

DISSERTATION  
AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES  
AT  
"URBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE"

Submitted by  
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, Colorado  
Summer 2007

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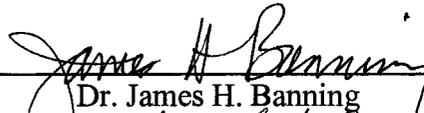
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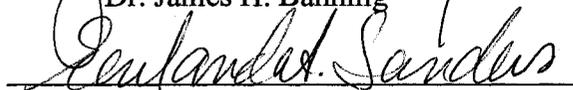
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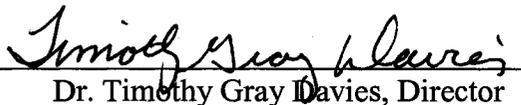
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**ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION**  
**AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES**  
**AT**  
**“URBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE”**

This qualitative study investigated the holistic experiences of nine African American students at a predominately White two year comprehensive community college in the Midwest region of the U.S., “Urban Community College (UCC).” Each participant was interviewed twice; a 90-minute semi-structured face-to-face interview followed by a 45-minute follow up interview. The researcher used a phenomenological research method similar to but not the same as Moustakas’s (1994) data reduction procedures to analyze the data (Willig, 2001). The analytical process for this study followed the traditional steps of doing a participant within case analysis followed by cross case analysis. The key findings of this study were presented using four salient domains from an inductive data analysis. The *expectations and motivations* domain described reason(s) that participants identified for attending UCC. The *attributes* domain explained talents/skills (assets) or enabling qualities or positive influencers and deficits or negative influencers that participants identified as they interfaced with the UCC college community. The *interactions and rapport* domain described participants’ interactions and transactions with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC. The term *rapport* defined participants’ relationship(s) with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC. The *transformation and self-*

*discovery* domain explained how attending UCC or participating in this study changed the participants' lives and the new perspective(s) that they may have gained. The dynamic interplay among four salient domains revealed the essence of participants' shared experiences. The essence of participants' shared experience(s) is their desire for becoming contributing and functioning members of their communities and achieving social stability. The findings were analyzed, interpreted, and presented in relationship to the literature. The participants' experiences and their stories will serve as a beacon for the future African American students enrolling in a two year comprehensive PWI community college. The participants' experiences will not only add to research literature, but their experiences can also provide a two year comprehensive PWI community college learning opportunities about cultural competence and to devise policies, programs, and initiatives that can promote positive experiences for other African American students as well as other minority students as these students pursue their educational journey at these institutions.

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## DEDICATION

The pursuit and attainment of my doctoral journey is dedicated to my grandmother, my family, my spouse, and my participants. My grandmother's humility, strength, and generosity taught me to become resilient, and endure the challenges that I encounter in my life every day. She is my source of inspiration. As an immigrant, my grandmother taught me that people of different complexion could be smart, wise, warm, caring, unselfish, kind, and generous. To date, I live with her memory and remember her fading smile. My family made profound sacrifices to trust my destiny in the hands of hope by sending me to this land of opportunity as a teenager. My spouse encouraged and supported me to continue with my charted path of study to attain my academic and professional goals. My participants whose rich and thick textured life stories made me realize how we take the simplest pleasures of life for granted.

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I am also grateful to my dissertation committee, Dr. Cliff Harbour, Dr. Jim Banning, Dr. Chance Lewis, and Dr. Eulanda Sanders-Okine. Special thanks to my advisor and methodologist who believed in me, and provided me guidance, and advice. I am also grateful to the Chancellor of RCCCD and the President of UCC for agreeing to give me access to UCC in order to complete my research study at this institution. Without the efforts and commitment of my gate-keepers, the recruitment of my participants would have been an impossible task. I am indebted to my participants whose stories I tried to tell fully throughout my research project. Without my participants' involvement, commitment, and generosity my research study would have been impossible.

*“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.” Marianne Williamson*

## **CHAPTER ONE: CHARTING THE JORUNEY**

### Introduction

Chapter One provides a description of an investigation that attempts to develop a holistic understanding of the experiences of African American students. This chapter describes my project, personal stories, my personal experiences in two community colleges, reasons why I chose to pursue this study, significance of this study, study background, statement of problem, and my researcher stance and perspective.

### *Description of the Project*

The focus of my research was to develop a holistic understanding of African American students' overall experiences at the River Cities Community College District (RCCCD), a pseudonym. RCCCD is located in the Midwest region of the U.S. RCCCD is a multi-campus district. My research project was conducted at the Urban Community College (UCC), a pseudonym, in the River Cities Community College District. UCC has the largest concentration of African American students in RCCCD.

Understanding the holistic experiences of African American students at UCC is a conundrum. I have been facing this conundrum as an educator for many years. I interface and interact with the African American students on a daily basis. These students enter UCC in significant numbers. They color the hallways of this institution throughout the year. However, when the time for graduation arrives, not many

African American students cross the stage to get their certificates, diplomas, or Associate Degrees.

In my research project, I was hoping to understand the holistic experiences of African American students. How I understood the experiences of African American students was shaped by my a priori personal and professional experiences, and reflections, as well as through my participation and dialogue with the participants in this study. I used a phenomenological inquiry approach to investigate the experiences of my participants. According to Patten (1990), phenomenological inquiry approach is based on the assumption that there is an essence or essence shared experience for several individuals (Merriam, 2002). This form of inquiry focuses on the idea that people interpret every day experiences from the perspective of the meaning it has for them. I employed the phenomenological approach for my study because it allowed me to discover the meaning of African American student's holistic experience at UCC.

Rendon, Romero, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) reported that the research on minority college students is relatively young. There are not many studies that investigate and describe the holistic experiences of African American students attending post secondary institutions. I feel that my research project would add to the literature concerning African American students' experiences attending post secondary institutions. I interviewed nine African American students at UCC. The themes which emerged from these interviews came from individuals' unique perspectives on their interaction with the environment, administrators, faculty, staff, personal peers, and other community college peers. "I," the researcher used these

themes to develop the overall students' experiences, "the essence" (Creswell, 1998). These experiences guided my understanding of African American students' holistic experiences at UCC. I will expand on the research methodology in Chapter Three.

Before I introduce you to my research and explain why this project is of interest to me, I would like to share two stories with you. I am hoping after you read each of the stories, you will understand why I chose this study. The first story is about my grandmother. The second story is my life story. Both of these stories affected me throughout my life. The first story opened my eyes at a young impressionable age, as a child, to racial discrimination that my grandmother experienced and endured. I witnessed how racial and cultural barriers interfered with family relationships. In the second story, I talk about my life because as a person from a non-majority category, I have experienced first hand what a person from a non-majority category experiences in his or her interactions with the majority White population in the U.S. In the section about my life story, as a youth, I had the privilege of listening to a recording of speech by an American hero, Dr. Martin Luther King in my homeland. Dr. King's speech affected my thinking about African Americans struggle for freedom, equality in the U.S. and the race relations between African Americans and the majority White population in the U.S.

I am hoping that these personal stories will tell you about my journey. Both stories also shaped me, and will tell you why I chose my research topic. Although, I was born in Iran, I consider myself a person of African descent because my paternal grandmother was from the continent of Africa. I do not consider myself a Caucasian. I am not a scholar or expert of African American culture, race, and ethnicity. But I

can relate to experiences of African American students because of my own experiences (personal and professional) and interactions with African American students during the past three decades.

### *My Grandmother's Story*

My paternal grandmother was African. She migrated with her parents from Ethiopia to Iraq when she was a young girl. She was forced to flee Iraq for neighboring Iran when she was in her twenties because of her race and ethnicity. I do not know the year of this migration. She was a woman of dark complexion, about 4' 11" in height, and weighed almost 100 pounds. She had dark hair, round face, and beautiful white teeth. My grandmother's features were proportionate. She always wore long-white dresses. The white color of her dress further contrasted her complexion against her surroundings. My grandmother was a fascinating person.

From very early on, I was aware that because of her appearance, mainly the color of her skin, others in the family treated her differently. She was always kept in the background. At almost all of the family gatherings I vividly remember none of the family members would ever pay any attention to my grandmother. They never thought she was smart or could contribute to any conversations. They never valued anything she said or expressed. In my young mind, I never knew how my grandmother felt or what she made of her interactions with our family or how she analyzed everything she encountered. She did not live long enough to tell me her story. I think she had a story to tell but was never given a chance to tell it. Our years of knowing each other were too short. I was too young and naïve to be able to comprehend her story and voices. All I wanted from her was her smile and her warm

touch. My entire world of being three to six years of age was enriched by the fact that the color of my skin contrasted with her skin color, how her skin felt so soft and smooth, her short folktale stories that she would tell amused me, and her beautiful big smile.

My visits with my grandmother were somewhat negotiated. She kept her distance in the family gatherings with everyone including me. At these gatherings, she would only make eye contact with me, and smile when our eyes would connect. Away from family gatherings, our babysitter would take us to see her when my mother was at work. My grandmother did not have much to offer me in terms of monetary things but she had much to offer me in other ways. My grandmother was an intelligent, articulate, and wise woman. Almost 40 years later, I still sense her gentle touch, the silky feel of her skin, and what she taught me in our short-lived relationship.

