regarding the participants' experiences. The survey instrument was completed and returned by 177 African American seniors from Mississippi State University.

According to the findings in this study, Peer Counseling/Mentoring programs support the persistence and retention of African American students at predominantly White institutions. A statistically significant difference was found to exist between participants who utilized their Peer Counselor/Mentor and those who did not. The results indicated that those who utilized their Peer Counselor/Mentor had a higher self-reported grade point average than those who did not utilize their Peer Counselor/Mentor. The Peer Counselor/Mentor program provided participants with a peer who understood their challenges, contributed to their persistence and strengthened their confidence and connection to the university cultural/climate. The research revealed that if administrators desire their African American students to graduate at rates on par with their Caucasian counterparts strong consideration should be given to the implementation of Peer Counselor/Mentor programs.

## DEDICATION

This Dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Earl Sr. and Eva Mae Fuller White; my maternal grandparents, Van Buren and Rosie Bell Hill Fuller; and, my paternal grandparents, Earl and Laura Franklin Beach. Momma and Daddy, oh the lessons you both taught me are vast! Moma, the love you showed for your girls was phenomenal. You established our “true” foundation by instilling in us the importance of having a relationship with God. You kept us, not just in church, but kept us in the teaching and working ministries of the church. Daddy, you taught us the importance of our name. I was not just Eva, not just Maria, but I was always Eva Maria. You taught us that when we introduced ourselves, we were to give our whole name...Eva Maria White. As your name carried great weight and people would see your confidence. For you taught us that “White is always right”! Oh, the lessons learned. To this day, I still carry those lessons for they have become a part of my every existence. To you both, thank you for giving us a love for music. You both were our very first choir directors, for we had to sing. Thank you!!! I love and miss you both so much!

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“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him” (Psalm 34:8). I must acknowledge the glory of God – “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.” (Psalm 150: 6). These scriptures express my feelings for how God has allowed me to complete this journey. It is only because of His grace and mercy that I am in this place at this time! He is Good!!!! I must praise Him and give Him thanks!!!

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vi
LIST OF TABLES .....	xii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	4
Purpose .....	6
Research Questions .....	7
Limitations.....	8
Delimitations .....	8
Justification of the Study .....	9
Definitions of Terms.....	11
II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE .....	14
A Historical Look at Legislation Affecting African American Students in Education .....	14
Challenges Affecting African American Students at Predominantly White Institutions .....	19
Retention of African American Students at Predominantly White Institutions.....	22
Peer Counseling/Mentoring in Higher Education .....	25
A Historical Look at Peer Counseling/Mentoring.....	25
The Benefits of a Peer Counseling/Mentoring Program .....	27
Established Peer Counseling/Mentoring Programs in Higher Education.....	29
The Mississippi State University Peer Counseling/Mentoring Program .....	33
Summary of the Review of Related Literature.....	36
III. METHODOLOGY .....	39
Research Design .....	39
Variables of the Study .....	42

Population.....	42
Instrumentation.....	43
Validity and Reliability of the “Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale .....	44
Pilot Study .....	46
Data Collection.....	48
Data Analysis.....	49
Research Question One .....	51
Research Question Two.....	52
Research Question Three.....	52
Research Question Four .....	52
Research Question Five .....	53
 IV. RESULTS .....	 54
Pilot Study .....	56
Demographic Data.....	56
Age of the Respondents.....	57
Admission Status of the Respondents .....	58
Enrollment Status of the Respondents.....	59
Current Residence of the Respondents.....	59
Marital Status of the Respondents.....	60
Academic Majors, Semester Credit Hours and Cumulative Grade Point Average of the Respondents .....	60
Educational Level of Parents for the Respondents.....	62
Paid College Expenses, Employment and Hourly Work Hours for the Respondents.....	63
Analysis of Research Questions .....	65
Research Question One .....	65
Research Question Two.....	68
Research Question Three.....	79
Research Question Four .....	85
Research Question Five .....	86
Summary of Results .....	95
 V. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	 97
Summary.....	97
Discussion.....	99
Conclusion.....	104
Recommendations .....	106
 REFERENCES .....	 108
 APPENDIX	

A.	REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO USE SURVEY INSTRUMENT .....	135
B.	APPROVAL FROM RESEARCHERS TO USE SURVEY INSTRUMENTS.....	138
C.	LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN PILOT STUDY .....	140
D.	SURVEY ASSESSMENT FORM FOR PILOT STUDY .....	142
E.	PEER COUNSELING/MENTORING SURVEY .....	143
F.	INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL .....	151

## LIST OF TABLES

1 Survey Response Rates .....	57
2 Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Sex.....	57
3 Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Age .....	58
4 Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Admission Status .....	59
5 Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Enrollment Status.....	59
6 Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Current Residence.....	60
7 Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Marital Status .....	60
8 Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Academic Major.....	61
9 Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Semester Credit Hours .....	62
10 Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Cumulative Grade Point Average.....	62
11 Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Parent Educational Level .....	63
12 Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by College Expenses .....	64
13 Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Student Hourly Work Week.....	64
14 Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Job on Academic Performance .....	65
15 Percentage of Factors Contributing to the Persistence of African American Students.....	67
16 Percentage of Coaching Experiences.....	69
17 Percentage of Role Model Experiences .....	70
18 Percentage of Counseling Experiences .....	72
19 Percentage of Acceptance and Confirmation Experiences .....	73

20 Percentage of Protection Experiences.....	74
21 Percentage of Exposure and Visibility Experiences .....	74
22 Percentage of Friendship Experiences .....	75
23 Percentage of Satisfaction and Assimilation Experiences .....	77
24 Percentage of Race Attribute Experiences.....	79
25 Descriptive Statistics of Variables .....	81
26 Interpretation of Correlation Strength.....	82
27 Pearson Correlation.....	84
28 Grade Point Average by Participation Descriptive Statistics .....	85
29 Grade Point Average by Participation ANOVA .....	86
30 Descriptive Statistics for Grade Point Average by Gender .....	87
31 ANOVA Results for Grade Point Averages by Gender.....	87
32 Descriptive Statistics for Grade Point Average by Age.....	88
33 ANOVA Results for Grade Point Averages by Age.....	88
34 Descriptive Statistics for Grade Point Average by Marital Status.....	89
35 ANOVA Results for Grade Point Averages by Marital Status.....	89
36 Descriptive Statistics for Grade Point Average by School Enrollment Status .....	90
37 ANOVA Results for Grade Point Averages by School Enrollment Status .....	90



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Ensuring the successful matriculation of African American students has required predominantly White institutions (PWIs) of higher learning to develop and implement strategies that directly contribute to the academic success and retention of this student population. Peer counseling/mentoring has consistently been cited in the literature as an effective strategy for the academic success and retention of African American students in higher education (Maher, Lindsey, Peel & Twomey, 2006; McGuire & Reger, 2003; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Girves, Zepeda and Gwathmey (2005) asserted that peer counseling/mentoring can be viewed as a successful strategy for academic integration, persistence, and retention. Moreover, peer counseling/mentoring has been found to directly and positively influence a student's undergraduate academic and social involvement, which in turn leads to their satisfaction with the university, their persistence toward degree completion, their retention, and their academic success/graduation (Crisp, 2010; Crisp, 2011; Hu & Ma, 2010; Scott & Homant, 2007).

Several researchers have concluded that administrators at institutions of higher learning have begun to identify and create support mechanisms/programs for African American students in order to improve their retention rates, academic success and educational experiences (Shotton, Oosahwe & Cintron, 2007; Terrion & Leonard, 2007). For example, research conducted by Good, Halpin and Halpin (2000) found that some

universities have instituted peer counseling/mentoring programs to assist entering freshman with their transition into the university setting and have found this strategy to be a viable approach to providing role models and leadership for their minority students. Peer counseling/mentoring has gained momentum over the past decade and appears to have become an effective tool in the successful transition and matriculation of minority students (Budge, 2006; Creighton, 2007).

As early as 1989, Upcraft, Gardner and Associates considered peer counseling/mentoring to be a “critical factor in the success of black freshmen” (p. 120). In addition, Good, Halpin and Halpin (2000) concluded that peer counseling/mentoring can be used as a way of increasing student retention. Many researchers have suggested that the major focus behind peer counseling/mentoring is to help students successfully adjust to the social and academic environment of an institution of higher learning. This concept involves training already acclimated students to assist new students in making the transition from home, high school or community college to a predominantly White university and to their new-found environment (Coles & Blacknall, 2011; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Hikes, 2005; Rodger & Tremblay, 2003).

Ward, Thomas, and Disch (2009) concluded that a peer mentoring program not only assists with a student’s transition into the university. The authors suggested that the pairing of a student with a successful and caring upper-class mentor is a proactive step towards the incorporation of the student into the institution and the development of a positive personal bond with his/her peer mentor, which in turn can lead to increased student retention and graduation rates. Villalpando (2003) determined that for students of color, peer groups are essential as “peer groups empower and nourish academic success

and foster the development of a critical cultural consciousness by understanding the member's condition as racialized students within the academy" (p. 633).

According to several researchers, the retention rates for African American students in institutions of higher learning in the United States is of grave concern as these students are leaving institutions at higher rates than those of their Caucasian counterparts (Baber, 2012; Creighton, 2007; Dervarics, 2011; Dodson, Montgomery & Brown, 2009; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Strayhorn, 2012). One commonality among early research conducted by a number of scholars asserted that African Americans were still under-represented in institutions of higher learning and graduated at lower rates than Caucasian and Asian students over a five-year period (Simmons, 2010; Thompson, Gorin, Obeidat, & Chen, 2006).

A 2012 report from the National Center for Education Statistics indicated the overall graduation rate for Caucasian students was 60.2 % and for African American students it was 37.9 % lower coming in at 22.3 %. Moreover, the Condition of Education's 2012 Report revealed that during 1999-2000, African American students earned 9 % of all bachelor's degrees conferred and in 2009-2010 this number increased to 10 %. These grim statistics leads one to question why African American students are not graduating from institutions of higher learning at the same rate as their Caucasian counterparts. It is also a strong indication that institutional administrations must be cognizant of what is needed to meet the academic and social needs of their African American student body.

The disparities in degree attainment among African American and Caucasian students can be linked to the many challenges African American students face upon

entering a predominantly White campus. Even though these students enter PWIs with good high school grades and SAT scores, their probability of becoming academically, socially and culturally isolated is great and can lead to depressed academic achievement and persistence and can discourage even the most ambitious students (Farrell, 2007; Maton, Hrabowski & Schmitt, 2000). These disparities can also be a result of stressors experienced by these students, which can include social, family and financial issues, unfamiliarity with the college process, institutional racism, poor health and energy, and an inability to navigate the campus landscape (Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley, 2008).

With African American student enrollment on the rise, institutions of higher learning, particularly predominantly White institutions, must recognize the challenges these students face in acclimating themselves in the university environment. Therefore, retaining this student population is imperative. As such, PWIs must find ways to address their academic and social needs (Joplin, Orman, & Evans, 2004; Kingsley, Edmonson, & Slate, 2010).

### **Statement of the Problem**

As African American students continue to integrate predominantly White college and university campuses, the obstacles and barriers they face within this educational arena are real and have proven to be difficult, as these students enter an environment that often does not resemble where they have come from (Heiselt & White, 2008). African American students' graduation rates continue to lag behind their Caucasian classmates, with more than 40 % failing to complete college and graduate (Harvey, Harvey & King, 2004; Mattaqnah, Ayers, Brand, Brooks, Quimby & McNary, 2010). The dismal graduation rates for African American students at PWIs have led to a strong outcry from

legislators and business owners who have a vested interest in higher education.

Moreover, the impact on the economy, as well as the socioeconomic status of African Americans, is of great concern to many (Dervarics, 2009; Girves, Zepeda & Gwathmey, 2005; Thompson, Gorin, Obeidat, & Chen, 2006).

The demand for accountability and determining or confirming an accurate retention path for African American students has become a serious mandate for predominantly White institutions (Rogers & Summers, 2008). Thus, many institutions of higher learning have instituted special services and programs to assist in the successful matriculation and retention of African American students (Barlow & Villarejo, 2004; D'Abate, 2009; Heiselt & White, 2008; Jaswal & Jaswal, 2008; Joplin, Orman & Evans, 2004; Maton, Hrabowski & Schmitt, 2000; Pope, 2002).

Researchers have sought to better understand and identify the benefits of peer counseling/mentoring on the retention and academic success of African American undergraduate students on a predominantly White campus (Bonin, 2013; Hu & Ma, 2010; Mangold, Bean, Adams, Schwab & Lynch, 2002; Rodger & Tremblay, 2003; Ward, Thomas & Disch, 2012). Even though peer counseling/mentoring has received extensive support from researchers, predominantly White institutions still face challenges due to the difficulty of accurately measuring the impact of peer counseling/mentoring on student success and retention (Coles & Blacknall, 2011; Crisp & Cruz, 2010). Yet, other researchers have found that involvement of African American students in a peer counseling/mentoring program is a significant contributor to their retention rates (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Morrow & Ackerman, 2012).

In recognizing the challenges in retention of first year African American students, the Office of Minority Affairs at Mississippi State University created and implemented a Peer Counseling/Mentoring program to assist these students with their transition to the predominantly White campus. The objective of the program was to pair an incoming freshman with an academically sound and experienced upperclassman. The administrators' belief was that the pairing of the peer counselor/mentor with the peer counselee/mentee would result in an easier transition for the counselee/mentee, as well as provide him/her with a role model with whom they could identify and feel comfortable (S. Jenkins, personal communication, December 10, 2007).

In a study on minority student retention, Good, Halpin and Haplin (2000) indicated that many higher education institutions are using peer counseling/mentoring with students of color to facilitate the transition process from home to a university setting. Moreover, Villalpando's (2003) study on the retention of minority college students determined that as these students enter the predominantly White university setting, they need someone to help them understand their racialized condition; hence, peers serve to empower and nourish them resulting in the development of their cultural consciousness, retention, and graduation. Thus, a study examining peer counseling/mentoring is timely and should be of importance to institutions of higher learning as they face the challenge of minority student retention.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine peer counseling/mentoring experiences of African American students involved in a formal undergraduate Peer Counseling/Mentoring program at Mississippi State University. This study specifically

examined the peer counseling/mentoring experiences of undergraduate African American students at this predominantly White institution to determine if a relationship existed between peer counseling/mentoring, retention and academic performance. This study also examined factors that contributed to the persistence of this student population, as well as determined whether participation in the peer counseling/mentoring program enhanced or contributed to the success of African American undergraduate students at this predominantly White institution. The experiences and outcomes of the peer counseling/mentoring relationships, and how these experiences may have resulted in increased academic success and student persistence was examined.

### **Research Questions**

This study focused on Mississippi State University undergraduate African American students' experiences involving the Peer Counseling/Mentoring program and how their experiences contributed to their academic success and retention rates. The research questions guiding the study were:

1. What factors contribute to the persistence of African American undergraduate students who are enrolled at a predominantly White institution?
2. What are the peer counseling/mentoring experiences of African American undergraduate students at a predominantly White institution?
3. What is the relationship between peer counseling/mentoring and academic performance as measured by self-reported grade point average?
4. Is there a statistically significant difference in self-reported grade point average between undergraduates who utilize peer counseling/mentoring programs and those who do not?

5. Are there statistically significant differences in grade point average by select demographic variables, e.g. gender, age, marital status, enrollment status, for African American students who participate in the program?

### **Limitations**

The study required respondents to self-report their grade point averages. Consequently, it was possible that the respondents were not honest or accurate in the reporting of their grade point averages. Moreover, based on the respondents positive or negative experience with the peer counseling/mentoring program and/or knowledge of those involved in the administration of the program, respondents may not have been objective or truthful in their responses. It should also be noted that the age/level of maturity of the respondent may have caused significant differences in the responses to the survey questions based on the individual's perception.

### **Delimitations**

This study was conducted at a land-grant institution located in the southeast, namely Mississippi State University and examined only the Peer Counseling/Mentoring Program at this university. The study was limited to a population of African American students classified as seniors identified at Mississippi State University during the spring semester of 2016 who are believed to have matriculated successfully with the assistance of the Peer Counseling/Mentoring program and who made up 18.83 % of the undergraduate student population, which totaled 16,128. Because this study focused on the experiences of undergraduate African American students in the Peer



Counseling/Mentoring program, the results from this study are limited to only the population described and cannot be generalized to all undergraduate students.

Moreover, the findings in this study were not generalizable to African American students at other land-grant institutions. Finally, the survey instrument utilized for this study was of a quantitative nature. This type of survey instrument could affect the respondent's ability to adequately express their opinions and feelings since the Likert scale response type survey did not allow written responses to open-ended questions.

### **Justification of the Study**

Crutcher (2007) indicated that traditional underrepresented racial and ethnic groups have been on the rise in colleges and universities over the last decade. Even with the increase in enrollment, over 50 years later, research continues to reveal that African American students on predominantly White campuses are easily marginalized and continue to experience alienation, isolation, unequal treatment, racial hostility, and many more challenges (Baber, 2012; Love, 2008; Maton, Hrabowski, & Schmitt, 2000). The academic attainment gap is further hindered by the structure and formulation of the predominantly White college campus, which was designed to serve predominantly White students (Jones & William, 2006). Subsequently, institutions must counter these negatives with strategies designed to carve socio-academic space for this minority student population in order that they may thrive in a majority student population (Dodson, Montgomery & Brown, 2009).