I was only six or seven years of age when my grandmother had a stroke. No one cared to take care of her. They perceived her to be a burden. After a short stay in a nursing home, her children brought her home. I think my grandmother sensed that she was a burden to her own family. She starved herself to death, realizing that her death would be a big relief for all of her dear ones, but a small sacrifice for her. She knew that she was not wanted. I could see it in her eyes. Unfortunately, I could not do anything about it. Before she died, she held my hand with a fading smile. Her faculties and body may have been worn out, but her spirit was alive.

To date, I live with her spirit. It guides me in all of my endeavors. My grandmother's story is about humility, strength, resilience, and generosity (giving of

herself). It is also about enduring, tolerating the differences of everyone against the odds even if she looked different from others. She taught me that people of different complexion could be smart, wise, warm, caring, unselfish, kind, and generous. She also taught me that these attributes all come from the heart. Many years passed and even today, I imagine my grandmother like a rose among a bunch of ordinary looking flowers.

### *My Life Story*

I was born in 1959, in a middle class, secular Muslim family in Iran. I am the eldest of three siblings. My sisters and parents still live in Iran. In my youth, our family participated in rich family traditions and cultural activities that my grandparents deemed important. I lost my grandparents at an early age. My childhood years were not only rich with culture and traditions but were also full of turmoil, and moments of joy and sorrow. When I was six years of age, my father and my uncle were imprisoned without a trial for their socialist ideologies in Iran. During the years that my father and uncle were not with us, our expanded family members cut their ties with us. We became virtually non-existent to them.

My mother was the glue that held our family unit together. As a teacher, she worked long hours to make ends meet. She managed the family affairs during the time that my father was gone and after he returned. My father was banned from employment for years. I was thirteen by the time he was allowed to work. Throughout my teenage years, I struggled to make sense of the oppression our family faced. I could never understand it.

When I was in the ninth grade, our history teacher brought in a tape-recorder. With all window shades shut in the class, a nervous history teacher paced back and forth in the class. I remember listening to a recording of a speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I have never forgotten this speech nor have I forgotten the pale face of my teacher. My teacher was a brave man. He was a hero by taking a risk of being caught and by having his class listen to an African American hero and scholar who lived many miles away. Dr. King's speech introduced me to the African American struggle for freedom, equality, and race relations in the U.S.

My life took a different turn in the late seventies. The Iranian government started cracking down on any form of intellectual activism. I recall student activists being prosecuted, jailed, tortured, maimed, sometimes executed, and returned to their families in body bags. I left my homeland for the U.S. after attempting to complete my first year as a freshman in a university in Iran. I was almost seventeen years of age when I arrived in the United States. I arrived in Chicago and then I went on to Oklahoma City. I resided in Oklahoma City for about four months. At the time, there was a large enclave of Middle-Easterners in Texas and Oklahoma. Some of the local residents labeled them as oil rats, camel jockeys, and desert rats because they were from the Middle East. But, I never registered my identity as being from the Middle East. This served as my first experience with discrimination in the U.S. When I tried to rent a small efficiency apartment in Oklahoma City, I was asked to provide a larger security deposit because I was not from Oklahoma. I was also mistakenly identified as a Chicano and was assaulted. I learned that living in

America would be challenging for me. After all, I looked different from the majority White population because of my race, ethnicity, and my nationality.

During my stay in Oklahoma City, I developed a friendship with a young African American man of my age. He and I explored the landscape of Oklahoma's countryside every Sunday afternoon. In our excursions, I discovered that he carried a gun with him. He said the "piece" was his protection.

After one month of studying English as the Second Language in Oklahoma City, I received my ESL certificate. Immediately after obtaining my ESL certificate, I attended a community college and a university during the same summer session. I recall the labels that were put on international students. Many White students treated most international students with very little respect. The international students I encountered in Oklahoma City took two approaches to living in U.S. - the first group simply forgot about their cultural identities and pretended to be like the majority White students. In their minds, the international students felt that their White peers accepted them. The second group never lost their cultural identities and traditions. I sat between these two factions. I felt comfortable in the enclave of African American students. These students welcomed me and they were hospitable.

I left Oklahoma by the end of the summer session for Minnesota because I had heard that Minnesotans were hospitable toward individuals who were different from them. Shortly after my arrival, I encountered hostility from some of my White classmates during the "United States Embassy Hostage" crisis in Tehran, Iran. In the midst of all 444 days captivity of 52 American hostages in Iran, I felt like a hostage in

U.S. I managed to survive these unfortunate times. I believe that the U.S. hostage crisis taught me to become resilient.

I finished my undergraduate engineering studies and took a job as a design engineer in Minnesota. My job at the engineering firm was not fulfilling. I never developed a sense of belonging at this firm. I left the firm after four years. Still in my twenties, I took a teaching job in the Midwest at Rural Technical Community College (RTCC, a pseudonym) because of my passion for education and teaching.

### *My Experiences in Community College*

I taught electronics, robotics, and laser curricula in early eighties at RTCC. One day, a colleague teaching an introductory class told me the students in her class were like a bunch of rocks. She claimed that the students did not have the capacity to learn. Approximately one-third of her class enrollment was minority students, including two African American students who were a husband and wife. This couple was from the Southern region of U.S. and they had recently moved to this Midwest rural community.

The following semester, as a normal progression, I was scheduled to teach the intermediate level course. Therefore, I had the same students from the introductory level course in my intermediate class. Up to this point, my colleague had communicated with me about the low aptitude of these minority students and as she put it “God knew that there were no hope for many of them.” This semester was the most rewarding experience in my years of teaching in the community college.

I learned quickly that my students were going to take me on a journey about their cultures, voices, values, and beliefs if I would allow them to be my guide. I

found out that their experiences were similar to mine. Although I was not born in this country, I could relate to their experiences (challenges/barriers), and how they lived and interacted with the dominant culture.

Over the course of my teaching the intermediate level course, I got to know the African American couple, the struggle and hardship they encountered by being at this community college. Numerous times, they would tell me how they were never valued at RTCC, how other students and faculty members did not know what to make of them because of their skin color. They said that people demonstrated kindness by displaying a fake smile from a distance. I assumed that the story of the African American couple was an isolated incident. The next semester I was assigned to teach the advanced level course. In my advanced level class with an enrollment of 15, I welcomed two more African American students from another section of intermediate course from the previous semester. Now, there were four African American students in my class.

Throughout every semester, as a bonus point in each test, I would ask all students in my courses to write something new about themselves. These expressions could be like a short narrative, a metaphor, or in any way they chose to communicate to me. One African American student drew two separate circles, one small circle, and one fairly large circle away from each other, accompanied by a narrative. The narrative noted that the smaller circle depicts the African American students at RTCC in their own enclave, and the larger circle depicts the majority White students. In many ways they are made to feel isolated at RTCC. I often reflect back to this

pictorial and the narrative. I believe my grandmother also felt isolated this way when she was among her own family, totally on her own.

I experienced the best years of my life at RTCC in the classroom. I felt that I was making a difference. I saw the struggle of students of color and students that resembled me. In my teaching years, my observations can be summarized as follows: I sensed how RTCC used the “one shoe size fit all” approach to address the plight of these students when they faced barriers. Many at RTCC did not seem concerned about why these students leave without fulfilling their educational goals. Most often, developmental education courses became the dumping ground for minority students because the perceptions of staff, faculty, and administrators were that these students could not endure the academic rigors of the mainstream non-minority educational system at RTCC. Yet, some of these individuals were my students and I knew they had the ability to do the work. It was the special care, nurturing, and support that they needed in order to develop the confidence to be successful. I regularly met with these students about their academic difficulties. Our conversations taught me to look for patterns, and themes in these conversations. Unknown to staff, faculty, and administrators at RTCC, I felt that no one thought about the cultural landscape that these students came from, what brought them to the RTCC in the first place, or what institutional barriers they faced in their journey, or why they left RTCC without finishing their schooling.

In my early thirties, I developed a fever to become an administrator. As an administrator, I firmed up my beliefs; first of all, the Whites were not always cognizant that minority students were different from the White students. Secondly,

the culture, beliefs, and values of these students were frequently overlooked both in and out of the classroom. I felt that the commitment and desire of many Whites for reaching out toward minority students was ceremonial and simply superficial. As a student-centered institution, the experiences of African American students were often overlooked at RTCC. My work experience at RTCC lead me to believe that at times, the abilities of these students were overshadowed and they were pushed in the margins of the college community. These experiences have been an essential part of the motivation for me to pursue this study and try to really understand the holistic experiences of my participants at UCC. My experiences have also shaped my perspective and stance. I must be cognizant of my biases due to my background, personal and professional affiliations, and experiences. I have my own story, but I also wanted to explore what African American students would have to say at UCC.

#### *African American Students in Community Colleges*

The African American student enrollment continues to grow rapidly in community colleges but their completion/graduation rate has remained stagnant in comparison to other students (Lum, 2004; Opp, 2002). The literature suggests that low completion/graduation rate is a multifaceted problem that often translates into student departure from the institution (Opp, 2002; Tinto, 1993). Smith (1999) and Jackson (2003) asserted that over the years, while the higher education literature reported studies of African American students in higher education, very few studies described the experiences of these students.

Other notable studies include Lewis and Middleton (2003). These authors reported a detailed review of research published on African Americans in community

colleges in the Community College Journal of Research and Practice (CCJRP) from 1990 to 2000. Their review focused on three themes: (a) student success; (b) need for increased faculty diversity; and (c) race and community college administration. The authors stated it is troublesome that only four research articles from 1990 to 2000 were published dealing directly with the African American experience in community colleges. Other qualitative dissertations examine some common themes such as retention, persistence, and enrollment that may impact African American students in community colleges (Alexander, 1999; Bilal, 1996; Lewter, 1995; Ludman, 1998; Turner, 2003; Wilder, 1995). But, these studies do not focus on the students' holistic experiences in the institution. Altogether, the reported literature can be useful to provide background knowledge about retention/persistence and enrollment, but it does not tell the story of African American students at a contemporary higher education institution. For these reasons, this research project was of interest to me.

#### *Significance of this Study*

In this section, I will offer three considerations for the significance of my study: (a) there is a need to understand the experience of African American students in their education at a Midwestern community college, UCC; (b) this understanding will expand our knowledge in regards to what they face in their interactions with the institution (environment, administrators, faculty, and staff) and their peers; and (c) additionally, once we acquire this knowledge, it can assist college personnel to help African American students overcome barriers to their success while enrolled at UCC. This study presented implications and applications for UCC in regards to how institutional personnel as a whole should interact with and support the African

American students. The intended result of this study might also assist UCC and the other two community colleges at RCCCD evaluate their current initiatives, design, as well as initiate the implementation of new programs and services that would improve the success of African American students and may curb the departure rate of these students. In the following section, I will provide an overview of African American students enrollment history in higher education to support the significance of my study.

### *African American Students Enrollment History in Higher Education*

Fifty years ago, the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) granted Linda Brown, a third-grader, permission to attend the nearby all white elementary public school in Topeka Kansas. This case challenged racial segregation in the public schools. This inequity was also replicated in American higher education. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case provided a foundation for equal opportunity for education for all individuals regardless of race or ethnicity (Williams, 1994). This case also started the elimination of segregation and inequities in the higher education in the U.S.

Prior to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), and throughout the earlier part of the 20th century, roughly 90% of all African American college students were educated at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) established after the Civil War (Fleming, 1984). By the late 1960s, societal and political pressures forced predominately White colleges and universities to provide equal access to education for all. These pressures increased African American students' access to

higher education (Carroll, 1998). As a result, African American college attendance has shifted from HBCUs to community colleges, colleges, and universities.

By the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century, roughly 75% of all African-American college students were enrolled in Predominately White Institutions (PWI) (NCES, 2004). Unfortunately, research findings suggest that African American students have not fared well on PWI campuses (Davis, 1998). Research findings show that the attrition rate of African American students is five to eight times higher than those of White students on the same PWI campuses (Alford, 2000; Allen, 1985, 1999). African Americans are also reported to obtain lower academic achievement, and are less likely to enroll in advanced degree programs beyond community colleges compared to White students (Allen, 1985; Rowser, 1997).

Community colleges enroll more African American students than the nation's 120 HBCUs (Smith, 1999). Community colleges draw about one in five of all African American students seeking a higher education (Smith, 1999). In 2001, the most recent year that statistics were available, African Americans accounted for 12.3 percent of all credit students, versus 10 percent in 1984 in community colleges (Laden, 2004). However, the African American students' persistence and degree completion rates are significantly less than their White peers in community colleges (Aragon, 2000; Getz, 2000; Harvey-Smith, 1993). Opp (2002) reports an Associate degree completion rate of 9.8% for African American students after three years.

In summary, community colleges in the U.S. have been welcoming a growing number of African students in recent years (Laden, 2004). These institutions often serve as the gateways to higher education aspirations for these students. However,

the community college completion/graduation rate of African American students is often inadequate when compared to that of other students.

*Most Relevant Literature on African American Students' Experiences*

One major reason that I pursued this research is because there is limited number of studies that focus on investigating the holistic experiences of African American students. Reported literature on African American students' experiences at a general level can be grouped into two categories. The first category deals with quantitative and qualitative studies, all of which are dissertations, describing African American students' experiences in the community colleges (Alexander, 1999; Bilal, 1996; Lewter, 1995; Ludman, 1998; Turner, 2003; Wilder, 1995). These qualitative studies examine common themes such as retention/persistence, and enrollment that affect African American students in community colleges.

The second category is comprised of studies in the last two decades that focus on issues and factors affecting the enrollment and retention/persistence of minority students in higher education (Couvillion-Landry, 2002; Harvey-Smith, 1993; McGregor, Reece, & Garner, 1997; Mohammadi, 1994; Opp, 2002; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1997; Piland, Hess, & Piland, 2000; Rendon, 1995; Rendon et al., 2000; Sanchez, 2000; Voorhees, 1987; Wild & Ebbers, 2002; Zamani, 2000). Unfortunately these studies do not investigate the experiences of African American students in higher education. It is important, to note that some of the abovementioned studies focused on African American students as a subgroup of minority students. My study focused on developing a holistic understanding of African American students' experiences at UCC in RCCCD.

### *Description of the study Site*

RCCCD is located in the Midwest region of the U.S. serving six counties, over a geographical radius of sixty miles, and an overall population base of 470,000. RCCCD includes three comprehensive community colleges each offering liberal arts, vocational and career technical education, and continuing education programs (IRPE Report, 2004). RCCCD's credit enrollment is 10,513. Roughly five percent of students are African American students. This research project was conducted at the Urban Community College in the River Cities Community College District. UCC enrolls 6,000 credit students. It has the largest concentration of African American students in RCCCD. The enrollment of African American students at UCC is approximately 400 students (IRPE Report, 2004). UCC is located in a bi-state area separated by a major river in a predominately White middle-class community with a population base of 35,000 (IRPE Report, 2004). Very few African American students reside in the community where UCC is located. The majority of these students including other students of color commute to UCC from the surrounding bi-state towns and cities every day. UCC does not have student housing. Men's and Women's golf and soccer are the major athletic programs at UCC.

### *Statement of the Problem/Issue*

The literature review revealed that there were not many studies which investigated the African American students' holistic experiences in their higher education journey. Moreover, African American students at UCC have a unique experience of attending college in the Midwest with these demographics; therefore, research is required to understand how African American students in this setting

would describe their experiences. My study focused on the essence of the academic and social experiences of African American students at UCC. Wolcott (1994) cautions the researcher to hold off introducing theory in the qualitative research until s/he is quite clear what the researcher is interested in theorizing about and how that relates directly to the research findings. Therefore, my literature review will not offer a comprehensive account of the relevant theory concerning African American students enrolled in contemporary higher education. Indeed, my theoretical perspective may change after the actual research is completed.

In choosing a research method/design relevant to my study, I am cognizant that there are several legitimate and useful research methods/designs, both quantitative and qualitative (Merriam, 2002). I became certain that quantitative research design would not be appropriate for my study. Quantitative research design could not provide me with a level of understanding of what I wanted to know about my participants' experiences at UCC. My interest in this study was not to measure, or develop casual and affect relationship, or comparisons using deductive, statistical research processes. I was not interested in conducting a study that was numerically and statistically focused which quantitative research design is known for. I could not use quantitative research design for my study. Therefore, I proposed a qualitative research design for my study.

Qualitative research design is comprised of in-depth investigations in the field, in-depth data analysis understanding themes and categories, and writing long passages and descriptions which allows for in-depth discussion between the researcher and the participants by utilizing multiple perspectives in a dynamic and

naturalistic setting (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative research design can provide a holistic understanding of events, situations, and phenomenon in a natural setting without a preconceived notion (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Marshall and Rossman (1989) add that qualitative research methodology values the participant's view of reality and seeks to discover these views in an interactive process allowing the participants to create the research in their own voice or words (Rolle, Banning, & Davies, 2000). Qualitative research design allowed me to investigate the how and why of the experiences of my participants at UCC which could not be told and quantified in numbers. Creswell (1998) provides five traditions within the qualitative research design: (a) biography; (b) case study; (c) ethnography; (d) grounded theory; and (e) phenomenology. Among the five traditions offered, phenomenology was appropriate for my study because it emphasized on the discovery of and describing the essence of a shared experience(s) of my participants. In a phenomenological study, the researcher reduces the experiences to central meaning or the "essence" of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). My study attempted to identify, describe, and explain the holistic experiences of African American students at UCC.

Moustakas (1994) described the phenomenological research as a type of study that is aimed at describing the meaning of experiences of a phenomenon (or topic or concept) for several individuals. Reporting on phenomenological research approach, Merriam (2002) also elaborated that the researcher will bracket, analyze, and compare the experiences of several individuals in order to identify the essence of the phenomenon. In order to understand the essence or structure of an experience, the researcher has to put aside, or bracket his or her personal attitudes, or beliefs about

the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). For my study, “I,” the researcher believed that phenomenological method would be a useful tool for understanding the meaning of my participants’ experience at UCC. Moreover, phenomenological method allowed me to reduce the experiences of my participants to a “central meaning” or “the essence” of their experiences. I will elaborate on the phenomenological research design in Chapter Three of the methodology section of this research project.

*Research Question(s)*

To facilitate an organized study of the problem, I identified one major research question, “*how do African American students describe their experiences at the UCC?*” I approached my study with the following sub-questions:

1. How do African American students identify, describe, and explain their experiences in the context of existing academic and student development procedures and programs at UCC?
2. What is the essence of this experience?
3. How do African American students identify, describe, and explain their success or lack of success at UCC?
4. What is the essence of the successful or unsuccessful experience reported by African American students at UCC?