Furr and Elling (2002) suggested that with the variance in patterns and factors among under-represented student populations, factors associated with retention must be examined and effective intervention strategies developed. Tinto (2002) noted that if

students are to be retained, successfully matriculate and graduate, institutions must treat them as valued members providing academic, social, and personal support via a climate that expects and requires success. Thus, programs related to retention have been found to be significant contributors to student success (Furr & Elling, 2002).

One program that has been identified as a positive factor in the retention of African American students attending a PWI is the Peer Counseling/Mentoring Program. According to research conducted by Wallace, Abel and Ropers-Huilman (2000), “many higher education scholars believe that mentoring can reduce the negative impact of barriers to successful college participation by facilitating relationships for students with someone who is experienced in navigating unfamiliar territory” (p. 88). Budge (2006) also asserted that “one of the major reasons why mentoring has been implemented in the university setting is to increase retention rates” (p. 75). Other researchers have concluded that a strong peer network that connects experienced academically successful students with incoming under-represented minority students from diverse economic backgrounds not only can improve grade point averages and retention rates, but it can also help to reduce feelings of isolation (Baker & Robnett, 2012; Barlow & Villarejo, 2004).

In colleges and universities, peer counseling/mentoring programs have been around for at least a decade or longer. Some of the services that peer counseling/mentoring programs provide are counseling students, being resident advisors in residence life, coordinating programs to help at risk students stay in college, and advising their peers through their own academic colleges and majors. Research conducted by Heisserer and Parette (2002) revealed that the “research literature on student retention and attrition suggests that contact with a significant person within an

institution of higher education is a crucial factor in a student's decision to remain in college" (p. 69). Davis (2005) described it succinctly when she stated, "as a predominantly White residential institution, the need exists to continue to provide intentional support to these students within the living environment" (para. 4). Thus, when considering the impact of social and academic integration on retention, it may be useful for administrators and faculty of predominantly White institutions to recognize and understand the impact of peer counseling/mentoring on academic performance and those factors that contribute to the persistence of their African American students.

This study was designed to examine the peer counseling/mentoring experiences and perceptions of African American students involved in a formal undergraduate Peer Counseling/Mentoring Program at Mississippi State University. This study will enable Mississippi State University and other institutions of higher learning to better understand the peer counseling/mentoring process and its possible relationship between peer counseling/mentoring, academic success and retention. Results from this study will also help build the knowledge base for counseling/mentoring African American students, as well as assist university administrators and faculty in their quest to develop and implement effective retention strategies designed to contribute to the academic success and successful matriculation of African American students.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following definitions were used in this study:

*Academic Performance* – A numerical indicator of a student's academic success and is measured by the student's cumulative grade point average.

*Counselee/Mentee* – One who is the recipient of counseling/mentoring from an

upper class student for development towards one's educational or career attainment and to adapt socially (Holmes Cultural Diversity Center Peer Counselor/Peer Ambassador Brochure, 2013).

*Formal Mentoring* – Interaction between a more experienced individual who has been intentionally paired with a less experienced individual via an initiated, structured mentoring program facilitated by an organization or program (Coles & Blacknall, 2011; Inzer & Crawford, 2005).

*Mentor* – Someone who “provides guidance, support and direction to protégés who may lack the foresight, exposure, or intuition needed to gain certain goals” (Spence, 2005, p. 55).

*Peer Counseling* – “The use of listening and problem-solving skills together with knowledge about growth and development by students in order to help, advise, and counsel other students. The peer counselor assists other students by clarifying thoughts and feelings, by exploring options, or providing needed information” (D’Andrea, 1987, p. 39).

*Peer Counselor* – An upper classman who serves as a mentor and university representative to provide guidance to incoming freshman students to assist in their transition to and successful matriculation at the university and in the development of their academic and social skills (Holmes Cultural Diversity Center Peer Counselor/Peer Ambassador Brochure, 2013).

*Peer Mentoring* – An informal or formal helping relationship between two individuals similar in age with one individual possessing more experience and knowledge than the other. The aim of the relationship is for the more experienced individual (junior

or senior) to provide support, guidance, advice and encouragement to the less experienced individual (freshmen) to facilitate their transition and acclimation into a college/university setting (Bonin, 2013; Coles & Blacknall, 2011; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Cuseo, 2010; Terrion & Leonard, 2007).

*Predominantly White Institution (PWI)* – A four-year institution of higher education where the majority student population is Caucasian.

*Retention* – A student’s continued enrollment or degree completion within the same institution of higher learning (The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2014).

*Senior* – A student who has completed 90 or more semester hours (Mississippi State University Student Handbook, 2015).

*Under-represented* – Any ethnic group – African American, Hispanic, Native American – whose representation is disproportionately less than their proportion in the general population.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This study examined the peer counseling/mentoring experiences of African American students involved in a formal undergraduate Peer Counseling/Mentoring Program for African American students to determine if a relationship existed between peer counseling/mentoring, retention and academic performance for this student population at Mississippi State University. This chapter reviewed related literature and research regarding legislation affecting the education of African Americans, African Americans in higher education and their experiences at PWIs. The literature reviewed examined academic performance, retention, and retention strategies for this student population. This chapter also reviewed the history of peer counseling/mentoring, its effect on retention of African American students, the challenges faced by African American students in higher education, and the benefits of peer counseling/mentoring. Further, this chapter will examine established Peer Counseling/Mentoring programs geared toward retention of students.

#### **A Historical Look at Legislation Affecting African American Students in Education**

United States history describes the story of the African American struggle and engagement in battle in the streets and in the courts to gain access to education and educational institutions (Hikes, 2005). As slaves, African Americans were “prohibited from learning to read and write” (The Institute of Higher Education Policy (IHEP) Mini

Brief, 2010, para. 1). However, neither the threat of beatings, imprisonment nor death diminished the desire of the slaves to be educated as they recognized the true value of an education and the power that came with being educated. As time progressed, quarrels over affirmative action, legal denial, equal access, equal facilities, equal protection, equal opportunity and unequal and separate institutions, further hampered the African American's access to institutions of higher learning (Gallien, 2005). This historical backdrop has strongly shaped the African American students' academic achievement. Therefore, the process of recruiting and retaining students cannot be extricated from this historical context (Gallien, 2005). Despite the African American's struggles, danger of discovery of their secretive educational practices, and legal challenges, change was on the horizon (IHEP Mini Brief, 2010, para. 1, 2).

Continuing to take the initiative to pursue educational opportunities, Blacks, along with the support of the American Missionary Association (AMA) and the Freedman's Bureau, created schools for the education of blacks (Purnell, 2011, para. 3). In 1837, Richard Humphreys, a Quaker, stepped from behind the fence of fear and established the nation's first black elementary and high school known as the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia (Historically Black Colleges and Universities, 2011, para. 1). Now known as Cheyney University and considered by some to be the oldest historically Black college and university in the nation, the institute's mission was the training of teachers (Harper, 2009; IHEP Mini Brief, 2010, para. 4). Yet, this would not be enough; there was still a national need and outcry for schools, colleges, and universities to be created for the education of Blacks.

Thus, it was 17 years later January 1, 1854, a key school, Ashmun Institute, was created specifically to educate Blacks. Founded by Reverend John Miller Dickey, a Presbyterian minister, and his wife, these Quakers wanted to recognize Jehudi Ashmun, a social reformer, for his tireless efforts in the Black struggle and his contributions to the liberation of Liberia. A request to the Pennsylvania legislature was made and Ashmun was recognized with the naming of this institute in his honor. This institute, now known as Lincoln University, would become the first college for African American students with its charter being granted on April 29, 1954 (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009; Thomas, 2011). Even with the generous “Christian” spirit of a few and the establishment of Midwestern radical reformatory colleges and a few New England liberal arts colleges opening their doors to educate African Americans, the struggle for equity and access was still being denied (Gallien, 2005).

As the doors of institutions of higher education opened for African Americans, land mark legislation opened them even wider. Senator John Morrill in 1862 sought to improve the state of public education. The result was the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 which established a national system of state colleges and universities and which marked the first federal aid to higher education. Senator Morrill’s premise was to create institutions that targeted agriculture, the applied sciences, and teachers (Purnell, 2011, para. 2) and create access for those excluded from higher education and unable to afford private or charity supported institutions (Morrill Act 1862, para. 3). Though the Morrill Land Grant Act was created to give federal lands to states for educational purposes, African Americans were still excluded and faced hostile, unwelcoming environments. In an attempt to rectify this problem, the second Morrill Land Grant Act was created in



1890. This Act, which continued the push to open higher education to African American slaves, is considered to be the mechanism that led to the creation of seventeen historically Black land grant colleges (Safransky, 2011). It furthered decreed that if the states were the recipients of the grant funds then they must allocate funds for the Black colleges and/or admit freed slaves to their (White) land grant universities and colleges (Purnell, 2011, para.2).

Even though many African Americans were attending historically Black colleges and universities, they continued to be yoked by inequality and the inequities of a “separate but equal” educational system. To continue to break these yokes of inequality and inequities, more legislation was on the way with *Brown versus the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) becoming the landmark decision desegregating public schools and granting access to White institutions of higher education (Benton, 2001). Though *Brown* established that the “separate but equal” doctrine in *Plessy v Ferguson* was unconstitutional and violated the rights of African Americans, segregation was still deeply rooted in the higher education arena (Hikes, 2005).

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century saw many legislative events that made a significant impact on African American’s postsecondary educational opportunities, yet, again it was not enough. In 1944, the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act or the GI Bill, as it become known, was the impetus for opening doors to colleges and universities for returning servicemen and provided college tuition, books, supplies, and subsistence. Once again, this new legislation was not enough, as the barriers to educational opportunity for African Americans were still erected. However, more legislation was on the horizon.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was one of the most significant legislative movements in United States history as this law mandated an end to discriminatory practices and segregation in public places, e.g. public schools. Recognizing the need to continue to build on and strengthen legislation to end discrimination in educational institutions, more legislative mandates were created specifically as a warning for institutions receiving federal financial assistance whose behavior was discriminatory. Moreover, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination based on race, color, and national origin and had a direct impact on services and programs in higher education as well as restricted the distribution of federal funds to segregated schools (Civil Rights Act of 1964).

The highlight of the underrepresentation of African Americans in institutions of higher learning was continued with the enforcement of Affirmative Action policies in the early 60's. The term affirmative action was first used by President Kennedy in an Executive Order in March of 1961 to ensure fair and equal treatment of all in employment and education (Messerli, 2010). This policy served as another method to remedy inequities and increase the presence of African Americans on predominantly White campuses (Creighton, 2007; Thompson, Gorin, Obeidat & Chen, 2006). Subsequent legislative maneuvers, both federal and state, continued to bring about profound changes in the United States educational arena and barriers previously erected appeared to be coming down.

## **Challenges Affecting African American Students at Predominantly White Institutions**

Several researchers have throughout the years concluded that African American students on predominantly White campuses experience a campus climate that negatively affects their college persistence (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman & Oseguera, 2008; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). Frederick Harper, a doctoral student at Florida State University, articulated quite well the predicament of Black students on a predominantly White campus (Harper, 1969):

### **Being Black in a Predominantly White University**

If you can listen with an accepting ear and try to get into my frame of reference, I will attempt to articulate what it means to be black in a White university. Being Black means to walk across campus on your first day of class and not see one black student. Being black means to have all White teachers and to be surrounded in class by all White or nearly all White students. Being Black is to open my text-books and see pictures of White folks and to read White-washed theory, philosophy and history which are not relevant to me. Being Black means to go to a White counselor whom I don't trust, and who doesn't know how to handle my presence or problem. Being Black is trying to get administrators to understand my needs and do something about them or trying to convince a campus policeman that he should not arrest me out of prejudice. Being Black is tolerating "Nigra" or "Negro" and favoring neither. Being Black is to watch Whites look upon my natural hair,

mustache, my African garments, my Black music and literature, my Black community language, and other symbols of Black pride as being deviant. Being Black is seeing a soul sister or brother slaving overtime on a dirty menial job and being underpaid. Being Black is to go into a class disadvantaged and find that I have a teacher who believes it is impossible for a Black student to make an “A” or “B” grade. Being Black is not having a penny in my pocket and seeing White students visit Europe and Mexico, driving fancy sports cars, and at the same time knowing that their parents and ancestors got rich off the sweat and pain of my parents and ancestors. Being Black is to be a resource person for curious White folks who after being answered, are not willing to accept my expertise. Being Black is to know that my great grandmother was raped and labeled promiscuous, that my great grandfather was worked from dawn to dusk and labeled lazy, that my father was denied a job and labeled shiftless, that my sister was “busted” upside the head by racists with an ax handle, while policemen laughed, and then labeled her as a trouble-maker, and finally, that I was denied an equal opportunity and labeled as “culturally deprived.” Being Black means to be in an ocean of White stimuli, to be angry consciously or unconsciously, to continuously struggle with oneself to deny hostile feelings, angry feelings. Finally, being Black means to be lonely, hyper alienated, depressed, displayed, ignored, and harassed. (p. 293-294)

Harper (1969) in his work spoke volumes and clearly pointed to the many reasons for the creation of laws that addressed the many inequities and inequalities in academia for African Americans. These experiences, though not as overt as in the past, continue to hold fast (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). As a result, challenges that African American students face on predominantly White campuses stem from a historical and racial perspective that is peculiar to these institutions (Jackson, 2012). Moreover, it has been found that these institutional experiences can greatly impact students' retention and persistence (Morrow & Ackerman, 2012).

For many students, transitioning from high school to college/university can be daunting and, in some instances, prove quite difficult (Heiselt & White, 2008; Zamani, 2000). These transitional challenges, in many instances, are the result of having to adjust to sudden independence; having to leave family and make new friends; having to navigate the campus, crowds, and academic environment; and/or having to modify or completely change their study techniques (Cuseo, 2010; Jaswal & Jaswal, 2008). Additionally, students may experience varying degrees of stress related to the predominant racial and cultural makeup of the campus, which differs from their norm and their ability to integrate both socially and academically to this new environment (Creighton, 2007; Cuseo, 2010; Shook & Keup, 2012). Thus, these variables are critical in the successful matriculation and graduating of African American students on predominantly White campuses. Further, to ensure their success, individually, socially and academically, it is critical that institutions devise strategies/programs that support the needs of these students (Cuseo, 2003; Hu & Ma, 2010; Tinto, 2006- 2007).

### **Retention of African American Students at Predominantly White Institutions.**

Gaither (2005) suggested that from the beginning of the twentieth century, several researchers have studied retention and attrition and how it affects students, their collegiate pursuits and college retention strategies. He defined retention “as students’ attainment of academic and personal goals, regardless of how many terms a student is at the college” (p. 21). The key word in Gaither’s definition is “attainment”. It is the lack of attainment for African American students on predominantly White campuses that poses a problem for university administrators and chief academic officers and highlights the need for institutional and educational commitment to the retention of African American students by developing strategies that aid in their successful matriculation (Creighton, 2007; Hilgenberg & Luxner, 2004).

A look at academic attainment for African American undergraduate students also revealed that the educational system is continuing to serve African American students the worst; they are entering college, yet not graduating at the same rate of their White counterparts (Pennington, 2009). Researchers (Lett & Wright, 2003; Lynch & Engle, 2010) strongly believed that if the university admits these students, it matters greatly how they receive them and it is their responsibility to envelope, develop and graduate them.

As African American students attempted to adapt to the college milieu, the challenges they faced were numerous because higher education leaders were not developing appropriate strategies to acclimate these students (Cole & Arriola, 2007). Harper et al. (2009) indicated that “for first year racial/ethnic minority students at PWIs the adjustment experience is especially critical and usually more difficult than it is for White students,” (p. 180). University officials seem to not realize that challenges faced by

these students are institutional related and are compounded because this student population is “asked to assimilate into an unfamiliar environment composed of bureaucratic organizations and policies, entertainment organizations, sports programs, diverse populations with differences in cultural values, and a judicial system with legal agents working to maintain campus social order” (Cureton, 2003, p. 296).

For many African American freshmen, not having a connection to an assigned group or person places them in a precarious position with no one to turn to for answers for their questions and concerns (Watson, Terrell, Wright, & Associates, 2002). Furthermore, data compiled on graduation rates by the United States Department of Education, found that as of 2014, graduation rates for African American students stood at forty-five % and Caucasian graduation rates stood at 66%, a 20 percentage-point gap.

Lett and Wright (2003) contended that African American students are better prepared academically than their White counterparts when they enter a predominantly White institution, yet the sad reality is that only one-third to one-half of these students graduate. Gaither (2005) posited that minority students are continuing to leave predominantly White institutions at a greater rate than non-minorities even though their entrance numbers have increased greatly. Dahlvig (2010) believed that it is the disparity in graduation rates that demonstrates the need to increase degree attainment for African American students. Further, he concluded that by exploring their experiences within the college/university setting, one may be able to discern which problems pose the greatest problems during their matriculation. Dervarics (2011) also suggested that although Whites, African Americans and Hispanics high school and college graduation rates have increased since 1975, African Americans are still falling behind on the collegiate level.

Hence, African American student retention for institutions of higher learning is an important twenty-first century issue.