I could not predict the outcome for my study. My hope is that my research findings will be of use to student community, institutional community, and the research community. In terms of the student community, I am hoping that describing African American students’ holistic experiences proves not only to be beneficial for African American students at UCC, but also help other students understand African

American students' journey at this institution. Relating to institutional community, the outcome of my research may provide the personnel (administrators, faculty, and staff) at UCC with a better understanding about the journey of African American students at UCC. This understanding may also shape programming and initiatives that can serve the needs to African American students at UCC and the other two community colleges in RCCCD. Relating to research community, the outcome of my research may add to research literature as well. An added dimension of my research would allow me to gain insights that broadened my worldviews, awareness, sense of knowing, and meaning making about what African American students endured in their journey at UCC.

#### *Researcher's Stance*

I believe that I have sufficient knowledge but limited experience in conducting a qualitative research study of this magnitude. To improve my skills of qualitative research, on November and December 2004, I conducted a small pilot study to assess my interview techniques in the fulfillment of a Community College Leadership Prospectus Development course requirement. I used the experience I gained from my pilot project to enhance and improve my phenomenological data collection and data analysis skills (Creswell, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I also sought the assistance and guidance from my advisor and methodologist in pursuing the data collection and analysis for my pilot study.

I brought to this study my own experiences. In my experience as a student, faculty, and an administrator I observed how community colleges are referred to as democratic colleges and how their names has been publicized as the mirror of this

democratic society (Klincheloe, 1995). However, these institutions have not fulfilled the dreams of a democratic college (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). They have a checkered history where the promise is never kept for all students (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). Rhoads and Valadez asserted that community colleges often failed the test of democracy when it comes to minority and White low-income students. Very often, these students are marginalized right at the beginning of their college experience in the institution.

As I reflected upon my past personal experiences as an international student in the U.S., my interactions with the non-minority students made me feel like a marginalized individual. Alipuria and Phinney (1996) provided a description for “the marginal man [sic]” as a person at the edge of two cultures living in two distinct traditions; never willing to break with the past and his or her traditions, not quite accepted in the new society, in which he or she sought to find a place. Their description reflected how I felt about myself.

My experiences in college shaped my perceptions as such that I became aware that class, race, and power relations issues had crawled their way into higher education; both in and out of the classroom. The classroom teachings that I had come to know were founded on the ideals of Euro-centric values. The interactions that I had become accustomed to would simply ignore my values, beliefs, and what I stood for. Therefore, I discovered that if I did not forego my individualized identity and culture, I would find myself living on the fringes of the marginalized world.

I have lived in the U.S. for almost thirty years. I still consider myself a homeless person, not in the sense of physical shelter but from the perspective of

belongingness and my own social concept. I am caught between the complexities and challenges of who I am, and who I should portray in order to be perceived as legitimate in the eyes of the majority White population in the U.S. I often use a metaphor of being “a guest in someone else’s house” when I reflect and expand upon my experience in this country (Sotello Viernes Turner, 1994).

For my study, the nature of reality (ontology) and how I came to know it (epistemology) were shaped by the social, political, cultural, economic, and ethnic values that I experienced over time (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). For example, how I understood the holistic experiences of African American students in community colleges would be shaped by my a priori personal and professional experiences, reflections, and through the participation of and dialogue with my participants in the study and documenting of their experiences. Again, for example, my knowing world would be transactional and would employ subjectivity, with value-mediated findings (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

In keeping my nature of reality and how I came to know that it was aligned and in check with my study, I was fully aware that my experiences did not mirror the African American students who participated in my study (Merriam, 2002). But, I was able to relate to the experiences of my participants because of my life journey. Therefore, for my study, I was cognizant of my biases and did forego of any pre-conceived notions about the experiences of African American students at UCC due to my background, personal and professional affiliations, and experiences in the U.S. as a student, faculty, and an administrator.

### *Definitions of Terms*

- Academic self-concept: The term academic self-concept refers to student's assessment of his or her academic ability in the college environment (Hurtado, 1996).
- African American students: The term African American refers to students born in the U.S. who are of African descent. Sedlacek (1987) and Kraft (1991) used the term Black when referring to these students. The term "African American" and "Black" signifies the same population of students throughout this research project.
- African American students' experiences: An African American student's experience can be defined generally as a process of how the student perceives and reflects upon his/her journey at UCC. In a nutshell, the college experience of students can consist of the events that occur in the college environment. Many of these experiences stem from events and conditions which the college makes possible which at least in some respect are intended to facilitate student learning and development (Pace, 1983).
- Attrition and student departure: Attrition is characterized as a friction between the student and his or her environment, which will result in the student's departure (Keim, 1981). Attrition can also be defined as student departure from education scene without completion of intended goals (Baca, 1999).
- Locus of control: The term locus of control refers to an individual's perception about the underlying main causes of events in his or her life (Rotter, 1966).

- Minority students or “Students of Color”: The term “minority students” or “students of color” refers to students from African American, American Indian, Asian American, and Hispanic background and ethnicity (Opp, 2002).
- Retention: Retention can be thought of as a harmonious relationship between the student and his or her environment, which results in the student staying in college and his or her persistence (Keim, 1981). Retention can also be defined as when students achieve their intended goal (continuing with education coursework completion, and graduation) (Baca, 1999).
- Self-Concept: The term self-concept is a relational term that is used to denote student’s judgment of their competence or skills (whether academic or social) relative to those of other students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).
- Self-Esteem: In higher education research, the term self-esteem refers to the process of evaluating one self on a variety of traits (ranging from popularity with the opposite sex, physical well being, social self-confidence, and leadership ability among others) in relation to one’s peer is referred to as self-esteem (Astin, 1982; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).
- Social self-concept: The term social self-concept refers to student’s assessment of his or her social skill and sense of belongingness and being valued in the college environment (Hurtado, 1996).
- White: The term White refers to a global construct to characterize people of European descent who migrated and helped colonize American.

## *Conclusion*

Chapter One provided an overview and introduction to my research study. It also provided the justification for my study. I described stories from my life journey to show my readers that I too have witnessed how some majority Whites can marginalize those of us with different color of skin, accent, or culture. One such example is when I began my own personal academic endeavor and professional journey in community colleges as a student, a faculty member, a department chair, and an academic dean. For the past thirty years, I have had the privilege of taking courses, teaching courses, advising, and working with students from diverse ethnic, racial, genders, cultural, and socioeconomic background. For this study, I was interested in the experiences of African American students.

Chapter One also provided an overview of relevant literature concerning African American student enrollment in higher education and their experiences in community colleges, significance of this study, information about the site for my study, statement of the problem(s), and research questions. I concluded this chapter with my researcher's stance.

In Chapter Two of my research project, I will elaborate on themes from select literature concerning African American students' experiences in community colleges followed by my research methodology in Chapter Three. The discussion of my stance will also be fully developed in Chapter Three. Chapter Four will include the findings on my research. My theoretical and conceptual framework will be developed and integrated with my findings in Chapter Five of this research study.

*“It takes some strength of soul-and not just individual strength, but collective understanding-to resist this void, this non-being, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard. To make yourself visible, to claim that your experience is just as real and normative as any other ... can mean making yourself vulnerable. But at least you are not doing the oppressor’s work, building your own closet (Adrienne Rich, 1986, p.199).”*

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

I thought of several options as I tried to develop this review of academic research literature for my chapter two. Compiling an extensive volume of academic literature and research studies which focuses and relates to the holistic experiences of African American students in their education journey was certainly an option. As I started reviewing the academic literature, I discovered that it was shaping my views about African American students’ experiences. I did not want to internalize what the literature had suggested and develop a bias about these students’ experiences. Therefore, I chose to focus on several specific research articles and studies that may have significant impact on my study. These themes are identified in the end of the section called African American students’ experiences in higher education in this chapter.

### **African American Students’ Experiences in Higher Education**

To date, very little is known about the qualitative experience of African American students in the nations’ colleges (Davis, 1994; Jackson, 2003). Among studies reported, some studies are quantitative and qualitative dissertations (Alexander, 1999; Bilal, 1996; Lewter, 1995; Ludman, 1998; Turner, 2003; Wilder, 1995). These studies report factors that may affect African American students’

retention/persistence and enrollment in community colleges. But, these studies do not focus on holistic experiences of African American students in the institution.

After researching academic literature related to African American students, I discovered that there is a gap in the literature concerning African American students' experiences in higher education, specifically in community college settings. I chose to focus on research articles and research studies that may have significant impact for my study. My literature review focused on the following themes that emerged after I reviewed several specific research articles and studies from the academic literature relating to African American students' experiences in their education: (a) institution type; (b) campus climate; (c) racism and prejudice; (d) role modeling and mentoring; (e) parental and family support, (f) student-faculty interactions; and (g) aligning teaching/learning styles of the students. A synthesis and critique of the literature overview concludes chapter two.

### *Institution Type*

In this section, I discuss academic literature concerning the effects of institution type(s) on African American students. I discuss five published research studies and four dissertations in this section.

### *Research Studies*

Fleming (1984) conducted a comparative study to determine how enrollment at HBCUs and PWIs affected African American students. Her study included approximately 3,000 freshman and senior students in fifteen colleges (eight PWIs and seven HBCUs) in four states with diverse social mores and attitudes toward African American education. Each participant spent four to eight hours filling out

questionnaires, taking cognitive tests, and working competitively under controlled experimental conditions. Fleming also conducted in-depth personal interviews of some participants and examined their official transcripts. This study revealed that positive interpersonal supports could be a precondition of cognitive growth among the African American students as they progressed from freshman to senior years. Fleming's study also signified that friends and mentors contribute to a positive learning atmosphere. Her study also confirmed that since HBCUs already have many of these interpersonal supports in place, African Americans who enroll in these institutions are often more successful in persisting toward graduation.

Garibaldi (1991) examined the qualities of HBCUs that contributed to resilience among African American students. For Garibaldi, resilience was understood as the process of coping with disruptive, stressful, or challenging life events in a way that provides the individual with additional protective and coping skills developed in response to disruptive events (Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Garibaldi (1991) highlighted several common threads that facilitate resilience among African American students at HBCUs. These common threads are: (a) each institution's proactive approach to students' retention issues; (b) early interventions; (c) the institutional culture that faculty, administrators, and staff have a shared commitment to academic achievement of their students no matter how under-prepared their students are; (d) faculty engages students in learning activities inside and outside of the classroom and encourage students to care about each other and academic success. Garibaldi (1991) noted that these common threads indicate HBCUs provide a supportive and nurturing environment for African American students.

Nettles, Wagener, Millett, and Killenbeck (1999) studied a report on the student retention and progression in ten private HBCUs by interviewing their presidents. Nettles et al. (1999) noted that HBCUs frequently welcome African American students who otherwise would not have an opportunity to attend college. These authors stated that HBCUs are better prepared to address the needs of these students because of the resources that they make available. The common theme among the programming and initiatives that each institution planned and implemented focused on providing a supportive and nurturing environment for their students. Nettles et al. (1999) reported this caring attitude as the first and foremost key ingredient to African American success in their education in these institutions. In other words, caring is everyone's business at these institutions (Nettles et al., 1999).

Chavous (2000) conducted a quantitative research study to examine the person-environment fit for African American college students at a PWI. The author examined the relationship among African American students' demographic backgrounds, beliefs regarding race, and their perceived fit in college environment due to ethnicity. These factors were used to predict student organizational involvement in race-specific organizations and mainstream campus organizations. This study involved 164 African American students from a PWI. The findings of this study reveal that both the meaning of race and the importance of race were related to the extent to which students felt comfort in expressing their ethnicity and, subsequently, their social participation in ethnic group affirming activities. This study indicated that African American students feel included in activities and initiatives that reaffirm their racial identity and ethnicity. This author's findings

suggest the importance of the students' perceptions of congruence between themselves and their educational environment. For African American students in PWI, this may be a complex and challenging task.

A quantitative study by Flowers (2002) included students from 207 post secondary institutions who participated in the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) data collection during 1999-2000. This study extended the work of DeSousa and Kuh (1996) who found that attending a HBCU versus a PWI resulted in greater academic and social gains for African American students. The analyses reported in Flowers' (2002) study were based on 7,835 African American students and included 5,072 women and 2,763 men. Of the 7,835 African American students, 1,385 African American students attended one of the 11 HBCUs in the institutional sample and 6,450 African American students attended one of 196 PWIs included in the institutional sample. The student sample was comprised of approximately 40% freshmen, 22% sophomores, 17% juniors, and 21% seniors.

Of the 207 post secondary institutions included in the institutional sample there were only seven Associate degree granting institutions. The remaining were institutions that granted specialized degrees (7), baccalaureate (49), masters (79), and doctoral degrees (65). The overall results of this study indicated that learning outcomes are enhanced for African American students at HBCUs. The major findings of this study, suggested by CSEQ data and analysis indicated that African American students at HBCUs experience higher self-reported academic and social gains than the African American students attending PWIs. Another dimension of this study confirmed that HBCUs have a positive impact on the overall development of

African American students: African American students show stronger intellectual confidence and a greater feeling of success and satisfaction with academic life than African American students attending PWIs (Flowers, 2002). These findings are consistent with other research.

### *Dissertations*

In a qualitative dissertation, King-Saulsberry (2002) interviewed ten African American females and ten African American males. This study identified and described key success events, patterns, characteristics, and influences for first generation African American students in a PWI in the Midwest region of U.S. These individuals were juniors and seniors at a large PWI in the Midwest. The first step in data collection was a 90-minute semi-structured, standardized interview. Next, a 30-minute follow-up interview was conducted to clarify and expand upon the initial interviews of the participants.

King-Saulsberry employed a phenomenological approach to analyze the collected data. She also used a research collaborator to validate relevant concepts and themes that emerged from the data. Data analysis identified key characteristics, events, and patterns of success for first generation, African American students. Successful participants possessed positive, sustaining non-cognitive personality characteristics as well as the ability to negotiate negative and/or challenging experiences associated with being a student at a PWI. The way African American students perceive their interactions in PWIs was one important finding in King-Saulsberry's (2002) study. Participants described that they had to exert extra energies and efforts to fit in the PWI environment. In turn, this may exhaust African

American students' academic energies and perhaps impact their persistence and achievement (Fleming, 1984; Sedlacek 1987).

In another quantitative dissertation, Alexander (1999) examined the academic and social involvement of African American and White students at three rural Mississippi community colleges. Alexander's (1999) study had a two-fold purpose: (a) to assess the academic and social involvement of African American and White students at three rural Mississippi public community colleges; (b) to determine students' perceived satisfaction with the college environment. The author used the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CCSEQ) to collect data from 263 African American students at the three community colleges: (a) a predominately Black college; (b) a predominately White college; and (c) a college where African American and White students were almost equally enrolled. The results indicated that African American students performed better and were more involved in the college environment at HBCUs than evenly mixed or PWIs. African American students' performance lagged behind that of White students at the PWI and at the institutions where the numbers of African American and White students were almost even. This study also revealed that African American students were more successfully involved in their academic and social environments at HBCU.

Ludman's (1998) qualitative dissertation investigated the experiences of six African American students at a rural community college in southwestern Michigan using a case study method. Ludman conducted a series of semi-structured interviews revealing a variety of experiences that assisted or hindered the academic and social integration of students at the institution. Students in this study identified: (a) the

small number of African American students; (b) the lack of minority faculty and staff; and (c) the absence of courses in African American studies as negative experiences.

Furthermore, the participants indicated the quality of teaching and personal attention on the part of faculty and staff as positive experiences in their time at the college.

Ludman's (1998) study reported five themes, one of significance is that colleges need enough African American students to support at least some social activities and to provide a sense of belonging.

Snowden's (1997) quantitative dissertation was a comparative analysis of African American students' perspectives on collegial experiences. This study focused on the differences existing between a selected group of African American students in attendance at either HBCUs or PWIs in Mississippi. The participants for this study were two convenience groups of African American undergraduate students. The first group attended public HBCUs in Mississippi and the second group attended PWIs in the state of Mississippi. 300 students participated in this study, equal numbers from historically Black college and universities and from the historically White colleges and universities. Snowden employed "The Diversity in the College Community: A Survey of Student Opinion and Experiences" in this study. This instrument was developed and tested in 1979 and 1980 by Walter R. Allen, a sociology professor at UCLA. The findings of this study indicated significant differences between African American students' experiences. African American students in historically White colleges and universities expressed lack of encouragement, support, and nurturing relationship with their professors. In addition, this study's findings indicated that students in HBCUs expressed support and

nurturing relationships with their professors. This nurturing and supportive relationship was one of the key ingredients for students' success at the HBCUs.

### *Synthesis*

The research studies by Fleming (1984), Garibaldi (1991), Nettles et al. (1999), Flowers (2002), the quantitative dissertations by Alexander (1998) and Snowden (1997) indicated that African American students find the HBCUs included in these studies as a hospitable and caring environment. The special care that HBCUs in these studies exhibit toward African American students plays a critical role in providing a positive experience for these students at these institutions. This positive experience may also facilitate African American students' satisfaction and affect their stay at these institutions.

The qualitative dissertations by King-Saulsberry (2002), Ludman (1998), and the research study by Chavous (2000) indicated African American students participate in activities and feel comfort in an environment that reaffirms their racial identity and ethnicity. These studies show that African American students at PWIs may have to invest extra energies in order to fit in the PWIs environment or become congruent to the college or university settings. In some ways, this may exhaust their academic energies and perhaps affect their persistence and satisfaction in PWIs. Taken together, the works of Fleming (1984), Garibaldi (1991), Nettles et al. (1999), Flowers (2002), Alexander (1998), Snowden (1997), King-Saulsberry (2002), Ludman (1998), and Chavous (2000) signifies the perception that HBCUs are generally viewed as institutions that are student-centered and nurturing. These institutions may be better prepared in providing their students an environment that is

supportive, nurturing, and caring. For African American students, the perception of such an environment that embraces them may facilitate their persistence and shape their experience.

In this section, I reviewed the academic literature concerning the effects of institution type on African American students' experiences in higher education. The significance of preceding research literature is that factors such as institution type may impact African American students' experiences in their higher education journey.

### *Campus Climate*

African American students often choose HBCUs because of the inclusive, supportive campus culture, and climates (Davis, 1998). Hope (1996) reported that many African American students academically eligible for ivy-league colleges choose HBCUs because of their campus climate, atmosphere, and experiences unavailable at PWIs.

According to Lett (2003), African American students often feel isolated and alienated in PWIs and do not feel included in the campus environment and college community. The impact of campus environment on educational experience and outcome of African-American students is one of most noted themes in academic literature on students in higher education (Allen, 1985; Fleming, 1984; Lett, 2003; Nettles, 1988; Rankin, 2005; Simms, Knight, & Dawes, 1993). Quantitative research studies by Brown (2005) and Rankin (2005), qualitative research study by Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas (1999), qualitative dissertation by Turner (2003), and quantitative dissertation by Gilliard (1996) indicated a link between perception of

campus racial climate and African American students' experiences and achievement in pursuit of their higher education journey.