Roughly, 32% of African Americans compared to 44% of Caucasians are enrolled in an institution of higher learning and though this is an increase, research conducted by Mattanah, Ayers, Brand, Brooks, Quimby and McNary (2010) revealed that “more than 40% of students fail to complete college” (p. 93). The horrendous gaps in graduation rates between African American and White students at some predominantly White institutions (Lynch & Engle, 2010) are strong indicators that something must be done to promote innovation and build capacity at colleges to foster student success and work to close this gap (Roberts & Styron, 2010). Furthermore, according to data published by Dervarics (2011), African American students have a 19% graduation rate compared to a Caucasian student graduation rate of 39%.

Data compiled by the United States Census Bureau revealed that in 2010, African Americans represented 19.8% of the United States college graduates whereas Caucasians represented 30.3%. However, “if first-time African American students earned degrees at a rate similar to White students, there would be 16,000 more with bachelor’s degrees from public four-year institutions and 11,000 more from private nonprofit institutions” (Mini Brief, 2010, para. 9).

Zamani (2000) suggested that deterrents to retention of minority students could be shaped by the students’ personal, cultural, demographic and institutional characteristics and institutional climate with prior academic achievement and intellectual ability playing a role as well. Research conducted by Eccles, Wong, and Peck (2006) concluded that from early adolescence, students are affected by the discriminatory practices they



experience on a daily basis perpetrated by their peers and teachers within diverse school settings. These experiences can translate into low achievement, low academic ability self-concept, low academic task values, low motivation and self-esteem, and increased behavioral problems that can undermine school engagement and performance.

Research conducted by Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, and Rosales (2005) indicated that minority students' college persistence is influenced by the students' perceptions of the college environment. As such, given the importance of retention of this peculiar student population, institutions of higher learning should be looking closely at these deterrents to retention and begin to focus their attention on developing and implementing strategies to reduce the attrition rates and increase the retention rates of this student population (Jackson, 2012).

### **Peer Counseling/Mentoring in Higher Education**

**A Historical Look at Peer Counseling/Mentoring.** The concept of peer counseling owes its beginning to the para-professional movement of the 60's because of the increased utilization of paraprofessionals in various counseling roles (D'Andrea, 2005). The Community Mental Health Act of 1963 set the foundation for the development of the concept of mental health centers that provided to defined population areas a variety of services (Community Mental Health, 1963). This development of the community mental health program along with the development of community action agencies gave rise to the notion of indigenous non-professionals and para-professionals (D'Andrea, 2005) who helped combat the shortage of professionally trained people who were able to provide counseling services.

The effective use of these counseling paraprofessionals gained popularity and found its way onto school and college campuses (D'Andrea, 2005; Song, Zhang, Zhou & Xu, 2014). When college counseling center personnel began to recognize that students played a huge role in helping and supporting each other, they sought to develop ways to use this to their advantage. These observations led administrators to develop peer counseling programs and “it was within the context of the educational community that peer counseling came into its own” (D'Andrea 2005; Song et al., 2014). By the late 70's, the term paraprofessional on college campuses had been changed to peer counseling to clarify the role of students helping students (Song et al., 2014).

The concept of mentoring has become deeply ingrained in academia and many believe it owes its earliest beginning to Greek mythology and French literature (Garvey & Westlander, 2013; Nayab, 2011). Greek mythology tells the story of Mentor who was given charge of King Odysseus' son, Telemachus, when the King went to war (Homer, 1990; Roberts, 1999; Spence, 2005). Mentor's care of Telemachus involved him acting as a teacher, an encourager, a supporter and an advisor in a nurturing manner in order to help him develop wisdom, integrity and self-sufficiency (Garvey & Westlander, 2013).

French author, Francois Fénelon, has been credited with popularizing the theme of mentorship in his 1699 book *Les Aventures de Télémaque* and the appearance of mentor as a noun in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1750 (Murray, 2001). Devoting his life to the cause of education, Fénelon wrote his book during the time he served as a tutor for Louis XIV's grandson drawing from his experiences and relationship with the king and the king's grandson. Fénelon's book refers to a mentor as a “sage counselor” who provided wisdom, support, nurturing and guidance to his protégé. Fénelon concluded

that the mentoring relationship along with the observation of the positive and negatives of people's behavior and world events helped shaped the pupil's character, purpose, decision-making process, and intellectual development.

**The Benefits of a Peer Counseling/Mentoring Program.** The African American students' transition into a predominantly White campus environment is often not easy. In many instances, this student population consists of first generation students who are entering an environment where their understanding of the institution's policies, procedures, expectations and culture are lacking (Gaither, 2005). According to Fischer (2007), to combat the feelings of uncertainty and to enhance the students' success and retention, a positive relationship with a significant other is critical. Consequently, many researchers have determined that this significant other can be found in academic institutional mentoring programs (Dahlvig, 2010; Leidenfrost, Strassnig, Schabmann, Spirel & Carbon, 2011; Nora & Crisp, 2007; Shook & Keup, 2012). Furthermore, overall findings by several researchers have indicated that as minority students at PWIs participate in mentoring programs their college retention rates are greatly increased (Campbell & Campbell, 2007; Crisp, 2011; Nora & Crisp, 2007; Ward et al., 2010).

Peer Counseling/Mentoring within institutions of higher learning is a unique tool with numerous benefits for African American students, and have been well documented in academic literature (Joplin, Orman & Evans, 2004; Leidenfrost et al., 2011; McWilliams & Beam, 2013). The prevalent theme throughout the literature describes Peer Counseling/Mentoring as a strong support mechanism for the academic success of African American students on predominantly White campuses with approximately ¼ of the student body utilizing their peer counselor/mentor (Cuseo, 2010; D'Andrea, 2005;

Shook & Keup, 2012). Crisp (2011) conducted a study to examine the mentoring experience for students and found that a student's ability to successfully integrate an institution, academically and socially, and persist until graduation was tied directly to their mentoring experience.

In 2007, a study conducted by Campbell and Campbell found that students who participated in mentoring programs had a higher retention rate than those who were not mentored. This study was supported by a literature review by Shook and Keup (2012) who found that peer mentors contributed greatly to the students' persistence and completion. Other researchers have also concluded that the peer counseling/mentoring relationship provides emotional and social support that is critical to the successful academic matriculation of African American students (Ward, et al., 2010; Cuseo, 2010). Moreover, the positive merits of these relationships sets a foundation that can impact for a lifetime (McWilliams & Beam, 2013). Peer counselors/mentors found in the literature acknowledged that their experiences with their peer counselors/mentors gave them great feelings of confidence which helped them to become comfortable in their surroundings (Bonin, 2013), and which led to an increase in their academic performance (Leidenfrost et al., 2011).

Several researchers have suggested that peer counselors/mentors are not the only ones who benefit from the peer counseling/mentoring experience. Peer counselors/mentors report that their experiences helped them to develop socially and emotionally; develop as leaders; hone their communication, both oral and written, skills; build confidence; develop and maintain networks; and develop an understanding of, and

appreciation for diversity, with 98 % of these students recommending becoming a peer counselor/mentor to others (Odirile, 2012; Shook & Keup, 2012; Terrion, 2012).

As institutions of higher education continue to address their student retention problems, they have embraced Peer Counseling/Mentoring programs as a viable mechanism to combat this issue (Campbell & Campbell, 2007; Nora & Crisp, 2007). It has been suggested that administrators of higher education institutions have recognized that peer counseling/mentoring programs promote student success and retention and alleviates the pressure on faculty and staff, especially African American faculty and staff, to be the only “go to” for African American students (Baker & Robnett, 2012; Dahlvig, 2010). Furthermore, peer counseling/mentoring programs are a source of revenue because of the retention of tuition paying students. Moreover, the students who participate in the program either as a peer counselor/mentor or as a peer counselee/mentee become so connected to their institution that when they graduate they become active alumni contributing both physically and financially (Cuseo, 2010; Shook et al., 2012).

**Established Peer Counseling/Mentoring Programs in Higher Education.** The literature on peer counseling/mentoring in higher education is extensive with the studies confirming the value of peer counseling/mentoring on academic performance, retention, persistence and adjustment (D’Abate, 2009; Howard & Smith-Goodwin, 2010; Hu & Ma, 2010; Jaswal & Jaswal, 2008; Joplin, Orman & Evans, 2004; Leidenfrost et al., 2011; Pope, 2002; Ward et al., 2012). The utilization of this support mechanism on retention and persistence of students can be a dynamic strategy to assist students with the transition

and adjustment to college and universities (Cuseo, 2003; Shotton, Oosahwe & Cintron, 2007).

Several researchers have documented the positive impact that peer counseling/mentoring has on the transition of students into the college/university setting and its positive impact on the students' academic and social involvement (Hu & Ma, 2010; O'Brien, Llamas & Stevens, 2012; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). However, the literature reviewed by the researcher for this study focused on Peer Counseling/Mentoring programs that examined the various peer counseling/mentoring experiences of various underrepresented student groups. Many of these programs were implemented to ensure that at-risk students were able to successfully transition into the college/university and matriculate successfully to graduation.

Ward, et al. (2010) created and implemented a peer mentoring program to study its ability to enhance student retention and goal attainment. During the recruitment process, 12 peer mentors were selected along with 35 protégés. The mentors and protégés were paired via secret ballot keeping with a 1 to 3 mentor/ protégé ratio. The researchers found a 97% rate of retention for those who returned for the following semester and the fall-to-fall retention rate for 19 African American freshmen who participated was 89% and for those 132 who did not participate in the peer mentoring program it was 73%. The findings of the study revealed several positives resulting from the peer mentor/ protégé relationship: it strengthened the protégés resolve to seek assistance for any challenges; it served to strengthen their academic resolve; and it encouraged the protégés not only academically but emotionally, physically and socially.

The researchers posited that for retention and goal attainment, peer mentoring is a powerful strategy.

Jaswal and Jaswal (2008) conducted a study of a tiered peer mentoring program at Bellevue Community College (BCC). This program was created to assist every new student with their transition during their first quarter at BCC and was comprised of three tiers with peer mentoring as the first tier of student-to-student contact; electronic contact as the second tier; and, the third tier involving connecting students with industry mentors. Initially, peer mentors were volunteers but because of the importance of being able to recruit and retain motivated and qualified peer mentors, they became paid workers. The program recruited seasoned students who took part in a comprehensive training program designed to increase their skill base relative to becoming effective mentors. The authors' study of the tiered mentoring program at BCC found that the peer mentors were instrumental in helping the mentees achieve feelings of success and in enhancing the retention rates. The results of the study revealed that 81.4% of the mentees were retained compared to the 72.6% retained who had no contact.

Hu and Ma (2010) in their study examining student engagement in mentoring and its effect on student persistence in college, indicated that the Washington State Achievers Program was developed to provide funding to colleges and universities in the state of Washington to provide scholarships for high achieving students and to provide the institution with funding for peer mentors. The program awarded the Achieves Scholarship to 500 high school juniors who attended one of the 16 identified Achieves high schools, who were first generation college students and demonstrated great academic achievement. Upon entry into their selected college or university, the students

were assigned a peer mentor for two years who would assist them with their transition to the college/university setting, with navigating the campus landscape, any adjustment issues and who would provide advice, encouragement and support. The researchers' (Hu & Ma, 2010) findings indicated that peer mentoring is a positive support strategy and significantly impacts the persistence and retention of students who participated in the two year peer mentoring program. Additionally, their findings strongly supported formalized mentoring programs as support and retention strategies for colleges and universities.

O'Brien, Llamas, and Stevens (2012) surveyed 200 first year education students who participated in a peer mentoring program at Griffith University. The peer mentoring program provided mentors to students who chose to be a part of the program. O'Brien et al. found that those students who participated in the program overwhelmingly rated the peer mentoring program as a positive experience. The mentored students expressed feelings of satisfaction about their ability to succeed at the university as well as they reported their stress levels were greatly decreased. Overall, the peer mentoring program gives credence to the contributions peer mentoring programs make to the successful retention of a diverse student population at institutions of higher learning.

Phinney, Campos, Kallemeyn, and Kim (2011) studied the impact of a mentoring program developed and implemented for Latino freshman students. The study, which involved twenty-five students, revealed that students who participated in the mentoring program maintained their academic motivation, their sense of belonging to the university was strong, bouts of depression and stress were greatly decreased and, at the end of the year they were not categorized as "at risk". Though the research found that mentoring did



not directly impact academic performance, the impact of the mentoring program on minority at risk students was deemed worthy of continuation.

The Meyerhoff Scholars Program was established at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, to address the lack of African Americans in science, math, and engineering disciplines (Girves, Zepeda & Gwathey, 2005; Maton, Hrabowski & Schmitt, 2000). The program offered selected African American students four years of financial aid and room and board as long as they maintained a B average in a science, engineering or math (SEM) major. A survey of participating students found that involvement in the mentoring aspect of the program created excitement and active involvement in the SEM disciplines and contributed to a 94% graduation rate.

Initiated in 2003, the University of Botswana's peer counseling program was developed to provide support and encouragement to groups of graduate and undergraduate students (Odirile, 2012). The study found that peer counselors facilitated their counselees' personal and social adjustment to the university by providing counseling, advice, and skill building workshops/presentations, e.g. time management, study skills. The study also concluded that students involved in the program as counselees experienced an increase in their grade point average as well as they were able to keep their focus on school.

**The Mississippi State University Peer Counseling/Mentoring Program.** Good, Halpin, and Halpin (2000) in their study on minority student retention indicated that many higher education institutions are using peer mentoring with students of color in order to facilitate the transition process from home to a university setting. This is the premise of the Peer Counseling/Mentoring Program at Mississippi State University's

(MSU) Holmes Cultural Diversity Center (HCDC). The HCDC Peer Counseling/Mentoring program provides students of color and international students with a “big brother” or “big sister” figure to assist them in their transition to college. Mrs. Aretha Jones-Cook, M.S. served as Director and Dean of Students of the Holmes Cultural Diversity at Mississippi State University for 5 years. As a seasoned professional with an expertise in diversity and minority affairs, she sought to increase the usefulness of the Peer Counseling/Mentoring program to include not only freshmen African American students but all freshmen students of color. Thusly, the objective of the Peer Counseling/Mentoring program is to provide first time and transfer students of color and international students with positive role models with whom they can identify and feel comfortable (A. Jones-Cook, personal communication, June 25, 2015).

The Office of Minority Affairs at Mississippi State University was created in 1979 to provide specific services to African American students. Dr. Sebetha Jenkins was hired to lead the department as the first Director. With a background in minority affairs and a doctorate in Higher Education Administration, Dr. Jenkins began the undertaking of assessing the needs of the African American student population.

The MSU Peer Counseling/Mentoring program was initiated in 1986 by the Office of Minority Affairs. Early research conducted by Dr. Sebetha Jenkins revealed that African American students were arriving at MSU academically prepared but not socially prepared. Coming from small rural towns, many of these students found it difficult to adjust to this university environment. The administration, namely the Director of the Office of Minority Affairs and the university Vice President, recognized that this student population was not successfully navigating the “social” landscape, which was

leading to significant dropout rates. It was determined that these students needed a support system that would aid them in successfully navigating the “whole” university system thereby increasing retention rates (S. Jenkins, personal communication, December 10, 2007). To this end, the concept of the Peer Counseling/Mentoring Program was born.

Thirty-one African American upper-class students who either held leadership positions on campus or who expressed an interest in the peer counseling/mentoring program were selected as the alpha class of peer counselors/mentors. Each peer counselor/mentor was randomly assigned three to six African American freshman students based upon their residence hall location. These students who were “counseled” or “mentored” were and are referred to as counselees. Peer counselors/mentors were required to make regular visits to the counselees’ residence halls in order to become acquainted with their “little brother” or “little sister”. Dr. Jenkins believed that these personal visits established relationships that caused the freshmen students to feel more at ease in their surroundings, which led to a reduction in the dropout rate.

The tide began to turn when the entering African American students were no longer dropping out because of their inability to navigate the social framework of the predominantly White campus, but Dr. Brenda J. Richardson, Assistant Vice President of Students Affairs/Director of the Holmes Cultural Diversity, discovered that they were no longer entering the university academically sound. Dr. Richardson became the 3<sup>rd</sup> leader of the Holmes Cultural Diversity Center as Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs/Director. With a doctorate in Higher Education and an expertise in student affairs, cultural diversity and minority affairs, she continued to track the success of the African American student population. She also discovered that the students’ lack of

academic strength and inability to quickly adapt to their new environment caused a myriad of problems for these students, which in turn placed their matriculation in jeopardy (B. J. Richardson, personal communication, April 9, 2014). This change resulted in the peer counselors/mentors receiving enhanced skills training and therefore being assigned to peer counselees/mentees based on academic discipline. Furthermore, initially, the peer counselors/mentors served in a volunteer capacity but as the program grew and it was determined that the peer counselor/mentor positions were vital to the success of African American students, the students began receiving a salary. Mrs. Yolanda Taylor, Ed.S. former Assistant Director of the MSU Office of Minority Affairs stated “the salaries were based on the number of hours per week they were awarded via work study financial aid” (Y. Taylor, personal communication, June 24, 2015).

Today, at Mississippi State University, peer counselors/mentors serve as university representatives focusing on student success by assisting freshman and transfer students to make a successful transition to the University academically and socially by offering opportunities for building personal connections with students, faculty and staff via peer-to-peer relationships. Currently, each peer counselor/mentor is assigned 45-50 students per year. Contact with counselees involves making personal resident hall visits, making contact via email, Facebook, twitter and/or meeting at various programs/events (Holmes Cultural Diversity Center Peer Counselor/Peer Ambassador Brochure, 2013).