This section describes campus climate followed by academic research literature concerning the effects of campus climate on African American students' experiences in higher education. I discuss three research studies and two dissertations in this section.

### *Campus Climate Defined*

Brown (2005) characterized campus climate as the sum total of the daily campus living experiences of students. Campus climate is pivotal to students' perceptions of the level of comfort that exists in the college environment. Braxton (2000) added that students' personal interpretation of their institutions' opportunities and challenges determine campus climate. Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen (1999) provided an explanation for campus climate as the current perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that define the institution and its members. Peterson and Spencer (1990) characterized campus climate as being reflective of participants' common attitudes, perceptions, or observations about the environment. Using these definitions, campus climate can be important in formulating the comfort factor that minority students experience from their involvement in the milieu of college community and campus environment. Minority students who feel unwelcome in the mainstream of campus life are unlikely to remain in college and become successful (Hurtado, 1990).

### *Research Studies*

In a qualitative research study Schwitzer et al. (1999) interviewed 22 African American students (13 women and 9 men) using focus groups. The purpose of this study was to investigate African American students' social climate experiences at a PWI. Fourth-year seniors were selected for this study because they had the greatest amount of experiences in the campus social environment. These participants had lived on campus at least one year and had taken courses in several academic departments. The authors selected their participants from among several advanced classes to obtain a cross-section of the campus population. Participants' academic majors included: (a) business (8 students); (b) social sciences (5); (c) liberal arts (3); (d) education (3); (e) general studies (2); (f) health sciences (3); and (g) physical sciences (2). In some cases students reported a double major.

Schwitzer et al. (1999) found that (a) African American students expressed greater satisfaction with college, made better adjustment, and were more likely to persist through graduation when they experienced warmer institutional climate; (b) African American students enrolled at institutions with actively involving and supportive environments also expressed greater satisfaction with their college experiences; and (c) when there was a network of supportive relationships, African American students reported enhanced adjustment and higher achievement rates. The study by Schwitzer et al. (1999) concluded that the presence of a warm and caring college environment coupled with a supportive network, and opportunities for engagement on campus activities contributed to African American students' satisfaction and shaped their experiences in college.

Brown (2005) investigated African American undergraduate engineering students' perceptions of institutional and personal/social campus factors to determine how they influenced academic performance and institutional graduation rates in PWIs and HBCUs. Data collection was accomplished through the use of a quantitative and qualitative survey instrument administered to a national sample of subjects. The subjects were individuals attending four 2002-2003 conferences sponsored or supported by the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE). NSBE is a student-managed national organization with 270 chapters on campuses nation wide. Nearly one-half of African American undergraduate engineering students are represented by the 2004-2005, a membership of 13,000 reported by the organization.

The survey instrument comprised of "Student Perception of the Campus Climate" (SPCC), was created to measure students' perception of eight campus climate variables thought to be important to minority student retention in the context of person-environment theory (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Chavous, 2002). The eight campus climate variables were: (a) classroom experiences; (b) faculty and staff interactions; (c) institutional support services; (d) racism and discrimination; (e) peer interactions; (f) student effort to learning; (g) goal commitment; and (h) institutional commitment (commitment of students to their choice of institution). The questionnaire was developed by formulating a subscale for each variable, consisting of a number of Likert-type, five-point scale questions. Six of the eight subscales were adapted from the Cabrera et al. (1999) SPCC questionnaire. Brown (2005) also adapted the remaining two subscales from

additional sources for this study. This author also posed qualitative open-ended questions in this study.

Brown (2005) found that participants enrolled in HBCUs had more favorable perceptions of their college experience and had higher grades than students attending PWIs. After controlling for institution category, higher graduation rates were associated with students' lower perception of racism and discrimination and with student's greater institutional commitment and academic preparedness. The results of qualitative analysis of student responses to the open-ended questions in Brown's (2005) study also supported the findings that African American students attending HBCUs report a favorable campus climate. This positive campus climate can contribute to African American students' satisfaction and influence their academic achievement as well as graduation rates in college (Brown, 2005).

In another quantitative research study, Rankin (2005) used a campus climate assessment instrument. She surveyed 7,347 undergraduate students from 10 campuses to explore whether students from different racial groups experienced their campus climates differently. Of the 7,347 participants, 5,308 students were White and 2,039 students were students of color. Students of color were students who identified their ethnicity as being "African American/Black," "Asian/Pacific Islander," "Middle Eastern," "American Indian/Alaska Native," or "Chicano/Latino/Hispanic" race. The participating institutions were geographically diverse, with one institution from the Northeast, two from the Mid-Atlantic States, one from the Southeast, two from the Great Lake region, one from the Midwest, two

from the Southwest, and from Northwest. The institutional sample included two private and eight public colleges and universities.

The survey questions were constructed utilizing primarily the work of Rankin (1994, 1998). The final instrument contained 55 items and an additional space for respondents to provide comments. The survey asked students to describe their perceptions about: (a) their personal experiences; (b) the campus climate; and (c) institutional action including administrative policies and academic initiatives regarding diversity issues and concerns on campus.

This study revealed three findings: (a) personal campus experiences; (b) perception of the campus climate; and (c) perceptions of institutional action including administrative policies and academic initiatives regarding diversity issues and concerns on campus.

Reporting on personal campus experience, the author indicated that approximately twenty-five percent of respondents (n=1,816) reported that they had experienced harassment. Rankin (2005) characterized harassment as any offensive, hostile, or intimidating conducts that interfered unreasonably with one's ability to work or learn on campus. Of all respondents, approximately 600 were students of color (33% of the complete sample) who reported that they had experienced harassment in comparison to 400 White students (22% of the complete sample). The vast majority respondents (75% of students of color and White students) identified other students as the source of harassment. Notably, 20% (students of color and White students) identified faculty as the source of harassment.

Reporting on the perception of the campus climate, Rankin (2005) identified that significantly greater proportion of students of color than White students view the classroom climate as less welcoming for students of color. Similar results were reported when reviewing the results for the workplace climate. A significantly greater proportion of White students viewed the workplace climate as welcoming for employees of color than did the students of color. Regarding the perception of campus acceptance, Rankin (2005) indicated that a significantly greater proportion of White students viewed the climate as more accepting than did students of color.

Reporting on the perceptions of institutional actions and strategies, Rankin (2005) reported that in general, students believed that more attention, in class and out of class, on issues of race would improve the climate on campus. Students of color, however, were more likely to believe that such intervention would significantly improve the climate than were White students. In addition, a significantly greater proportion of students of color indicated that such workshops would improve campus climate at a greater rate than White students. White students were less likely than expected to agree that such interventions would improve campus climate, but more likely to believe there would be no change.

In summary, the research study by Schwitzer et al. (1999) indicated that the presence of a warm and caring college environment coupled with a supportive network, and opportunities for engagement on campus activities contributes to African American students' satisfaction and shape their experiences in college. Brown's (2005) study confirmed that African American students' achievements are related to campus climate. HBCUs provide a caring, nurturing, and supportive

environment and campus climate. Therefore, African American students at HBCUs exhibit higher achievement levels. Rankin (2005) identified that students of color experience college campuses quite differently than White students do. Therefore, their perception of campus climate is drastically different from White students. Taken together, campus climate can be a key ingredient in shaping African American students' experiences, satisfaction with college, and higher academic achievement in college.

### *Dissertations*

Gilliard's (1996) quantitative dissertation explored the effect of the campus racial climate on African American and White students' success at PWIs. This study used data from the Midwest Colleges study, a questionnaire which was administered from 1990-1991 at six Midwestern PWIs that had successfully maintained African American enrollments. Of the 2,107 respondents, 896 African American and 1,211 White undergraduate students completed the mailed questionnaires. Among key findings that Gilliard (1996) reported was some PWIs have distinct racial climates affecting African American and White students' educational outcomes. She indicated that White students' psychosocial well-being was revealed to be negatively affected by their perception of campus racial climate. Moreover, in her study Gilliard noted that African American students' perceptions of racial discrimination from administrators could negatively impact their success. African American students often look to college administrators to define an institution's racial climate. These students' perceptions of a racially inhospitable environment may negatively impact the success of all students. Gilliard's (1996) study also indicated that for all students

to be successful in PWIs, the institutional racial climate must continue to support and affirm students from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. The author concluded that administrators have important roles in leading, promoting, and valuing the institution's racial and ethnic diversity.

In another qualitative study, Turner (2003) examined an analysis of the factors affecting African American student persistence enrolled at Moraine Valley Community College (MVCC), a Vanguard Learning College. The author employed naturalistic, phenomenological, and symbolic interactionist approaches to explore the attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of African American students. Turner (2003) selected 12 students for this study using purposeful sampling. Of the 12 participants, 3 were male and 9 were female. Participants were from 19 and 51 years of age. Nine of the participants were full-time students and the remaining three students attended MVCC on a part-time basis. Seven of the participants were in their second year of study and the remaining five participants were in their third year of study at MVCC. Turner's study indicated that several factors could contribute to African American students persistence at MVCC. Of significance was the role of campus climate in African American students' persistence at MVCC.

In summary, the works of Gilliard (1996) and Turner (2003) indicate that campus climate can play an important role in shaping the perceptions of African American students about their college environment. African American students who experience a warm, caring, and supportive campus environment express positive experience concerning their college experience and persist at a higher rate in college (Gilliard, 1996; Turner, 2003).

### *Synthesis*

The research studies by Schwitzer et al. (1999), Brown (2005), Rankin (2005), dissertations by Gilliard (1996), and Turner (2003) explain the importance of campus climate on African American students' experiences and their perceptions of their environment in their academic journey at PWIs or HBCUs. Collectively, these studies indicated a link between perception of campus racial climate and African American students' experiences and achievement in pursuit of their higher education journey.

African American students display a comfort level with campus environment that is engaging and inclusive (Schwitzer et al., 1999). African American students' perceptions of HBCUs indicate that these institutions provide a climate that is nurturing and supportive (Brown, 2005). Rankin's (2005) study revealed students of color who experience harassment at some PWI campuses might perceive the campus climate as hostile (in and out side the classroom). This author asserted that such PWI hostile campus climate could improve with the addition of educational interventions such as workshops, classes, and professional training.

Gilliard (1996) and Turner (2003) also signified the importance of campus climate and perception of African American students in their educational journey. Since campus climate is a dynamic milieu and is constantly changing due to increasing students' diversity, researchers and scholars have posited that campus climate is both influenced by and exert influence on the people who comprise them.

In this section, I described campus climate and presented the academic literature concerning the effects of campus climate on African American students'

experiences in higher education. The importance of preceding research literature is that factors such as campus climate may impact African American students' experiences in their higher education journey.

### *Racism and Prejudice*

Many African American students are affected at some point and in some way by racially hostile environments in their higher education experience (Getz, 2000). Racism and prejudice are consistent themes in the literature concerning the African American students' experiences in PWIs (Davis, 1998; Fleming, 1984). In deed, Racism and prejudice have been reported in several studies as the root causes that exhaust African American students' academic energies, create a feeling of isolation and alienation for these students, and derails their efforts in fulfilling their educational goals in the PWIs (Allen, 1992; Davis, 1998; Fleming, 1984). In this section, I define racism and prejudice. I also discuss three research studies concerning the effects of racism and prejudice on African American students. I conclude this section with Tinto's (1988) social integration theory and Steeles' (1997) theory of stereotype threat.

#### *Racism and prejudice defined*

Lorde (1992) characterized racism as one's belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all other races, and thereby the right to dominance. Marable (1992) explained racism as a system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians, and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color. Prejudice can be characterized as a preconceived, usually unfavorable idea, a bias or opinion held in

disregard of facts that contradicts it (Solorzano, 2000). African American students who attend PWIs encounter varying degrees of racism and prejudice (Allen, 1992).

Love (1993) reported racism and prejudice as a pervasive factor in African American student development. The acts of racism and prejudice, no matter how subtle, can cause harm to the self-esteem of African American students (Lett, 2003). Often times, the lack of self-esteem will create a sense and feeling of isolation and alienation for African American students. These feeling can translate into their discontinuance of education (Lett, 2003).

### *Research Studies*

Getz (2000) conducted a qualitative study of African American students from six colleges and universities in the San Diego area. Two of the institutions were private four-year schools, one school was a four-year state school, one school was predominately Hispanic, one school was predominately African American, and the remaining school had a very diverse student population. Of six schools, three were PWIs. Administrators and faculty at their respective institutions recommended eight students for the study. Participants were evenly distributed by gender and included four women and four men. The participants were: (a) of African American descent; (b) sophomores or juniors in college; (c) between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two; (d) attending a college or university in the San Diego area at the time of the individual interview; (e) lived through or were living in what they referred to as difficult, stressful or challenging life situations; and (f) were willing participants.

Getz (2000) conducted two individual interviews with each of her participants and one group interview of all participants. Several themes emerged from Getz's

(2000) study. Of significance were the participants' positive educational experiences and how these positive experiences gave them the confidence and belief that they could make it in higher education. Positive educational experiences included academic achievement, as well as social adjustment, verbal, and tacit acknowledgement. The participants indicated the acknowledgement and encouragement (from parents, peers, and faculty) of their achievements, no matter how subtle, increased their motivation. This motivation also impacted the participants' expectations of themselves and influenced the expectations of others.

Another important theme from this study included how some participants encountered stereotyping and misconceptions about themselves and their ability. For example, many of the participants remarked that people at the institution constantly perceived them as less than capable and competent. Another theme emerged when some participants stated that they experienced discrimination and hostility in their respective institutions both inside and outside the classroom. These participants ignored the discrimination and hostilities or blocked it out. Participants further elaborated that they did not internalize their negative interactions with their White peers, professors, and others in the institution in order to get along with these individuals in the institution.

The participants also explained the experience of being the only African American students in the class. This theme was common for six of the eight participants in this study. These participants felt isolated in their institutions. Notwithstanding these experiences of isolation, participants valued positive inclusive relationships with some of their professors. Participants commented that the ideal

professor and student relationship was forged when the professors could relate to them. Some participants thought that African American professors could relate to them better than White professors. The African American students participating in PWIs expressed a feeling of isolation and experienced racism and prejudice on campus. Other participants who did not attend PWIs were also stereotyped and judged by someone in their current or previous educational institution. All participants also described that they learned not to succumb to the destructive verbal and nonverbal messages they received at their institutions.

In another quantitative study, Marcus (2003) examined students' perception of racial discrimination in classrooms, on campus, and in contacts with students at a Southern urban university. This institution was a moderate sized liberal arts university with an approximate enrollment of 4,900 students of which 63.1% were White, 31.8% were African American, and 4.3% were other minorities. The percentage of African American students increased from 17.2% (1,128) in 1991 to 31.8% (1,559) in 2000. The average student age was 25 years. The student body was comprised of 36.6% men and 63.4% women. Of the 318 full-time and part-time faculty, 7% (23) were minorities and 93% (295) were White.

The data for this study were collected from 398 students who were in 26 randomly selected classes during the spring quarter of 1998. The 26 classes were selected from 555 class sections, excluding laboratory sections and internships, from all of the academic schools using a proportionate stratified sampling approach. Classes in all periods of the day, night, and the weekend were included. The classroom rosters for the 26 selected classes indicated a total of 496 enrolled students.

The 398 returned instruments indicated an 80% of the enrolled students in the selected classes.

The survey instrument was comprised of three sections: (a) section one collected essential student background information (i.e., sex, year of birth, marital status, ethnic/racial background, college classification, and religious affiliation); (b) section two collected data regarding students' evaluation of their membership in campus activities (i.e. student organizations, clubs, and fraternities); and (c) section three requested information concerning eight contexts, each dealing with a different aspect of campus life. The eight contexts were campus, instructors, cafeteria, housing, classroom, campus police, university staff, and administration.

A summary of this study's findings are as follows: (a) in the ANOVA analysis, there was a significant relationship between race and discriminatory behaviors, confirming that universities were not immune to racism and discrimination of a covert type; (b) race was significant in several cases that African American students reported perception of racial bias in the behaviors of non-blacks by the African American students than the assessment or perception of bias in the behavior of non-Whites by the White students; (c) students expressed lower levels of racial bias outside the class than in their classes. For example, when students were asked their feeling of racial bias outside the class, the reported incidence of perception was between 7.3 and 17.3%. On the contrary, when students were asked their feeling of racial bias inside the class, the reported incidence of perceptions was between 17 and 32.2%; and (d) students expressed higher levels of discrimination and racial bias from their professors (i.e., reporting on activities such as being ignored, refusing to help,

being belittled, and being graded unfairly). For example, 26% of students reported that their instructors belittled their intellectual ability in the class in comparison to 17% for the similar occurrences outside of the class. Marcus' (2003) study concluded that African American students reported a greater incidence of racial and discrimination occurrence than the White students at this Southern urban university.

Green, Bird, and Percy (undated), in a qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach to interview 15 African American undergraduates, male and female, representing a variety of majors, academic standings, and ages. All participants were undergraduate students at Virginia Polytechnic Institutes and State University. In depth interviews coupled with creative use of metaphors of participants' experiences revealed participants perceived isolation and a feeling of racial stereotypes, alienation, and discrimination at this institution (Cureton, 2003). Often times, isolation, and alienation can cause stressful situations for African American students in PWIs.

In summary, the research studies by Getz (2000), Marcus (2003), and Green et al. (undated) described that African American students often experience racial prejudice, hostile campus environment (inside and outside the class), belittlement by their White peers and professors, and a lack of respect for their academic abilities. Often times, these experiences cause stressful situations for these students which derail their educational efforts, create lower achievement and academic outcomes, and ultimately their departure from educational scene.

In the section that follows next, I discuss the works of Tinto (1988, 1993) followed by one qualitative research study and one descriptive study. I end this

section by summarizing the concept of stereotype threat using the works of Steele (1992, 1997).

### *Social Integration*

Tinto (1982) described the limits of theory and practice in student attrition in a descriptive study. He asserted that it becomes difficult for many African American students to feel integrated into the mainstream of the academic life under adverse conditions of negative attitudes, racist stereotypes, and overt threats which contribute directly to a sense of alienation and departure from college. Tinto (1993) in his book, *Leaving College* also reported that in order for students to achieve academically, they must be socially integrated into the college environment. The author further argued that for many African American students attending PWIs, the college environment does not provide the high level of social integration or a sense of community. Many times, students may look for social support and sense of community beyond the PWIs. This often translates into interacting and dealing with the wrong crowd or group activities that may derail students' academic efforts and increase their dissatisfaction with the college experience (Davis, 1998).