### **Summary of the Review of Related Literature**

This review of related literature provided an overview on Peer Counseling/Mentoring programs, retention, and academic performance of African American students at a predominantly white institution. The literature delved into the

history and legislation that set the tone for African Americans' pursuit for educational attainment, and the many challenges they faced as they pursued higher education. Further, several researchers focused on African American students at predominantly White institutions and examined the impact of peer counseling/mentoring programs on the academic success and retention of African American students (Brittian, 2009; Brown, 2009; Johnson, 2013). Historically, African Americans have encountered many segregation barriers that impeded their pursuit of higher education. These barriers, though strongly entrenched, would soon be torn down by the enactment of various legislative decisions (Cervantes et al., 2005). Spanning 50 years, these legislative enactments mandated that African Americans be given equal access to elementary and secondary schools and institutions of higher learning. These mandates were the impetus for the increases in African American enrollment, specifically in institutions of higher learning (Harvey, Harvey & King, 2004).

As racial demographics changed for colleges and universities, the higher education administration began to recognize that there was a need for refined intervention strategies to assist minority students with their transition into the college/university setting and with their social and academic success (Jensen, 2010; Roach, 2008). The retention of African American students had become a major challenge for institutions of higher learning. Several researchers indicated the rise in enrollment of African American students on predominately White campuses ("Black Student College Graduation," 2015; Casselman, 2014; "Fast Facts," 2015; Roach, 2015). Yet, the literature revealed the disparities in graduation rates between African American students and Caucasian students (Jones, Castellanos & Cole, 2002; Larimore & McClellan, 2005; Quay, 2010).

The struggles of African American students as they strive to obtain higher education degrees has prompted institution of higher learning administrators to devise strategies that provide the support needed for students to succeed. Several researchers have concluded that Peer Counseling/Mentoring in the collegiate environment has proven to be effective in the retention and graduation of African American students from PWIs (Harris, 2012; Patton & Harper, 2003). Studies conducted on Peer Counseling/Mentoring indicated that this student support service eases transition into the campus environment and helps alleviate feelings of isolation and alienation (Collings, Swanson, & Watkins, 2014). Moreover, students who participated in a formal peer counseling/mentoring program felt a greater connection to the institution, which led to academic persistence and increased student retention.

For many African American students, earning a college degree is a dream come true. Making this a reality requires that administrators and policy makers of academia “cultivate an ethic of positive restlessness that takes the form of an institutional commitment to continual innovation focused on student success” (Whitt, Kinzie, Schuh, & Kuh, 2008, p. 9). Ultimately, an institutional commitment to peer counseling/mentoring programs can only positively influence the educational success of African American students on predominantly White campuses.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the peer counseling/mentoring experiences of African American students involved in a formal undergraduate Peer Counseling/Mentoring program at Mississippi State University. The study specifically examined the peer counseling/mentoring experiences of undergraduate African American students at this particular PWI to determine if a relationship existed between peer counseling/mentoring, retention and academic performance. This study also examined factors that contributed to the persistence of this student population, as well as whether participation enhanced or contributed to the success of African American undergraduate students at this predominantly White institution. This chapter describes the methodology and procedures that were used to conduct this study. This chapter includes the following sections: research design, variables of the study, population, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

#### **Research Design**

The research design for this study was descriptive, correlational and casual comparative. Descriptive research summarizes, describes, and presents data to provide a description of and gain an understanding of the population being studied (Bickman & Rog, 2009; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). Descriptive research is often referred to as

survey research because surveys or questionnaires are used to collect the data. Further, the use of survey research is appropriate because this study seeks to examine the students' experiences with a peer counseling/mentoring program. According to Fraenkel et al. (2012) in survey research, the use of a questionnaire with close-ended questions is more popular with respondents and could possibly yield greater responses from them (Check & Schutt, 2012). Research questions one and two of this study were answered utilizing descriptive research methodology, as this method was the design appropriate for this research since answers were sought pertaining to their persistence and peer counseling/mentoring experience.

A correlational research design method was also utilized to answer research question three as the study examined the relationship between peer counseling/mentoring and academic performance. Correlational research, sometimes referred to as associational research, was used to investigate the relationship between two or more variables or predict likely outcomes (Fraenkel et al., 2012). The intensity and direction of the relationship between the variables typically have a correlation coefficient that ranges between -1.0 and +1.0. The closer the coefficient is to zero, the weaker the relationship. A perfect positive relationship or a perfect inverse relationship is reflected in +1 or -1 correlations respectively (Engel & Schutt, 2013). Because this study sought to determine the relationship between peer counseling/mentoring and academic performance, correlational research often referred to "Pearson's r" was appropriate for this study.

Research questions four and five were answered by using the causal cooperative research design. In causal comparative research, the researcher examines how the



independent variables are affected by the dependent variables and involves cause and effect relationships between the variables along with an exploration of the differences between two groups (Mertler, 2015). Also referred to ex post facto, the factorial design focuses on two or more categories with the independent variables compared to the dependent variable to determine relationships and compare the performance of the two groups (Mertens, 2014). The causal comparative research design provided the researcher the opportunity to examine the interaction between independent variables and their influence on dependent variables. Further, this research design was best used for comparison groups that differ in that one group possesses a certain characteristic and a second group does not.

Data analysis for causal comparative research “involves calculation of both descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as the statistical comparison of two or more groups on some quantitative variable” (Mertler, 2015, p. 125). Utilizing the t-test, this statistical test compares the mean scores of different groups in order to discover if the variables are related or if one level is altered, will it alter the level of the other (Fraenkel et al., 2012; Lowry, 2012). It is assumed that a difference based on the mean score of the dependent variable will be found because of the influence of the independent variable (Pituch, Whittaker & Stevens, 2013). Since the researcher sought to determine whether the utilization or non-utilization of a peer counselor/mentor by a student affects grade point average, the causal comparative research design was appropriate since the researcher sought to compare the grade point average for the two groups and determine whether the mean of the two were statistically different from each other.

### **Variables of the Study**

The reported grade point average of the African American students was the dependent variable for this study since the research sought to determine if a relationship existed between academic performance and peer counseling/mentoring. The Racial and Mentor Experiences Scale survey instrument was utilized to measure the relationship between the peer counseling/mentoring and academic performance, hence, the primary independent variable for this study was the students' perceptions of their peer counseling/mentoring experience. Additional variables included demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age) and enrollment characteristics (e.g., major, class load).

### **Population**

The population for this study consisted of 1042 African American undergraduate students who were classified as a senior and who were enrolled on the main campus of Mississippi State University during the 2016 spring semester. The total university enrollment was 20,138 with an undergraduate enrollment of 16,536. The undergraduate student population at Mississippi State University comprised 82.1% of the total student enrollment (Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, 2016) with African American undergraduate students comprising 19.2% of the total student enrollment (Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion, 2016). There are 5,213 students who were classified as seniors accounting for 33% of the student enrollment of which 19.31% of the seniors were African American. The participants were identified via information retrieved from the Office of the Registrar.

## Instrumentation

A survey instrument consisting of three parts was used in this study (see Appendix E). Part I of the instrument collected demographic data and enrollment characteristics. Kinsey's (2007) Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale was used as Part II of the instrument and the Peer Counseling/Mentoring Experiences Questionnaire represented Part III of the instrument.

Part I of the survey instrument contained questions related to demographic and enrollment information of the student participants (e.g., age, sex, enrollment status, and self-reported grades). Along with the demographic and enrollment information, Part I of the instrument included one question that was used to determine the participants' use of a peer counselor/mentor.

Part II, the Racial and Mentoring Experience Scale developed by Kinsey (2007), is a modified version of the Mentoring Functions Scale developed by Noe (1988). Noe (1988) initially produced the Mentoring Functions Scale as a part of his research to investigate the success of assigned mentoring relationships and determine the degree to which mentors influenced the psychological and career outcomes of their protégés. In Noe's original survey, 29 items were devised to measure career-related functions of the mentor and the degree to which a mentor gave exposure and visibility, sponsorship, protection and challenging assignments. Noe's (1988) survey was expanded and modified by Kinsey (2007) for college students in an academic setting, at a PWI. The modified survey contained items, which assessed the degree to which the mentor showed acceptance and confirmation and provided coaching, role modeling and counseling. Kinsey's survey, The Racial and Mentoring Experience Scale, contains 39 statements

related to the counseling/mentoring experiences and academic environment of students attending PWIs. Kinsey's survey, making up Part II of the instrument used for this study, consists of five-point Likert-scale items with the following choices and response values: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5) and addressed 10 specific aspects of the mentoring experience: Coaching, Role Model, Counseling, Acceptance and Confirmation, Protection, Exposure and Visibility, Friendship, Satisfaction and Assimilation, Race Attribute, and Persistence.

Part III of the survey instrument, Peer Counseling/Mentoring Experiences Questionnaire, consisted of four open-ended questions. These questions specifically addressed the participants' experience with their peer counselor/mentor. Permission to use the "Mentoring Functions Scale" and the "Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale" was obtained from Dr. Raymond Noe and Dr. Sundra D. Kinsey respectively (see Appendices A and B).

### **Validity and Reliability of the "Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale"**

Three Student Affairs administrators knowledgeable about Peer Counseling/Mentoring programs validated the survey instrument. These Student Affairs professionals reviewed the items on the survey instrument to ensure that the wording was clear and concise. The premise for the review was to make sure the survey items measured what they were designed to measure and were not vaguely written. The Student Affairs professionals determined that no revisions were needed, and the survey instrument items were clear and properly worded. Using SPSS, the responses were coded and analyzed.

Noe's study (1988) on mentoring relationships involved an exploratory factor analysis strategy because it was one of the first studies designed to develop a quantitative measure for mentor/protégé relationships, function and success. His research resulted in the development of The Mentoring Functions Scale. Noe followed his factor analysis with a varimax rotation, which resulted in three items being excluded from the 29 item mentoring function items. Further analysis resulted in the two decision rules being used to determine which items defined the rotated factors.

The items on Noe's instrument had to have a factor loading equal to or greater than .30 and had to clearly load on one of the factors. Results from the analysis also indicated that Factor 1 characterized psychosocial mentoring functions because the factor was defined by the extent to which the mentor provided coaching, counseling, acceptance and confirmation, and service as a role model. Results from the analysis of Factor 2 indicated that this factor characterized mentoring functions related to the mentees' career growth (e.g., protection, exposure and visibility, sponsorship, and challenging assignments). Two factors represented the mentors' functions except for items assessing friendship because it did not load clearly on either factor.

Noe's career-related functions scale included seven items, which assessed the extent to which the mentor provided exposure and visibility, sponsorship, protection, and challenging assignments resulted in a .89 internal consistency estimate. For the psychosocial functions items assessing the degree to which the mentor served as a role model and provided counseling, acceptance, confirmation and coaching, the internal consistency reliability estimate was .92. The inter-correlation between assessing career and psychosocial functions was .49.

Noe's Mentoring Functions Scale was modified by Kinsey (2007) and renamed, The Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale. Although Kinsey's instrument measured the same type of mentoring functions as Noe's (1988) study, her modifications of the instrument included tailoring Noe's questions to the academic environment on college and university campuses, as well as the addition of one factor to assess the importance of race in the mentoring relationship and one factor to assess satisfaction and integration into the academic environment based on mentoring experiences.

As a means of establishing the reliability and validity of the new modified version of Noe's survey instrument (Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale) 20% of the undergraduate population of African American seniors enrolled at a predominantly White institution were surveyed in Kinsey's (2007) pilot study. Based on the analysis of data gathered from her pilot study, Kinsey found consistency between survey categories and survey questions and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .933.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted to help the researcher detect any problems that should be remedied before conducting the actual study. Fraenkel et al. (2012) have described a pilot study as a condensed sample of the projected procedures. The authors noted that this procedure allows for the discovery of any issues in order that they will be remedied before the actual research instrument is delivered to the respondents. Ultimately, revisions can be made to the proposed survey to identify and correct any problems discovered prior to conducting the actual research study.

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research at Mississippi State University, 100 African

American undergraduate senior students were randomly selected to participate in the pilot study. To validate and test the reliability of the survey instrument, the pilot survey was constructed, and pilot tested on 10% of the participants. Gay and Airasian (2000) indicated that “for descriptive research, it is common to sample 10 to 20% of the population” (p. 112). Fraenkel et al. (2012) suggested that the best way to represent the population is to use a large random sample size. The participants selected from the pool of generated students provided by the University’s Registrar’s Office were not included in the actual study. They were contacted electronically and asked to participate in the pilot study. The African American undergraduate students were asked to respond to the instrument in the same manner that the actual participants were asked to do. The participants needed approximately 10-15 minutes to complete a three-part survey instrument, the “Peer Counseling/Mentoring Survey” online via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com).

After the participants completed the survey, the data were analyzed to answer all the research questions and to test the statistical procedures. Appendix C contains a copy of the e-letter that was sent to the participants in the pilot study. Upon completion of the pilot study survey, a total of 42 participants had responded providing a 42% response rate. Of this population, 69.05% (N=29) of the participants indicated participation in the PCPA program and (30.95%) (N=13) did not.

An assessment form was provided to the participants in the pilot study with instructions to review each statement in the survey instrument for clarity, preciseness of instructions, and appropriateness of content. Participants in the pilot study were asked to list unclear statements and/or questions on the assessment form which needed to be

modified prior to administration of the final survey instrument. A space was provided in each section of the assessment form for participants in the pilot study to make comments, suggestions, and recommendations as they deemed appropriate. Based on information gathered in the pilot study, the researcher found that no revisions were required for the survey instrument. Appendix D contains a copy of the assessment form that participants used in the pilot study.

### **Data Collection**

A list of names and contact information for all African American undergraduate students classified as a senior in the spring 2016 semester and who were enrolled at the main campus of Mississippi State University was obtained from the Office of the Registrar. To collect the data for this study, the survey was posted and distributed via the web, utilizing the Mississippi State University email service and [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com). Online survey research provides access to unique populations, saves time and money for the researcher by moving to an electronic medium from a paper format (Wright, 2005), as well as the use of web-based surveys allows one to reach a greater number of participants in a quick manner with a short and quick time frame (Reynolds, Woods & Baker, 2007). In addition, “Web-based surveys can easily take advantage of advancing technology to provide multiple-question formats, direct database connectivity, data quality checking, customized instrument delivery, and guaranteed confidentiality, all of which can serve to improve the reliability of the data” (Reynolds et al., 2007, p. 5). As such, utilization of web-based sources allowed participants’ responses to be automatically stored in a database and retrieved fairly easy for use in SPSS format.



Before beginning the actual survey, participants were informed of the purpose and procedure of the study. Secondly, participants were asked for their voluntary participation in the online survey. Students were informed of the benefits of their participation in the study, and it was emphasized to participants that their responses would be confidential.

Prior to the administration of the final survey instrument for the study, approval was received from the University's Office of Research Compliance Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research.

### **Data Analysis**

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 23.0 was utilized for statistical analysis of the collected data in this study. Statistical analyses utilized in this study were both descriptive and inferential. Standard deviations, frequencies, means and %ages via descriptive statistical analysis were used to analyze the demographic variables of the study gathered with Part I of the survey. In turn, these demographic variables were used as the independent variables of the study. Also included as a demographic variable in Part 1 of the survey was an item that identified whether or not a participant of the study utilized the Peer Counselor/Mentor Program. Peer Counselor/Mentor Program utilization represented one of the independent variables for this study and participants' responses to this item determined what level of the independent variable they represented (participant/non-participant).

The inferential statistical analyses utilized in this study were the One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and the Pearson Product-moment Correlation

Coefficient (Pearson  $r$ ). The ANOVA was used to detect statistically significant differences between the means of two or more groups.

The Pearson  $r$  is a bi-variate statistical measure used in correlational research to determine the strength of the linear relationship between two quantifiable variables (Fraenkel et al., 2012). The Pearson  $r$  analysis provides a correlation coefficient ranging from a -1 to a +1, with values closer to the absolute value of 1 representing stronger relationships. Positive values represent positive relationships which indicate that the measures of the two variables vary in the same directions. That is, as one variable increases, so does the other and as one variable decreases, so does the other. Negative values represent negative or inverse relationships. As one variable increases, the other variable decreases. Therefore, the positive and negative only represent the type of relationship. The coefficient identifies the strength of the relationship.

Correlational studies are used to determine if relationships exist between (or among) variables and to determine if one variable can reliably predict another. Depending on the purpose of the correlational study, the variables used in the study have different labels attached to them. For exploratory studies, variables are often identified as simply quantifiable variables. For studies where the intent is to make predictions, the variables are often identified as predictor and criterion variables or independent (predictor) and dependent (criterion) variables. For the purpose of this study, the variables were identified as dependent and independent variables, with the dependent variable being African American students' grade point average and the primary independent variable being the students' perceptions of their Peer Counseling/Mentoring experiences.

For the ANOVA analyses, which were used in the Causal Comparative research design method portion of this study, students' responses to Part II of the survey instrument served as the dependent variables and their demographic variables served as the independent variables. For the Pearson r analyses, used for the Correlational research design method, the primary independent variable was the students' perceptions of their Peer Counseling/Mentoring experiences which was also obtained from their responses to the items in Part II of the survey, the Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale and the dependent variable was their grade point average.

The Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale had 41 items representing 10 categories and used a five-point Likert-scale with responses ranging from Strongly Disagree (1 point) to Strongly Agree (5 points). For both the ANOVA and Pearson r analyses, items within each of the 10 categories were summed and averaged. In turn, these average scores by category were used as either the dependent variable for the ANOVA or the independent variable for the Pearson r.

The following section lists each research question and the specific analysis used to answer the research question. For each of the inferential statistics used, an a'prior significance level (alpha) of 0.05 was used.

### **Research Question One**

What factors contribute to the persistence of African American undergraduate students enrolled in a predominantly White university? To answer research question 1 the researcher used a descriptive research design and descriptive statistical analysis utilizing frequencies, %ages, means and standard deviations to analyze the responses to survey items on Part II of The Mentoring and Racial Experiences Survey.

### **Research Question Two**

What are the peer counselor/mentor experiences of African American undergraduate students enrolled in a predominantly White university? To answer research question 2, the researcher used a descriptive research design and descriptive statistical analysis utilizing frequencies, %ages, means and standard deviations to analyze the responses to survey items on Part II of The Mentoring and Racial Experiences Survey.

### **Research Question Three**

What is the relationship between peer counseling/mentoring and academic performance as measured by students' grade point average? To answer research question 3, the researcher used a Correlational design research method. To answer this question, the Pearson r statistical procedure was used to determine if a relationship existed between their responses to the survey items on Part II of The Mentoring and Racial Experiences Survey and their academic performance as measured by their grade point average.

### **Research Question Four**

Is there a statistically significant difference in self-reported grade point average between undergraduates who utilize peer counseling/mentoring programs and those who do not? To answer research question 4, the researcher used a Causal Comparative research method and analyzed the data with the ANOVA. The dependent variable for the ANOVA computed to answer this question was the participants' self-reported grade point average and the independent variable was utilization of peer counseling/mentoring programs (participants and non-participants).

### **Research Question Five**

Are there statistically significant differences in grade point average by select demographic variables, e.g. gender, age, marital status, enrollment status, for African American students who participated in the program? To answer research question 5, the researcher used a Causal Comparative research method and the ANOVA analysis. The dependent variable for these ANOVA analyses was the participants' self-reported grade point average and the independent variables were gender, age, marital status, and enrollment status of the African American students who participated in the peer counseling/mentoring program.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The successful matriculation of African American students is at the forefront of conversations taking place among administrators at predominantly White institutions of higher learning. These university administrators have recognized the importance of providing this student population with access to mentoring programs/resources that address key issues and problems which in turn contributes to retention and increased graduation rates (Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford, & Pifer, 2017). As early as the sixty's and seventy's there have been a number of Peer Counseling/Mentoring programs that have addressed the needs of African American students as they matriculate through institutions of higher learning. For example, Minor (2007) in his studies found that these programs have made a significant impact on the achievement of African American students. Additionally, many institutions of higher learning have developed Peer Counseling/Mentoring programs to ensure that their African American students have the tools and resources necessary to succeed (Wood, 2017).

Hence, the purpose of this study was to examine the peer counseling/mentoring experiences of African American students involved in a formal undergraduate Peer Counseling/Mentoring program and the relationship between peer counseling/mentoring, retention and academic performance. This chapter presents the findings and the analysis of data in this study. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What factors contribute to the persistence of African American undergraduate students who are enrolled at a predominantly White institution?
2. What are the peer counseling/mentoring experiences of African American undergraduate students at a predominantly White institution?
3. What is the relationship between peer counseling/mentoring and academic performance as measured by self-reported grade point average?
4. Is there a statistically significant difference in self-reported grade point average between undergraduates who utilize peer counseling/mentoring programs and those who do not?
5. Are there statistically significant differences in grade point average by select demographic variables, e.g. gender, age, marital status, enrollment status, for African American students who participate in the program?

The research design for this study was quantitative and utilized a three-part survey instrument to answer the research questions posed in this study. African American students classified as seniors during the spring 2016 semester at Mississippi State University were emailed and asked to complete a 39-item questionnaire, Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale, with four open-ended questions on pc/m experiences via Survey Monkey. A population of 1042 African American students were emailed the survey. Of this student population, 309 had undeliverable e-mail addresses. Hence, the actual surveyed population consisted of 733 African American seniors. The survey data yielded responses from 177 participants, constituting a response rate of 24.15%.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted prior to conducting the actual research study to detect any problems that should be remedied before conducting the actual study. The participants (N=100) were asked to review the survey instrument in this study to determine the clarity of the instruments' items and to make corrections, if appropriate. Upon completion of the survey instrument and a review of the assessment form, the data were analyzed to answer the research questions and to test for statistical procedures. The researcher used Cronbach Alpha to determine the reliability of the survey instrument. The resulting calculated Cronbach alpha based on the survey instrument was .879. The participants in the pilot study noted no inconsistencies or unclear statements on the assessment form. Therefore, the researcher made no changes or revisions on the survey instrument prior to conducting the actual study.

### **Demographic Data**

A description of the demographic characteristics of the African American seniors related to sex, age, marital status, enrollment status, admission status, residence, major, number of hours currently enrolled in, current grade point average, parents' educational level, employment, effect of employment on studies, college expenses met, and utilization of Peer Counselor/Mentor were presented in this section. Participants were asked to provide demographic data in Part I of the Demographic Data and Enrollment Characteristics section of the survey instrument which is presented in this section. The target population in this study consisted of 1042 African American students classified as seniors. Because 309 of the participant emails were undeliverable, the actual surveyed



population consisted of 733 African American seniors. The survey data yielded responses from 177 participants, constituting a response rate of 24.15 % (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Survey Response Rates*

Target Population	Emails Returned	Actual Population	Actual Returns	Response Rate
1042	309	733	177	24.15

*Sex of the Respondents*

Table 2 shows the classification of African American seniors according to sex. Of the respondents surveyed, the majority 62.15 % (N=110) were female and 37.85 % (N=67) were male. The data shown in Table 1 summarized the results of sex of the respondents. Further results of the demographic data are summarized in Table 2 through Table 13.

Table 2

*Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Sex*

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Female	110	62.15
Male	67	37.85
Total	177	100

**Age of the Respondents**

The average age reported by the University for all students in 2016 was 22.8 (Office of Institutional Research and Effective, 2016). The data (n=176) presented in

Table 3 show that 55.68% (n=98) of the students in this study were between the ages of 18 to 24. The age distributions also indicated that 27.27% (n=48) were between the ages of 25 to 34, 13.07% (n=23) were between the ages of 35 to 44, 3.41% (n=6) were between the ages of 45 to 54, and 0.57% (n=1) were between the ages of 55 to 64.

Table 3

*Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Age*

<i>Age</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
18 – 24	98	55.68
25 – 34	48	27.27
35 – 44	23	13.07
45 – 54	6	3.41
55 – 64	1	0.57
Total	176	100

**Admission Status of the Respondents**

The results from the data showed that the largest number of students were admitted to the university as full-time students (see Table 4). The full-time admitted students comprised 81.14% (n=142) of the population and transfer students comprised 18.86% (n=33) of the admitted population.

Table 4

*Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Admission Status*

<i>Status</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Full-time	142	81.14
Transfer	33	18.86
Total	175	100

**Enrollment Status of the Respondents**

Of the admitted students shown in Table 4, the data shown in Table 5 indicates that 84.88% (n=146) were full-time students and 15.12% (n=26) were enrolled as part-time students.

Table 5

*Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Enrollment Status*

<i>Status</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Fulltime	146	84.88
Part-time	26	15.12
Total	176	100

**Current Residence of the Respondents**

As it relates to the current residence of the respondents, data in Table 6 revealed that 77.97% (n=138) of this student population resided in off campus housing and 22.03% (n=39) lived in campus residence halls.

Table 6

*Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Current Residence*

<i>Housing Location</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
On campus housing	39	22.03
Off campus housing	138	77.97
Total	177	100

**Marital Status of the Respondents**

Table 7 data indicated that 80.68 % (n=142) of the respondents identified their marital status as single, 13.64% (n=24) identified as married, 4.55% (n=8) identified as divorced and 1.14% (n=2) identified as separated.

Table 7

*Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Marital Status*

<i>Married Status</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Single	142	80.68
Married	24	13.64
Divorced	8	4.55
Separated	2	3.41
Total	176	100

**Academic Majors, Semester Credit Hours and Cumulative Grade Point Average of the Respondents**

Table 8 presents the varied academic majors of the respondents. For the 2016 spring semester, the majority respondents (42.9%) were enrolled in 13 to 15 credit hours

(see Table 9). Further, data revealed that the average grade point average for all respondents was 3.33 with most of the students self-reporting a grade point averaged between 2.50 to 3.00 (see Table 10).

Table 8

*Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Academic Major*

<i>Major</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Agriculture	3	1.70
Architecture/Art	5	2.84
Biological Sciences	5	2.84
Business/Accounting/Marketing	20	11.36
Communications/Public Relations	6	3.40
Education	58	32.95
Engineering	36	20.45
Fashion Design & Merchandising	5	2.84
Food Science, Nutrition & Health	3	1.71
History	2	1.14
Human Sciences	4	2.27
Interdisciplinary Studies	3	1.71
Political Science	3	1.71
Psychology	5	2.84
Social Work	9	5.11
Other	9	5.11
<b>Total</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 9

*Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Semester Credit Hours*

<i>Semester Credit Hours</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
6 or fewer	19	11.18
9 – 12	53	31.18
13 – 15	73	42.94
16 – 18	23	13.53
21 – 24	2	1.17
<b>Total</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 10

*Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Cumulative Grade Point Average*

<i>Student Self-reported GPA</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1.90 – 2.49	9	5.49
2.50 – 3.00	78	47.56
3.10 – 4.00	77	46.95
<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>100</b>

**Educational Level of Parents for the Respondents**

Additionally, the data revealed that almost half of the students came from households where one or both parents graduated from college (see Table 11). When responding to their parents' educational level, 37.5% of the students reported that both parents graduated from college, 6% indicated that their father only had graduated from

college, 40% indicated that their mother only had graduated from college, and 64% reported that neither parent graduated from college.

Table 11

*Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Parent Educational Level*

<i>Did Parent Graduate College</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No	64	36.36
Yes, both parents	66	37.50
Yes, father only	6	3.41
Yes, mother only	40	22.73
<b>Total</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>100</b>

**Paid College Expenses, Employment and Hourly Work Hours for the Respondents**

Although over 90% of the participants indicated that some of their college expenses were being met (see Table 12), nearly 80% of the participants were employed during the 2016 spring semester (see Table 13) and nearly 50% indicated that their employment had some effect on their academic performance (see Table 14).

Table 12

*Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by College Expenses*

<i>Met college expenses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No	11	6.29
Very Little	12	6.86
Less than half	17	9.71
About Half	49	28.00
More than half	42	24.00
All or nearly all	44	25.14
Total	175	100

Table 13

*Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Student Hourly Work Week*

<i>Hourly Work Week</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
None-no job	34	19.21
1 – 10	10	5.65
11 – 20	42	23.73
21 – 30	62	35.03
31 – 40	29	16.38
Total	177	100



Table 14

*Frequency and Percentage of Respondents by Job on Academic Performance*

<i>Does Job Affect Studies</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No job	34	19.43
Does not interfere	55	31.43
Takes some time away	65	37.14
Takes a lot of time away	21	12.00
Total	175	100

**Analysis of Research Questions**

The results from the data analysis provided information regarding the (1) factors that contributed to the persistence of African American students at a PWI, (2) peer counseling/mentoring experiences of African American student at a predominantly, (3) relationship between peer counseling/mentoring and academic performance as measured by self-reported grade point average, (4) difference in self-reported grade point average between those who utilized the peer counselor/mentor and those who did not, and, (5) differences in grade point average by select demographic variables for those who participated in the peer counselor/mentor program. Data were analyzed to answer the five research questions listed below that guide this study.

**Research Question One**

What factors contribute to the persistence of African American undergraduate students enrolled in a PWI? To answer Research Question 1, descriptive statistics were

computed for the participants' responses to items 34-39 of the survey instrument which asked questions pertaining to their persistence.

The analysis of data gathered from items 36-41, revealed that for most of the items on the persistence section of the survey, the majority of participants either strongly agreed or agreed with the statements. The only statement (item) that the majority of participants did not agree to was the statement, "The campus environment had an impact on my ability to persist." For this item, only 33.4% of the participants either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. While five participants (6.4%) recorded a neutral response, the majority of participants did not agree with the statement. In fact, over half (60.3%) of the participants disagreed with the statement. However, for the remaining five statements (items), over half of the participants either agreed or disagreed.

For the remaining five items (persistence statements), the percentages of agreement ranged from 55.9% to 84.1%. The item with the largest majority of participants (84.%) either strongly agreeing or agreeing was the statement that said, "My institution welcomed my cultural differences." For this item, 67.9% (53 participants) agreed that their institution welcomed their cultural differences and 16.7% (5 participants) strongly agreed. Over 70% of the participants agreed that the events/activities hosted by the department contributed to their persistence at the university and over 50% of the participants agreed that their experiences with the faculty, staff, and academic department contributed to their academic success. However, 70.6% (55 participants) agreed that there was a point in time when they felt it would be hard for them to graduate at the institution.

Based on the participants' responses to the six survey items examining persistence, most participants perceived that the following four experiences led to their persistence: (a) The events/activities hosted by their department, (b) the experiences with their academic department, (c) the institution's welcoming of their cultural differences, and (d) their experiences with the faculty and staff of the entire university. Table 15 displays the results of the analysis of data used to answer Research Question 1.

Table 15

*Percentage of Factors Contributing to the Persistence of African American Students*

	SD	D	N	A	SA
The events/activities hosted by the department contributed to my persistence at the university.	1.3%	5.2%	22.1%	54.5%	16.9%
The campus environment had an impact on my ability to persist.	9.0%	51.3%	6.4%	23.1%	10.3%
My experiences with the faculty and staff in the university as whole contributed to my academic success.	0.0%	9.1%	35.1%	44.2%	11.7%
My experiences with my academic department contributed to my academic success.	0.0%	9.1%	35.1%	44.2%	11.7%
My institution welcomed my cultural differences.	0.0%	5.1%	10.3%	67.9%	16.7%
There was point in time at this institution that I felt it would be hard for me to graduate.	1.3%	3.8%	24.4%	60.3%	10.3%

## Research Question Two

What are the peer counselor/mentor experiences of African American undergraduate students enrolled in a predominantly White university?

Part II of the survey was Kinsey's Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale which included items examining the following ten areas of the mentoring experience: coaching, role model, counseling, acceptance and confirmation, protection, exposure and visibility, friendship, satisfaction and assimilation, race attribute, and persistence. Responses recorded by the 85 students who indicated that they utilized a peer counselor/peer mentor were analyzed to answer Research Question 2. To facilitate a thorough understanding of their experiences, their response for each of the ten areas assessed by the survey were examined and analyzed separately. Tables 16 – 23 display the %ages of response choices recorded for each item of Part II of the survey.

The first section of Part II of the survey included five statements related to the participants' coaching experiences. Based on the responses recorded by the participants, their peer counselor/peer mentor coaching experience was both positive and helpful. For each of the five coaching items, at least 90 % of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed with each of the statements. While each of the items had small %ages of participants who indicated that they were neutral (%ages ranged from 2.6 to 5.1), only one participant disagreed with any of the statements. This one participant disagreed with that statement that said mentor has showed history of his/her career with you. Table 16 displays the five coaching experiences items and the %ages of participants indicating their level of agreement for each choice.

Table 16

*Percentage of Coaching Experiences*

	SD	D	N	A	SA	NA
Mentor has shared history of his/her career with you.	0.0%	1.3%	3.8%	65.4%	29.5%	0.0%
Mentor has encouraged me to prepare for advancement.	0.0%	0.0%	3.8%	59.0%	37.2%	0.0%
Mentor shared ideas with you.	0.0%	0.0%	2.6%	61.5%	34.6%	0.0%
Mentor suggested specific strategies for accomplishing academic tasks that could be used to improve academic performance.	0.0%	0.0%	2.6%	62.8%	34.6%	0.0%
Mentor suggested specific strategies for achieving your career goals, becoming involved in campus activities and organizations, and getting to know faculty and administrators on campus.	0.0%	0.0%	5.1%	53.8%	41.0%	0.0%

Section II of the Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale included three items related to role model experiences. For these three items, well over 90% of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements regarding their role model experiences. According to the majority of participants, their mentors (role models) held attitudes and values that were similar to their own and that they both admired and respected their mentor. While 3.8% (three participants) of the participants' response were neutral to all three items, there were only two responses that indicated any level of disagreement. For the item "my mentor has displayed attitudes and values similar to my own", one participant strongly disagreed, and one participant disagreed. Consequently, the results of data analysis of the Role Model experiences items indicate that participants

had a beneficial experience. Table 17 displays the results of data analysis for the three Role Model Experience items.

The respondents' role model experiences portrayed in Table 16 indicates that 96.2% agreed with their mentor's attitudes and values regarding education, 94.6% respected and admired their mentor and 93.6% agreed that their values and attitudes were similar to their mentors.

Table 17

*Percentage of Role Model Experiences*

	SD	D	N	A	SA	NA
I agree with my mentor's attitudes and values regarding education.	0.0%	0.0%	3.8%	65.4%	30.8%	0.0%
I respect and admire my mentor.	0.0%	0.0%	3.8%	46.2%	48.7%	0.0%
My mentor has displayed attitudes and values similar to my own.	1.3%	1.3%	3.8%	64.1%	29.5%	0.0%

Participants' perceptions of their counseling experiences were examined with Section III of the Racial and Mentoring Experience Scale. For this section of the survey, there were six Likert-scale items and for each of these items, the majority of participants indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements. The percentages of participants agreeing with the statements (either agreed or strongly agreed) ranged from 85.9% to 98.7%, indicating that for most participants, the peer counselor/peer mentor counseling experience was positive and meaningful. For example, for the 78 participants who completed the item, "mentor has demonstrated good listening skills in our conversations," 43 participants (51%) agreed and 34 participants (43.6%) strongly agreed. There were only two items where the percentage of participants agreeing with the

statement failed to reach the 90 % mark. For the item which stated, “mentor has discussed my questions or concerns regarding feeling of competence, commitment, isolation, relationships with peers and faculty, and academic achievement” only 89.8% (46.2% agreed and 43.6% strongly agreed) of the participants agreed with the statement. The only other item with less than 90% agreement was the item that stated, “Mentor has conveyed empathy for the concerns and feelings I have discussed with him/her.” For this item, only 85.9% of the participants indicated agreement. However, as indicated in Table 18, very few, if any, participants disagreed with any of the counseling experiences statements. In which case, it appears that the peer counselor/peer mentor provided beneficial counseling experiences for the participants. Table 18 displays the results of the descriptive analysis for the Counseling Experiences section of the survey.

Table 18

*Percentage of Counseling Experiences*

	SD	D	N	A	SA	NA
Mentor has demonstrated good listening skills in our conversations.	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%	55.1%	43.6%	0.0%
Mentor has discussed my questions or concerns regarding feelings of competence, commitment, isolation, relationships with peers and faculty, and academic achievement.	0.0%	0.0%	7.7%	46.2%	43.6%	2.6%
Mentor has shared personal experiences as an alternative perspective to my problems.	0.0%	0.0%	3.8%	52.6%	42.3%	1.3%
Mentor has encouraged me to talk openly about anxiety and fears that detract from my studies.	0.0%	1.3%	3.8%	50.0%	41.6%	3.8%
Mentor has conveyed empathy for the concerns and feelings I have discussed with him/her.	0.0%	3.8%	7.7%	51.3%	34.6%	2.6%
Mentor has kept feelings and doubts I shared with him/her in strict confidence.	0.0%	2.6%	3.8%	59.0%	32.1%	1.3%

Two Acceptance and Confirmation items are found in Section IV of the Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale. For the two items in this section, the majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed with both statements. Yet, 32.1% disagreed with the statement “My mentor has asked me for suggestion concerning problems he/she has encountered in their own work environment” and 14.1% posted a neutral response for this item. Nevertheless, the 90% response rate of the participants indicates that the Peer Counselor/Mentor conveyed feelings of respect for the participants as well as sought their



suggestions for issues they faced. Table 19 displays the results of the descriptive analysis for the Acceptance and Confirmation Experiences section of the survey.

Table 19

*Percentage of Acceptance and Confirmation Experiences*

	SD	D	N	A	SA	NA
Mentor has conveyed feelings of respect for me as an individual.	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%	48.7%	50.0%	0.0%
My mentor has asked me for suggestions concerning problems he/she has encountered in their own work environment.	2.6%	29.5%	14.1%	34.6%	16.7%	2.6%

Section IV and VI of the Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale are both one item sections. Section V, Protection Experiences, states “mentor has reduced unnecessary risk that could threaten my academic progress and performance.” For this item, 49.4% of the participants agreed with the statement and 13.8% strongly agreed with the statement. However, while there were no participants who disagreed with the statement, over one-fourth of the participants recorded a neutral response (see Table 20). Section VI, Exposure and Visibility Experiences states “Mentor helped you meet new faculty, peers or administrators that could be useful in your career.” While most participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, a significant %age of participants indicated that they were neutral, meaning they could neither agreed or disagreed with the statement. Table 21 displays the results of data analysis for the Exposure and Visibility item.

Table 20

*Percentage of Protection Experiences*

	SD	D	N	A	SA	NA
Mentor has reduced unnecessary risks that could threaten my academic progress and performance.	0.0%	0.0%	25.3%	49.4%	13.8%	1.1%

Table 21

*Percentage of Exposure and Visibility Experiences*

	SD	D	N	A	SA	NA
Mentor helped you meet new faculty, peers, or administrators that could be useful in your career.	0.0%	0.0%	28.2%	55.1%	15.4%	1.3%

Section VII of the Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale has two items designed to examine the Friendship Experiences of the participants who had a peer counselor/peer mentor. For the two items in this section, most participants agreed with the statements however, significant percentages disagreed with the statements. Slightly over 10% of the participants disagreed with the statement that said, “My mentor has invited me to lunch or social functions outside of the academic setting” and nearly 12% of the participants disagreed with the statement that stated, “My mentor has interacted with me socially outside of the work or the academic setting.” Nevertheless, as evidenced by the response of over 80% of the participants, the peer counselor/peer mentor, in most cases, created positive friendship experiences for the participants. Table 22 displays the results of data analysis of the Friendship Experiences survey items.

Table 22

*Percentage of Friendship Experiences*

	SD	D	N	A	SA	NA
My mentor has invited me to lunch or social functions outside of the academic setting. (Friendship)	0.0%	10.3%	3.8%	57.7%	26.9%	1.3%
My mentor has interacted with me socially outside of the work or the academic setting. (Friendship)	0.0%	11.5%	7.7%	56.4%	24.4%	0.0%

Items 21 – 30 in section VIII of the Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale examined the participants’ satisfaction and assimilation into the university environment based on their Peer Counselor/Peer Mentor experience. Of the responses received for six of the satisfaction and assimilation items listed below, at least 82% of the participants’ either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements. Further, respondents for these six statements indicated a neutral response with percentages ranging from 6.9% to 18.4%.

- It was not difficult to find a mentor at my current institution.
- The majority of experiences with my mentor were positive.
- I am satisfied with the relationship with my mentor.
- I felt more connected to campus as a result of encouragement and advice from my mentor.
- Positive experiences within the mentoring relationship helped to develop a closer bond between me and my mentor.
- Negative experiences hindered the growth of the mentoring relationship.

Two statements recorded lower %ages for agree/strongly agree. Participants (79.3 %) agreed/strongly agreed that “mentoring experiences made a significant

contribution to my academic performance and integration into the school environment,” 8% were neutral. For the item, “my mentor had a significant impact on my decision to stay in school and graduate,” 67.8% agreed or strongly agreed, 5.7% disagreed and 13.8% indicated they were neutral. For the two remaining items in section 7, participants reported either disagree or strongly disagree. For the statement, “the mentoring program helped me make a successful transition to the university,” 86.2% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with 1.1% reported neutral or agree. Table 23 displays the results of data analysis for the Satisfaction and Assimilation Experiences survey items.

Table 23

*Percentages of Satisfaction and Assimilation Experiences*

	SD	D	N	A	SA	NA
My mentor had a significant impact on my decision to stay in school and graduate.	0.0%	5.7%	13.8%	48.3%	19.5%	1.1%
It was not difficult to find a mentor at my current institution.	0.0%	0.0%	6.9%	49.4%	32.2%	1.1%
I experienced negative outcomes during my mentoring relationship.	25.3%	55.2%	2.3%	3.4%	2.3%	1.1%
The majority of experiences with my mentor were positive.	0.0%	4.6%	18.4%	44.8%	20.7%	1.1%
I am satisfied with the relationship with my mentor.	0.0%	0.0%	8.0%	54.0%	26.4%	8.0%
I felt more connected to campus as a result of encouragement and advice from my mentor.	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	47.1%	40.2%	0.0%
Mentoring experiences made a significant contribution to my academic performance and integration into the school environment.	0.0%	0.0%	8.0%	57.5%	21.8%	1.1%
Positive experiences within the mentoring relationship helped to develop a closer bond between me and my mentor.	0.0%	1.1%	8.0%	55.2%	25.3%	0.0%
Negative experiences hindered the growth of the mentoring relationship.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	37.9%	48.3%	1.1%
The mentoring program helped me make a successful transition to the university.	37.9%	48.3%	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%	0.0%

The concluding section analyzed in the Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale to answer Question 2 is section IX, Race Attribute Experiences. In this section, participants were asked to rate the following three statements on a scale of one to five ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

- The race of my mentor had an impact on the mentoring/mentee experiences.
- Race was a primary factor when considering a mentor.
- Race was a primary factor when considering a mentor.

For these three statements, response for agree/strongly agree ranged from 61.6% to 43.6% to 66.6%, respectively. The remaining responses, 23.1%, 25.6% and 17.9%, respectively, disagreed or strongly disagreed that the race was a major contributing factor. Furthermore, 15.4%, 26.9% and 14.1% recorded neutral response. While the average percentage of the agree/strongly agree was responses was 57.2%, it appears that the race of the mentor does impact the mentoring/mentee experience, race was a primary factor when considering a mentor and a greater bond is created when the Peer Counselor/Peer Mentor and Counselee/Mentee are of the same race. Table 24 displays the results of the analysis for the Race Attribute Experience survey items.

Table 24

*Percentage of Race Attribute Experiences*

	SD	D	N	A	SA	NA
The race of my mentor had an impact on the mentoring/mentee experiences.	9.0%	14.1%	15.4%	38.5%	23.1%	0.0%
Race was a primary factor when considering a mentor.	11.5%	14.1%	26.9%	29.5%	14.1%	2.6%
Having a mentor of the same race creates a greater bond between the mentor and mentee.	3.8%	14.1%	14.1%	41.0%	25.6%	1.3%

**Research Question Three**

What is the relationship between peer counseling/mentoring and academic performance as measured by students' grade point average?

The participants' peer counseling/mentoring experience was measured with section II, Racial and Mentoring Experience Scale, of the survey instrument used in this study. The Racial and Mentoring Experience Scale examines the following 10 areas of the participants' peer counseling/mentoring experience: Coaching, Role Model, Counseling, Acceptance, Protection, Exposure, Friendship, Satisfaction, Race Attributes, and Persistence. For each of these areas, participants' responses were analyzed to obtain a mean score for each area (see Table 25). In addition to the mean scores for each area, an overall mean score for their peer counseling/mentoring experience was computed. This overall mean score represents an overall measurement of the participants' peer counseling experience. The analyses computed to answer research question three used these mean scores as predictor variables and the participants' self-reported grade point average as the criterion variable to determine if relationships existed between peer

counseling/mentoring experiences and academic performance. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used first to determine if relationships existed and then to determine the magnitude of the relationships. For this study, the magnitude of the obtained correlation coefficients was interpreted as depicted in Table 26.



Table 25

*Descriptive Statistics of Variables*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>N</b>
Overall	3.90	.41	78
Coaching	4.31	.47	78
Role Model	4.30	.50	78
Counseling	4.24	.67	78
Acceptance	3.87	.67	78
Protection	3.82	.79	78
Exposure	4.23	.75	78
Friendship	3.96	.85	78
Satisfaction	4.03	.48	78
Race Attributes	3.60	.99	78
Persistence	3.57	.55	78
		<u>1.81</u>	<u>75</u>

Table 26

*Interpretation of Correlation Strength*

<b>Value of r</b>	<b>Strength of Association</b>
.80	Very strong
.60	Strong
.40	Moderate
.20	Low
.00	Not related

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the overall peer counseling/mentoring score and the participants' self-reported grade point average. There was no correlation between the two variables,  $r = -.043$ ,  $n = 75$ ,  $p = .716$ . Therefore, it appears that participants' perceptions of the overall peer counseling/mentoring experience were not related to their self-reported grade point average. As a follow-up to this analysis, additional analyses were performed to determine if any of the participants' perceptions of the 10 areas of Peer Counseling/Mentoring assessed were related to their self-reported grade point average. The results of this series of analyses also failed to identify any significant relationships between participants' scores on the 10 areas of Peer Counseling/Mentoring and their self-reported grade point average. Therefore, it appears that participants' perceptions of their experiences in the 10 assessed areas of their peer counseling/mentoring experience was not related to their self-reported grade point average. Consequently, the answer to research Question three is that there is no relationship between peer

counseling/mentoring and academic performance. Table 27 displays the results of data analysis used to answer Research Question three.

Table 27

*Pearson Correlation*

	Coaching g	Role Model	Counselin g	Acceptance	Protection	Exposure	Friendship	Satisfaction	Race Attributes	Persistence	GPA
Coaching	1										
Role	.749**	1									
Model											
Counseling	.708**	.749**	1								
Acceptance	.453**	.409**		1							
Protection	.406**	.318**	.472**	.544**	1						
Exposure	.531**	.522**	.518**	.369**	.400**	1					
Friendship	.315**	.361**	.337**	.377**	.261**	.342**	1				
Satisfaction	.683**	.698**	.735**	.606**	.559**	.674**	.558**	1			
Race	.083	.046	.201	-.051	-.024	.227*	.067	.095	1		
Attributes											
Persistence	.174	.072	.147	.249*	.205	.087	.105	.143	-.128	1	
GPA	.016	.057	.065	-.051	-.088	.085	.020	.484**	.008	-.084	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

#### Research Question Four

Is there a statistically significant difference in self-reported grade point average between undergraduates who utilize peer counseling/mentoring programs and those who do not?

To answer Research Question 4, a one-way ANOVA was computed to compare grade point averages for participants who utilized peer counseling/mentoring and participants who did not utilize peer counseling/mentoring. There was a significant effect for peer counseling/mentoring utilization [ $F(1, 162) = 4.65, p = .033$ ]. Participants who utilized the Peer Counseling/Mentoring program had a higher self-reported grade point average ( $m = 3.17, sd = .41$ ) than participants who did not utilize Peer Counseling/Mentoring program ( $m = 3.03, sd = .42$ ). Therefore, it appears that the Peer Counseling/Mentoring program had a positive effect on participants' grade point average. Table 28 and 29 display the results of the analysis of grade point averages by participation.

Table 28

*Grade Point Average by Participation Descriptive Statistics*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Utilized Peer Counseling/Mentoring	80	3.17	.41	.05
Did Not Utilize Peer Counseling/Mentoring	84	3.03	.42	.05
Total	164	3.09	.421	.03

Table 29

*Grade Point Average by Participation ANOVA*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.81	1	.806	4.65	.033
Within Groups	28.08	162	.173		
Total	28.89	163			

**Research Question Five**

Are there statistically significant differences in grade point average by select demographic variables, e.g. gender, age, marital status, enrollment status, for African American students who participated in the program?

To answer Research Question 5, a series of one-way ANOVAs were computed to determine if there were significant differences in participants' grade point averages by select demographic variables. The first ANOVA computed compared grade point averages by participants' gender. There was no significant effect of gender on participants' grade point averages [ $F(1, 73) = .089, p = .767$ ]. Therefore, there are no significant differences in grade point averages between male and female participants. Tables 30 and 31 display the results of the analysis of grade point averages by participants' gender.

Table 30

*Descriptive Statistics for Grade Point Average by Gender*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Male	50	3.51	1.70	.24
Female	25	3.37	2.05	.41
Total	75	3.46	1.81	.21

Table 31

*ANOVA Results for Grade Point Averages by Gender*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.294	1	.294	.089	.767
Within Groups	242.134	73	3.317		
Total	242.427	74			

A one-way ANOVA was computed to compare grade point averages by participants' age. There was no significant effect of age on participants' grade point averages [ $F(3, 71) = .234, p = .873$ ]. Therefore, there are no significant differences in grade point averages among participants of different ages. Tables 32 and 33 display the results of the analysis of grade point averages by participants' age.

Table 32

*Descriptive Statistics for Grade Point Average by Age*

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
1.00	53	3.3825	1.68492	.23144
2.00	17	3.7812	2.39969	.58201
3.00	4	3.2075	.31341	.15670
5.00	1	3.2500		
Total	75	3.4617	1.80999	.20900

Table 33

*ANOVA Results for Grade Point Averages by Age*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.371	3	.790	.234	.873
Within Groups	240.056	71	3.381		
Total	242.427	74			

A one-way ANOVA was computed to compare grade point averages by participants' marital status. There was no significant effect of marital status on participants' grade point averages [ $F(1, 73) = .257, p = .614$ ]. Therefore, there are no significant differences in grade point averages between married and single participants.

Tables 34 and 35 display the results of the analysis of grade point averages by participants' marital status.



Table 34

*Descriptive Statistics for Grade Point Average by Marital Status*

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
1.00	68	3.4959	1.89663	.23000	3.0368	3.9550	1.90	15.00
2.00	7	3.1300	.30659	.11588	2.8464	3.4136	2.75	3.50
Total	75	3.4617	1.80999	.20900	3.0453	3.8782	1.90	15.00

Table 35

*ANOVA Results for Grade Point Averages by Marital Status*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.850	1	.850	.257	.614
Within Groups	241.578	73	3.309		
Total	242.427	74			

The final one-way ANOVA was computed to compare grade point averages by participants' school enrollment status. There was no significant effect of enrollment status on participants' grade point averages [ $F(1, 72) = .293, p = .590$ ]. Therefore, there are no significant differences in grade point averages between full time student participants and part time student participants. Tables 36 and 37 display the results of the analysis of grade point averages by participants' enrollment status.

Table 36

*Descriptive Statistics for Grade Point Average by School Enrollment Status*

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
1.00	72	3.4858	1.84357	.21727	3.0526	3.9191	1.90	15.00
2.00	2	2.7750	.03536	.02500	2.4573	3.0927	2.75	2.80
Total	74	3.4666	1.82184	.21178	3.0445	3.8887	1.90	15.00

Table 37

*ANOVA Results for Grade Point Averages by School Enrollment Status*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.983	1	.983	.293	.590
Within Groups	241.312	72	3.352		
Total	242.295	73			

Part Three of the survey contained four open-ended questions that related to the Counselee/Mentee experiences with their Peer Counselor/Mentor. These specific questions were provided in order to allow the counselees/mentees to give their thoughts in their own words regarding the Peer Counseling/Mentoring program and to make recommendations on how to improve the Peer Counseling/Mentoring program. Based on the participants (N=57) response to the question “How did the peer counselor/mentor experience contributed to their freshman experience”, the responses were varied, yet positive. Several participants noted that because of their PC/M their freshman experience

was positive, meaningful, exciting, created a smooth transition, things were made easier and gave them a sense of belonging. Other participants reported that they had someone they could relate to, talk to, and receive good advice from. The remaining responses from the participants indicated that the contribution to their freshman experience by their PC/M was positive. One student commented, “As a freshman the peer counselor/mentor experience allowed me the opportunity to meet new people and develop relationships that helped me stay in college. None of my immediate family had ever been to college and although my family supported me I had no one to talk to or give me guidance with the new situations and experiences I was going through. The program gave me a wealth of people and experiences to help me during my freshman year.”

Another student commented, “Counseling and mentoring kept me on time for class, it gave me great study skills and tips, showed me how to better manage my time, how to prioritize tasks so that I may get more things done in a small amount of time.”

Another student’s positive experience was captured in the statement, “It provided a safe haven of sorts by providing support and guidance for adjusting to the campus environment.”

Similar positive comments recorded were, “It created a bridge between high school and college that helped me to believe that I could be successful at a major university.”

“Always there for me if I needed them. Definitely helped me on deciding my major and academics.”

“It kept me engaged with fresh information, a person to talk to when I needed to vent or had frustrations about something, or felt homesick. My mentor helped eased the anxiety.”

“I was able to meet new people and establish meaningful relationship with peers and faculty.”

“It helped me to get better acquainted with the university and people.”

The freshman year experience can be peaceful or chaotic depending upon the characteristics and the qualifications of the PC/M. Thusly, the qualifications and characteristics of the PC/M are very important in helping students to navigate the campus environment. The participants (N=56) in this study, used adjectives such as friendly, smart, hardworking, determined, personable, dependable, approachable, professional, knowledgeable, energetic, young, compassionate, resourceful, kind, trustworthy, fun, honest, transparent, nice, serious and intelligent to describe their PC/M. One participant commented, “My counselor being positive, encouraging, motivating, and inspiring contributed to my great experience as a freshman.”

Another participant stated that, “My peer counselor/mentor was a graduating senior during my freshman year. She was able to help me navigate the mountain of information and procedures of college life, such as financial aid, class registration, utilizing academic advisor, on campus housing, work study, roommate issues. My peer counselor/mentor always made herself available to help me regardless of how simple of an issue was having.”

Many participants noted that their PC/M was a great listener, who was willing to share their experiences and opinions. “My mentor was very well spoken and open with

her opinions and ideas in regard to my success. She never made me feel like a failure. She'd had a long history of working with younger students to put them on a path to success.” Other participants commented that their PC/M instructed them on how to “carry myself”, “stay focused”, and “focus on the bottom line – get an education and graduate while still stressing the importance of social engagement.”

When asked “would they recommend the Peer Counselor/Mentor Program to other African American undergraduate students, the participants (N=67) overwhelmingly responded yes, absolutely, most definitely. Some of the respondents stated,

“I would highly recommend this program to other African American students.”

“Yes, I have done it with family and friends that are currently or have been enrolled to seek out their counselor for help. I was happy that I was a part of the organization.”

“Yes, most definitely it's so easy to be intimidated and to get lost in the fray.”

The participants in this study were cognizant of their presence or the lack thereof on the campus. For them, it was obvious there were issues that needed to be addressed to improve the experience of African American undergraduate students enrolled at the university. In responding to the question, “What recommendation would you give to the University or your academic department to help improve the experiences of African American undergraduate students enrolled at a predominantly White institution,” the response echoed repeatedly by the participants was: The University/Academic Departments must “be sensitive and understanding of the needs and cultural differences of minority/African American students”. One participant stated, “Acknowledge the culture differences and similarities between all ethnic backgrounds and develop ways to

show appreciation for all students as a whole.” Another stated, “Don't assume that White students and African American students are all the same. There is a completely different way of thinking. Where the experience may come naturally for White students, it may be something totally new and foreign to African American students. Plan events that cater to the interests of those particular students. As far as academics, don't be boring. If staff are excited about their roles and educators are interesting in their classrooms, they will definitely garner a better response from African American students, which will improve the experience for not only the African American students, but the University as a whole.”

Several participants commented on the lack of African American professors and stated that more should be hired/employed. One participant stated, “I would recommend that they put programs and people in place who can relate to their African American students and the issues that they may bring to school. It would be good if more African American professors were hired so we can see someone in the classroom who looks like us and may better understand how we feel and what we have to deal with.” Another commented, “More African American professors would help students to feel even more comfortable in the classroom if there were more professors who looked like them.”

Regarding the Peer Counselor/Mentor program, participants' recommendations were:

“Continuing to have African American peer counselors who will take the time out of their daily life to help African American students. It's good for African American students to see and have successful African American counselors.”

“Perhaps placing more mentors in each department of the schools to help more from an academic standpoint.”

“Be sure to continue to have Peer Counselor/Peer Ambassador program to help engage African American students. Developing a mentee/mentor relationship early in life is key and even into adulthood it's very important in the professional world. To have a mentor as an African American student can help build a solid foundation for that student moving forward in their college career, as well as professional career.”

“Allow mentors the opportunity to continue to get training in these rolls (more hours); with the changes in the world today, more students have bigger issues with random things that were not a factor during my time at the University! Allow more input in HOW the support should be structured. Increase more activities and self-help seminars (including those on finances, i.e. avoiding debt!).”

“I would recommend that the university educate potential students about the program during the recruitment process. I was unaware of the program before I received the first contact from my counselor/mentor. I feel that knowledge of the program would help to alleviate some of the fears of students and parents associated with going to college.”

### **Summary of Results**

This chapter presented the statistical results of this research study. The research design used to analyze the data was quantitative with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 23.0 being utilized to analyze the collected data. Descriptive statistics, correlational and causal comparative statistical tests were utilized to analyze the data and answer the research questions in the study.

The results regarding the peer counseling/mentoring experiences of African American students involved in a formal undergraduate Peer Counseling/Mentoring Program indicated that there were four experiences which led to their persistence: (a) The events/activities hosted by their department, (b) the experiences with their academic department, (c) the institution's welcoming of their cultural differences, and (d) their experiences with the faculty and staff of the entire university. Results also indicated that for the ten areas of Peer Counselor/Mentor experiences, the majority of the experiences were positive. As a result of the data analyzed, it was found that: (1) that there is no relationship between Peer Counseling/Mentoring and academic performance, (2) the Peer Counseling/Mentoring program had a positive effect on participants' grade point average and, (3) there were no significant differences in grade point averages among participants' gender, age, marital status or enrollment status.

Four open-ended questions provided further insight on the participants' Peer Counselor/Mentor experiences as they elaborated on positive aspects of the program and what they believed would make the program better. They further gave greater details on the qualities/characteristics of the peer counselor/mentor that were beneficial to the relationship. Supporting these findings were studies conducted by Ward, Thomas and Disch (2014), Straus, Marquez, and Feldman (2013) and Hatfield (2011). These researchers concluded that the most desirable characteristics of Peer Counselors/Mentors was their honesty, being active listeners, and having the ability to advise/assist in identifying support systems. The participants expressed enthusiastically that they would recommend the Peer Counseling/Mentoring program to incoming students.



## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

Over the past years, African American students' matriculation, retention and graduation rates at predominantly white institutions has received considerable coverage. The attention given to this subject is a direct result of the increase in African Americans entering predominantly white universities yet do not persist to graduation (Kolodner, 2016; Tate, 2017). Researchers have concluded that even though the graduation rates for this particular student population is improving slowly, this population is still not on par with their Caucasian counterparts (Shapiro, Dundar, & Huie, 2017; Camera, 2016). Nationally, the African American graduation rate is 22 % below their white peers and, in fact, the "gap between blacks and whites is growing wider not narrower" (Kolodner, 2016; Woo, 2017).

With these statistics, it is obvious that African American students are facing challenges that are hindering their matriculation, retention and graduation rates. The challenges faced by this student population, in some instances, may be a result of the student's inability to make the transition to university life, the culture of the university, feelings of isolation and lack of academic preparedness, to name a few (Booker & Brevard, 2017; Wood, 2017). Hence, there is a great need for university administrators to create a supportive environment with programs and resources developed specifically to

help African American students overcome the challenges that may hinder their success (Wood, 2017).

Several researchers have suggested that mentoring programs serve as a viable resource in the matriculation, retention, and graduation of African American students on predominantly white campuses (Gibson, 2014; Harris, 2012; Lowenstein, 2011; Minor, 2007). This research study surveyed African American seniors enrolled at Mississippi State University to examine their experiences with a Peer Counseling/Mentoring program, and the relationship between peer counseling/mentoring and academic performance. Of interest in this study was how this particular group of students interpreted their peer counselor/mentor experience at a predominantly white institution. The data and information gathered were comprised of selected variables (e.g. age, sex, marital status, utilization of the peer counselor/mentor and self-reported grade point average) which were believed to correlate with the participants' persistence and the relationship between peer counseling/mentoring and academic performance.

Based on the research questions in this study, the researcher was seeking to find out what factors contributed to the persistence of this student population, what was the peer counseling/mentoring experience, the relationship between peer counseling/mentoring and academic achievement based on grade point average. The researcher also sought to examine the difference in grade point average of those who utilized the peer counseling/mentoring program and those who did not. Finally, the researcher examined select demographic variables to determine if there were any effect on the grade point average.

The research questions guiding this study utilized a quantitative research design with all five questions using descriptive statistics. Correlation coefficients were obtained from the results to answer research question three, which sought to determine if a relationship existed between peer counseling/mentoring and academic performance as measured by grade point average and then to discover the magnitude of the relationship. Questions four and five were computed utilizing a one-way ANOVA to compare grade point averages for participants who utilized their peer counselor/mentor and those who did not and to determine if there were significant differences in participants' grade point average by select demographic variables.

Participants in the research study completed a three-part survey instrument. Part I of the survey instrument was created to collect demographic and enrollment data and discover which participants utilized their peer counselor/mentor and which participants did not. Part II, the Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale, was created to collect data that examined the participants peer counseling/mentoring experiences, factors that contributed to their persistence, the relationship between grade point average and academic performance, difference in grade point average of those who utilized their peer counselor/mentor and those who did not. Part III of the survey instrument was an open-ended questionnaire designed to gather information regarding the participants' experiences. One hundred-seventy-seven African American seniors from Mississippi State University completed and returned the survey instrument used in this study.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study indicated that of the six survey items examining persistence, four experiences seemed to have led to the participants' persistence. To

determine which factors contributed to the participants' persistence, descriptive statistics were used. These contributing factors suggest that the factors relating to the university's environment, culturally and academically, and the interactions with their academic department and faculty and staff were beneficial. Further, experiences were significant and gives insight into areas of importance for this student population as these factors are directly related to areas overseen by university administration.

The peer counselor/mentor experience of participants was obtained via a quantitative analysis of the survey instrument, Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale. The items on this survey instrument was categorized into ten areas. The ten areas of the mentoring experience included: coaching, role model, counseling, acceptance and confirmation, protection, exposure and visibility, friendship, satisfaction and assimilation, race attribute, and persistence. Based on the participants' responses, the findings suggest that when the peer counselors/mentors share their experiences with their counselees/mentees, the coaching experience was both positive and helpful.

The results for the role modeling experience for the counselees/mentees found that the participants both admired and respected their Peer Counselor/Mentor. Further, the data revealed that the Peer Counselor/Mentor held attitudes and values that were similar to their own. These statistics indicated that the role modeling experience was beneficial to the counselees/mentees.

For participants in the study, the counseling experience was positive and meaningful. The findings indicate that the counseling interactions proved beneficial for the counselees/mentees when they received encouragement and empathy from their Peer Counselor/Mentor. Further, the counselees/mentees thrived on the attention shown to

them during conversations with their Peer Counselor/Mentor which were held in strict confidence. These results agree with research conducted by Snowden and Hardy (2012) who found that when mentees were encouraged and given praise by their Peer Counselors/Mentors, their confidence levels were enhanced.

The two items relevant to the acceptance and confirmation experience for the counselees/mentees indicated that the Peer Counselor/Mentor conveyed feelings of respect for and sought suggestions for issues they, as Peer Counselors/Mentors, faced from their counselees/mentees. Such behavior conducted by Peer Counselors/Mentors is critical in the breaking down of barriers between the Peer Counselor/Mentor and the Counselee/Mentee which in turn creates opportunities for strengthening the relationship between the two and the development of greater confidence by the counselees/mentees (Snowden & Hardy, 2012).

Based on the results in this study, counselees/mentees agreed that their Peer Counselor/Mentor had reduced unnecessary risks that could threaten their academic progress and performance indicating that their protection experience was meaningful. The exposure and visibility item on the survey instrument revealed that even though most of the participants agreed that their Peer Counselor//Mentor had helped them to meet new faculty, peers and administrators there was a significant %age who were recorded a neutral response.

Friendship experiences data revealed that the participants interacted with their counselees/mentees outside of the university setting. These interactions created positive friendship experiences. The participants' responses on their satisfaction and assimilation experiences indicated that this experience was positive and meaningful. These results

indicated that the positive interactions with their Peer Counselor/Mentor contributed greatly to their ability to connect with the university and persist. Other research studies reveal that counselees/mentees who interact positively with their Peer Counselor/Mentor are prone to have academic success which in turn leads to persistence and degree completion (Booker & Brevard, 2017; Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford & Pifer, 2017). Even with these results, it was interesting to note that even as the participants agreed with most of the items, a strong majority disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that “the Peer Counselor/Mentoring program helped their transition to the university.” However, these findings do not support more current research. For example, in a study conducted by Booker and Brevard (2017), their findings indicated that Peer Counseling/Mentoring relationships support a successful transition for African American students into the university setting.

The results of the responses regarding race of the mentor agrees with the findings of a study conducted by Blake-Beard, Bayne Crosby, and Muller (2011). These researchers found that when counselees/mentees have a mentor of their own race they are more likely to persist and graduate. Earlier research conducted by Kincey (2007) found that having a Peer Counselor/Mentor of the same race made bonding between the Peer Counselor/Mentor and counselees/mentees easier.

A question of this study dealt with whether a relationship existed between peer counseling/mentoring and academic performance as measured by the participant’s grade point average. Initially, the analysis of the data examined the ten areas of the participants’ peer counseling/mentoring experience to obtain a mean score for each area. These mean scores were then used to determine if relationships existed between peer

counseling/mentoring experiences and academic performance. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to determine if a relationship existed and the magnitude of the relationship between the ten areas of the Peer Counseling/Mentoring experience and grade point average. The results of the analysis indicated that the participants' Peer Counselor/Mentor experiences were not related to the self-reported grade point average. Further analysis indicated that there was not relationship between Peer Counselor/Mentor and academic performance. This finding was determined by Pearson Product Moment correlation,  $r = -.043$ ,  $n = 75$ ,  $p = .716$ . These findings are contrary to what has been supported by previous researchers (Crisp et al., 2017; Hatfield, 2011; Snowden & Hardy, 2012) who suggested that one of the greatest benefits of mentoring is its effect on academic performance. Earlier research conducted by Fox, Stevenson, Conelly, Duff and Dunlop (2010) found that those students who participated in a Peer Counseling/Mentoring program achieved higher grade point averages than those students who did not participate in a Peer Counseling/Mentoring program.

A statistically significant difference was also found to exist between those participants who utilized their Peer Counselor/Mentor and those who did not. The results indicated that those who utilized their Peer Counselor/Mentor had a higher self-reported grade point average ( $m = 3.17$ ,  $sd = .41$ ) than those who did not utilize their Peer Counselor/Mentor ( $m = 3.03$ ,  $sd = .42$ ). The findings indicate that the use of a Peer Counselor/Mentor directly affects the grade point average of the participants in a positive manner.

Further results of this study were find via the analyzing of selected demographic variables. The analysis of the selected variables found that there was no statistically

significant difference in grade point averages and the selected variables – gender, age, marital status and enrollment status. The absence of a relationship between the variables and grade point average are supported by research conducted by Amuda, Bulus, and Joseph (2016) who found that age and marital status had no significance on academic performance. Earlier research conducted also concluded that gender, age, and marital status posed no significant differences in grade point averages (Blake-Beard et al., 2011); Thomas, Raynor, & Al-Marzooqi, 2012).

Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire with four open-ended questions concerning their peer counselor/mentor experience. The comments made by the participants indicated that the Peer Counseling/Mentoring program was definitely a program that contributed to their success. The comments also indicated that if the University wants to continue to retain and graduate their African American student population, it is important that more African American professors be hired. Because of positive experiences with the Peer Counselor/Mentor program, the majority concluded that they would recommend the program to incoming students.

### **Conclusion**

Implementation of retention programs at institutions of higher learning for African American students has grown over the years in response to the increase of this student population onto predominantly White campuses. As these students arrive on campus, various challenges have made it difficult for them to successfully matriculate and graduate from these institutions. In response to these challenges, institutions of higher learning have begun to establish support mechanisms/programs designed to ensure



the successful matriculation, retention and graduation of their African American student population.

According to the findings in this study, Peer Counseling/Mentoring programs is a support mechanism that provides beneficial service to support the persistence and retention of African American students at predominantly White institutions. Thusly, if administrators desire their students, particularly African American, to graduate at rates on par with their Caucasian counterparts then strong consideration should be given to the implementation of Peer Counselor/Mentor programs. Throughout the years, studies have continued to espouse Peer Counseling/Mentoring programs as an effective program for the successful persistence, retention and graduation of African American students (Clark, Andrews, & Gorman, 2013; Collings, Swanson, & Watkins, 2014; Gibson, 2014; Snowden & Hardy, 2017).

Based on the experiences of the participants in this study, the Peer Counselor/Mentor program provided participants with a peer who understood their challenges and with whom they were able to establish a meaningful relationship. Participants who received the Peer Counseling/Mentoring support communicated that their experiences contributed to their desire to persist, to become engaged on campus and to develop meaningful relationships with faculty and staff. The participants also communicated that because of their positive experiences, they would recommend that incoming students utilize the Peer Counseling/Mentoring program. The findings of the study indicate that even as the counselees/mentees establish relationships with their Peer Counselor/Mentor, their confidence and connection to the university cultural/climate is

strengthen and this is another benefit that solidifies the effectiveness of the Peer Counseling/Mentoring program.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results of this research study, there were several recommendations, as well as potential areas for future studies. The response rate for the study was extremely low, hence the experience of those students who did not complete the survey could differ from those who did complete the study. A probable reason for the low return is that only graduating African American seniors were surveyed. Future studies might be to survey students across all classifications, e.g. sophomore, junior, and not limit to one classification to get a better perspective and reach more students.

Based on the four open-ended questions in the survey instrument, it was perceived that greater information could have been obtained from the participants if some of the items on the Racial and Mentoring Experiences had been presented as an open-ended question. Future studies might be used to create an open-ended questionnaire to allow participants to expound on their experiences thereby giving greater insight into their experiences. It is recommended that further study be conducted utilizing a qualitative research methodology.

The research study provided insight into the participants' desire to see more African American professors in the classroom. As institutions of higher learning seek to increase the retention rate of African American students, it would be valuable if they employed more African American faculty and staff. Also, future studies might be used to examine the students' perceptions of their relationship with faculty and its effect on retention and academic success. This study would help administration to design and

implement a mentoring program that is geared toward pairing faculty/staff with students. The mentoring program could be extended to include alumni of the University.

Another recommendation would be to examine other experiences and perspective that may contribute to low retention rates for African American students. It would be meaningful to focus on experiences/factors such as socioeconomic status, poverty, first generation student, and family support and the impact they may have on retention.

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APPENDIX A

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO USE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

April 9, 2014

Dr. Raymond Noe  
828 Fisher Hall  
Fisher College of Business  
2100 Neil Avenue  
Columbus, OH 43210

Dear Dr. Noe:

My name is Eva Maria White. I am a doctoral student at Mississippi State University currently pursuing a degree in Instructional Systems and Workforce Development. The reason I am writing is because I am seeking your permission to use the *Mentoring Functions Scale* as part of my dissertation. My research involves looking at the mentoring experiences of African American students enrolled at a predominantly White institution to determine if mentoring has an impact on student persistence and retention for this select group of students. In addition, my research will consider the relationship between mentoring and academic performance for this particular student population.

After reviewing the items included in your scale from your study of *An Investigation of the Determinants of Successful Assigned Mentoring Relationships*, it seems that this questionnaire could provide greater insight into the mentoring relationships for African American students sampled in my study to determine the quality and extent of mentoring received at their institution. Therefore, I am asking for your permission to reproduce and modify this scale for the selected population in my research.

If permission is granted, please advise whether additional permissions will be needed and also scoring criteria for the requested instrument as well as information on where additional copies may be obtained beyond the study indicated above.

Thank you so much for assisting me with my research.

Sincerely,

Eva Maria White



October 8, 2014

Dr. Sundra D. Kinsey  
Florida A&M University  
Tallahassee, FL

Dear Dr. Kinsey:

My name is Eva Maria White. I am a doctoral student at Mississippi State University currently pursuing a degree in Instructional Systems and Workforce Development. The reason I am writing is because I am seeking your permission to use the *Racial and Mentoring Functions Scale* as part of my dissertation. My research involves looking at the mentoring experiences of African American students enrolled at a predominantly White institution to determine if mentoring has an impact on student persistence and retention for this select group of students. In addition, my research will consider the relationship between mentoring and academic performance for this particular student population.

After reviewing the items included in the scale from your study, it seems that this questionnaire could provide greater insight into the mentoring relationships for African American students sampled in my study to determine the quality and extent of mentoring received at their institution. Therefore, I am asking for your permission to reproduce and modify this scale for the selected population in my research.

If permission is granted, please advise whether additional permissions will be needed and also scoring criteria for the requested instrument as well as information on where additional copies may be obtained beyond the study indicated above.

Thank you so much for assisting me with my research.

Sincerely,

Eva Maria White

## APPENDIX B

### APPROVAL FROM RESEARCHERS TO USE SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

---

Noe, Raymond A. <noe.22@fisher.osu.edu>  
To: Eva Maria White <whiteevamaria@gmail.com>

Sun, Apr 13, 2014 at 8:15 PM

Hi Eva:

You have my permission to use the mentoring functions scale in your dissertation. No additional permissions are necessary.

Ray

---

---

Kincey, Sandra <sandra.kincey@famu.edu>  
To: Eva Maria White <whiteevamaria@gmail.com>

Wed, Oct 8, 2014 at 8:06 AM

You are more than welcome to use the survey. I wish you well in your doctoral studies.

Sandra D. Kincey, Ph.D.  
Director of Program Quality  
Office of Institutional Effectiveness  
Florida A&M University  
305 33rd South  
Tallahassee, FL 32307  
(850) 599-8316



APPENDIX C

LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN PILOT STUDY

Dear Participant:

You are invited to participate in a research study titled “Peer Counseling/Mentoring and Its Impact on the Academic Success and Retention of Students of Color at a Predominantly White Institution” conducted by Eva Maria White, Department of Instructional Systems and Workforce Development, under the direction of Dr. Linda Cornelius. The purpose of this study is to examine the Peer Counseling/Mentoring experiences of African American students involved in a formal undergraduate peer counseling program for students of color at Mississippi State University. The study will also determine the relationship between the Peer Counseling/Mentoring experience and its relationship to retention and academic success for African American undergraduate students at Mississippi State University. The information sought via this study will serve to continue the collection of data relevant for institutions and administrators in developing effective retention strategies for African American students at predominantly White institutions. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research at Mississippi State University has approved this study. If you have any concerns and/or questions regarding your rights as a research subject in this study, you may contact the Mississippi State University Office for Regulatory Compliance at 662-325-5220.

Participants in this study will consist of all African American seniors enrolled at Mississippi State University. However, you are being invited to participate in this preliminary pilot study to assess the clarity of the instruments’ contents. Your completion of this preliminary survey is expected to take a maximum of 20 minutes and is very important to this research. Your participation is strictly voluntary and you may stop the survey at any time.

Please complete the survey assessment form and return by November 31, 2015. Your assistance is extremely valuable to this process, and I want to thank you in advance for taking the time to participate in this pilot study. If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, please contact me at 662-418-5600.

Sincerely,

Eva Maria White  
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D

SURVEY ASSESSMENT FORM FOR PILOT STUDY

APPENDIX E  
PEER COUNSELING/MENTORING SURVEY

Peer Counseling and Its Impact on the Academic Success and Retention of African American Students at a Predominantly White Institution

Pilot Study Survey Instrument Assessment Form

Directions: Please read the directions for each part of the survey instrument attached. If an error appears in the directions, please mark that error on the form. As you review the instrument, please read each statement for clarity, preciseness of instructions, and appropriateness of content. Statements that are unclear, vague, or ambiguous should be listed in the space provided. Please make suggestions and recommendations that would improve the survey instrument in the space entitled “Other Comments”.

Part I. Demographic Data and Enrollment Characteristics

Unclear Statements: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Part II. Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale

Unclear Statements: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



### Part III. Peer Counseling/Mentoring Experiences Questionnaire

Unclear Statements: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Peer Counseling and Its Impact on the Academic Success and Retention of African

American Students at a Predominantly White Institution

**PEER COUNSELING/MENTORING SURVEY**

**DIRECTIONS:**

To answer each question: Click the circle (radio button) besides the answer that best fits your desired response. A black dot will appear in the circle. This indicates that the answer is “chosen”. If you want to change your answer, just click another circle (radio button) and the black dot will appear in your new choice.

**PART I – DEMOGRAPHIC DATA AND ENROLLMENT CHARACTERISTICS**

1. Gender:                                       Male                       Female
2. Age:    \_\_\_\_\_
3. Marital Status:                               Single                       Married                       Divorced                       Separated
4. Enrollment Status:                               Full-time                       Part-time
6. Admission Status:                               Full Time                       Transfer Student
7. Residence:                                       On Campus Housing                       Off Campus Housing
8. Major:    \_\_\_\_\_
9. Numbers of Hours Currently Enrolled In:                      \_\_\_\_\_
10. Current Grade Point Average:                      \_\_\_\_\_
11. Parent’s Educational Level – Did either parent graduate from college:  
 No     Yes, both parents     Yes, father only                       Yes, mother only
12. Employment- Hours Worked Each Week:  
 None-no job                       1-10                       11-20                       21-30                       31-40

13. Effect of Employment on Studies:

No Job  Does not interfere  Takes some time away  Takes a lot of time away

14. College Expenses Met: (scholarship/grants)

None  Very Little  Less than half  About half  More than half  
 All or Nearly All

15. Utilized your Peer Counselor/Mentor  Yes  No

*Students who answer no to question 15 will be directed to the end of the survey and thanked for their participation.*

## PART II – RACIAL AND MENTORING EXPERIENCES SCALE

To answer each question: Click the circle (radio button) besides the answer that best describes the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. A black dot will appear in the circle. This indicates that the answer is “chosen”. If you want to change your answer, just click another circle (radio button) and the black dot will appear in your new choice. 1=Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree, NA = Not Applicable

Racial and Mentoring Experiences Scale		1 SD	2 D	3 N	4 A	5 SA	NA
1.	Mentor has shared history of his/her career with you. (Coaching)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.	Mentor has encouraged me to prepare for advancement. (Coaching)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3.	Mentor shared ideas with you. (Coaching)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4.	Mentor suggested specific strategies for accomplishing academic tasks that could be used to improve academic performance. (Coaching)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5.	Mentor suggested specific strategies for accomplishing academics tasks that could be used to improve academic performance. (Coaching)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.	I agree with my mentor’s attitudes and values regarding education. (Role Model)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7.	I respect and admire my mentor. (Role Model)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8.	My mentor has displayed attitudes and values similar to my own. (Role Model)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9.	Mentor has demonstrated good listening skills in our conversations. (Counseling)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10.	Mentor has discussed my questions or concerns regarding feelings of competence, commitment, isolation, relationship with peer and faculty, and academic achievement. (Counseling)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11.	Mentor has shared personal experiences as an alternative perspective my problems. (Counseling)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12.	Mentor has encouraged me to talk openly about anxiety and fears that detract from my studies. (Counseling)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13.	Mentor has conveyed empathy for the concerns and feelings I have discussed with him/her. (Counseling)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14.	Mentor has kept feelings and doubts I shared with him/her in strict confidence. (Counseling)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15.	Mentor has conveyed feelings of respect for me as an individual. (Acceptance & Confirmation)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16.	My mentor has asked me for suggestions concerning problems he/she has encountered in their own work environment. (Acceptance & Confirmation)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17.	Mentor has reduced unnecessary risks that could threaten my academic progress and performance. (Protection)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18.	Mentor helped you meet new faculty, peers, or administrators that could be useful in your career. (Exposure and Visibility)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18.	Mentor helped you meet new faculty, peers, or administrators that could be useful in your career. (Exposure and Visibility)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19.	My mentor has invited me to lunch or social functions outside of the academic setting. (Friendship)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20.	My mentor has interacted with me socially outside of the work or the academic setting. (Friendship)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21.	My mentor had a significant impact on my decision to stay in school and graduate. (Satisfaction & Assimilation)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22.	It was not difficult to find a mentor at my current institution. (Satisfaction & Assimilation)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23.	I experienced negative outcomes during my mentoring relationship. (Satisfaction & Assimilation)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24.	The majority of experiences with my mentor were positive. (Satisfaction & Assimilation)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
25.	I am satisfied with the relationship with my mentor. (Satisfaction & Assimilation)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
26.	I felt more connected to campus as a result of encouragement and advice from my mentor. (Satisfaction & Assimilation)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
27.	Mentoring experiences made a significant contribution to my academic performance and integration into the school environment. (Satisfaction & Assimilation)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
28.	Positive experiences within the mentoring relationship helped to develop a closer bond between me and my mentor. (Satisfaction & Assimilation)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
29.	Negative experiences hindered the growth of the mentoring relationship (Satisfaction & Assimilation)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
30.	The mentoring program helped me make a successful transition to the university. (Satisfaction & Assimilation)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
31.	The race of my mentor had an impact on the mentoring/mentee experiences. (Race Attribute)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
32.	Race was a primary factor when considering a mentor. (Race Attribute)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
33.	Having a mentor of the same race creates a greater bond between the mentor and mentee. (Race Attribute)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
34.	The events/activities hosted by the department contributed to my persistence at the university. (Persistence)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
35.	The campus environment had an impact on my ability to persist. (Persistence)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
36.	My experiences with the faculty and staff in the university as whole contributed to my academic success. (Persistence)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
37.	My experiences with my academic department contributed to my academic success. (Persistence)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
38.	My institution welcomed my cultural differences. (Persistence)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
39.	There was a point in time at this institution that I felt it would be hard for me to graduate. (Persistence)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### **PART III – PEER COUNSELING/MENTORING EXPERIENCES QUESTIONNAIRE**

Please respond to the following questions based on the experiences that you had with your Peer Counselor/Mentor.

1. How did the Peer Counselor/Mentor experience contribute to your freshman experience?
2. What characteristics and qualifications did your Peer Counselor/Mentor possess that contributed to your freshmen experience?
3. Based on the experiences you had with your Peer Counselor/Mentor would you recommend this program to other African American undergraduate students?
4. What recommendations would you give to the University or your academic department to help improve the experiences of African American undergraduate students enrolled at a predominantly White institution?

APPENDIX F  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL

**Study 16-079: Peer Counseling/Mentoring and Its Impact on the Academic Success and Retention of African American Students at a Predominately White Institution**  
ncobb@orc.msstate.edu <ncobb@orc.msstate.edu>

Thu, Apr 21, 2016 at 4:16 PM

To: emw1@msstate.edu

Cc: ncobb@orc.msstate.edu, lcornelious@colled.msstate.edu

Protocol Title: Peer Counseling/Mentoring and Its Impact on the Academic Success and Retention of African American Students at a Predominately White Institution

Protocol Number: 16-079

Principal Investigator: Ms. Eva White

Date of Determination: 4/21/2016

Qualifying Exempt Category: 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)

Attachments: In email following this notice.

Dear Ms. White:

The Human Research Protection Program has determined the above referenced project exempt from IRB review.

Please note the following:

- Retain a copy of this correspondence for your records.
- An approval stamp is required on all informed consents. You must use the stamped consent form for obtaining consent from participants.
- Only the MSU staff and students named on the application are approved as MSU investigators and/or key personnel for this study.
- The approved study will expire on 12/31/2016, which was the completion date indicated on your application. If additional time is needed, submit a continuation request. (SOP 01-07 Continuing Review of Approved Applications)
- Any modifications to the project must be reviewed and approved by the HRPP prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project.
- Per university requirement, all research-related records (e.g. application materials, letters of support, signed consent forms, etc.) must be retained and available for audit for a period of at least 3 years after the research has ended.
- It is the responsibility of the investigator to promptly report events that may represent unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This determination is issued under the Mississippi State University's OHRP Federal wide Assurance #FWA00000203. All forms and procedures can be found on the HRPP website: [www.orc.msstate.edu](http://www.orc.msstate.edu).

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at [ncobb@orc.msstate.edu](mailto:ncobb@orc.msstate.edu) or call [662-325-5220](tel:662-325-5220).

Sincerely,

Nicole Cobb Compliance Administrator