Tinto (1988) also identified several factors that can contribute to student's integration in colleges and universities. Of significance among factors offered was the role of student organizations and inclusive classroom communities.

### *The Role of Student Organizations*

In a qualitative study, Guiffrida (2003) interviewed 88 African American undergraduate students to understand the role of African American student organizations in facilitating the social integration at PWIs. The results of this study

supported Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure but indicate limitations of the theory when applied to African Americans from predominately White home communities.

The author employed a qualitative inquiry using the constant comparative method of data collection and analysis. The participants were 88 African American students from a midsize (under 11,000 undergraduates), PWI research institution. This institution was located in the Northern region of United States. The sample was approximately 45% male and 55% female, consisted of 16 freshman, 39 sophomore, 18 juniors, and 15 seniors. The author interviewed students both actively involved as well as students who reported little or no involvement in African American organizations. This allowed for a wide array of perspectives to emerge. Small focus groups (size 2 to 6 students) were used during data collection process. Focus group interviews began open-ended to allow the participants to shape what was studied. Participants raised a number of different themes when describing their assets and liabilities at college (i.e. faculty, counselors, and families).

A common thread that emerged from all focus group interviews was the participation of students in African American student organizations. The African American student organizations that students discussed included academic honor groups, Greek societies, religious groups, political organizations, and student governments. Although the purpose and mission of each type of organization differed, these organizations served similar purposes in facilitating cultural connections and social integration on to university. The most important reason for valuing this membership was that groups assisted them in establishing out-of-class

connections and relationships with faculty, provided them opportunity to give back to others, allowed them to feel comfortable by being around others perceived as like them, and facilitated their social integration in the university. African American student organizations also provided these students with an outlet to discuss their experiences and frustrations of being a minority including incidents at the university or in the community. Moreover, involvement in these organizations helped expose and connect Black students from predominately White home communities to African American culture.

Guiffrida's (2003) study also indicated that African American student organizations provided students an important means with which to connect with African American faculty outside the classroom. This has been found to be important to academic achievement and persistence. A close relationship with faculty has also been associated with better grades, higher levels of retention, and a perhaps a feeling of satisfaction with the university. Establishing out-of-class relationships with faculty is also important. Participating in African American organizations can be viewed as one important step for African American students to overcome hurdles they may have perceived in establishing these important relationships.

In summary, the results of Guiffrida's (2003) study were consistent with Tinto's (1993) theory regarding the important role that student organization can play in socially integrating African American students at PWIs. However, Tinto's (1993) theory may not be applicable when applied to African American students from predominately White home environments. Guiffrida (2003) stated that the involvement of some African American students from predominately White

communities in African American student organizations may have alienated those students who were accustomed to socializing with Whites by forcing them to choose between two groups. Although, these students were more comfortable with the norms of the White majority, they felt alienated from other African Americans who saw them as turning their backs on their own. For these students, interacting with other African Americans for the first time was one of the most difficult aspects of their transition to college.

#### *Inclusive Classroom Communities*

In a descriptive study concerning the academic research literature on the retention of minority students, Sanchez (2000) stated that promoting inclusive classrooms could result in positive college experience for minority students. Classrooms as communities that are not sensitive to minority students' needs inhibit these students from feeling socially integrated into the social fabric of the institution (Sanchez, 2000). Therefore, faculty could play an important role by finding ways to build and sustain a sense of community within the classroom (Sanchez, 2000). Faculty can play a critical role in creating a classroom environment that is warm and accepting of minority students. This classroom environment can be instrumental in shaping African American students' experiences and affect their level of satisfaction (Herndon & Moore, 2002).

#### *Stereotype Threat*

Steele (1992) stated that the on-going stigmatization or stereotyping of African American students in their classrooms was a major reason for the failure of so many African American college students in achieving their potential. The author

argued that African American college students are bombarded with subtle and pervasive messages that say: (a) they are intellectually inferior and (b) there is no place for them in the ranks of the educated and successful. These subtle and pervasive messages often cause these students to refocus their energies outside of the college or university. Thus, Steele (1992) noted, more than half of African American college students fail to complete their degree for reasons that have little to do with innate ability or environmental conditioning.

African Americans' poor academic performance and persistence in college, then, is viewed, at least in part, as a function of negative cultural views of African Americans, or group stereotypes, on their academic self-concept and abilities (Steele, 1992).

Steele (1997) developed a theory by examining how stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance of minority student. He coined the term "stereotype threat" to explain the structural barriers and achievement gaps of capable African American students (p. 614). The premise of Steele's (1997) theory begins with the assumption that negative societal perceptions about African Americans can negatively impact the intellectual and identity development of individual group members. The stereotype threat occurs most often when one is pursuing a career or education not perceived as the norm of reference (Steele, 1997). This predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged or treated stereotypically, or with the prospect of conforming to the stereotype. Subsequently, these expectations may result in pressures that negatively influence individuals' academic self-perceptions as well as their academic performance (Steele, 1997).

## *Synthesis*

The academic research literature confirmed that African American students encounter racism and prejudice at PWIs as they embark on their educational endeavor (Getz, 2000; Green et al., undated; & Marcus, 2003). Often times, the racism, prejudice, overt or covert acts of discrimination may create a sense of isolation and alienation for African American students. This feeling of isolation and alienation may also impact African American academic achievement. It may also exhaust these students' academic energies and perhaps cause their departure (Getz, 2000; Green et al., undated; Marcus, 2003).

African American students' interactions with their professors, and their peers (same race or White) can be instrumental in facilitating their integration in the social sphere of the institution (Tinto, 1982, 1988, 1993). Guiffrida's (2003) study confirmed that African American students' social integration could be enhanced through their participation in African American student organizations. Often times, African American students connect with their professor by participating in these organizations on campus (Guiffrida, 2003). Sanchez (2000) and Herndon and Moore (2002) asserted that faculty plays a critical role in creating a community in the classroom where the African American student can feel comfortable and perceive to be a part of college community.

Steele (1992, 1997) explored another dimension of African American students' experiences on their educational journey. This author asserted that a preconceived notion about certain ethnic group concerning their abilities and aptitude certainly introduces a threat to stereotype for that particular group. This stereotype

threat could influence students' self esteem, and their academic self-concept, and therefore, stigmatizing certain minority groups (Steele, 1997).

Collectively, the academic research literature reviewed in this section identified several common threads: (a) African American students encounter racism, prejudice, and discrimination at PWIs; (b) African American students also indicated the stereotypes prevalent at PWIs; and (c) African American students expressed a lack of integration in the social sphere of the college. Taken together, these threads may serve as key factors in forging negative experiences for African American students at PWIs.

Another dimension of preceding academic literature also revealed that for African American students, the perception of being undervalued and being perceived as incompetent, coping and adjustment to college environment may be a difficult and challenging process. This difficult and challenging process can facilitate these students' departure from college without accomplishing their academic goals.

In this section, I defined racism and prejudice. I also discussed research studies concerning the effects of racism and prejudice on African American students' experiences in higher education. Tinto's (1988) social integration theory and Steele's (1997) theory of stereotype threat concluded this section. The findings reported in preceding research literature can be significant. Factors such as racism and prejudice may impact African American students' experiences in their higher education journey.

## *Role Modeling and Mentoring*

LaVant, Anderson, and Tiggs (1997) in a descriptive study stated that mentoring in higher education has proven to be a valuable and effective tool in promoting interaction between students and faculty. African American students have reaped the benefits of formally structured mentoring programs at college and universities (LaVant et al., 1997). Mentoring dates back to the ancient Greek; the term mentoring is linked to Greeks mythology and the character Odysseus (Jacobi, 1991). In this section, I review the literature of mentoring using the works of several authors to define mentoring, expand on the role of mentoring as a tool for student integration, and types of mentoring. I also discuss three research studies relating to mentoring of African American students.

### *Mentoring Defined*

The mentoring process has traditionally been perceived as a model for apprenticeships in graduate education, but it is now increasingly identified as a retention strategy for undergraduate education (Jacobi, 1991). Shandley (1989) characterized mentoring from a higher education perspective as an intentional process involving interaction between two or more individuals. The author asserts that mentoring is a nurturing process that fosters the growth and development of the protégé. Mentoring is an insightful process in which the wisdom of the mentor is acquired and applied by the protégé. Shandely (1989) views mentoring as a supportive and often times a protective process. The mentor can serve as an important guide or reality checker and introduces the mentee to the environment he or she is preparing to enter.

Several other authors have offered similar views. For example, Moore and Amey (1988) characterized mentoring as a form of professional socialization wherein a more experienced individual acts as a guide, role model, teacher, and pattern of a less experienced protégé. Zey (1984) suggested that a mentor is a person who oversees the career and development of another person, usually a junior, through teaching, counseling, providing psychological support, protecting, and at times promoting or sponsoring. And, Phillips-Jones (1982) stated that mentors influence people and significantly help them reach their major life goals. Mentoring is also referred to as role modeling. Role modeling requires direct interaction between the mentor and mentee. It greatly influences the development and outcome of a mentoring relationship.

Academic research literature indicated that role modeling and mentoring could influence experiences of minority students in their academic journey (Fleming, 1984; Karnei, 2003). Minority students who participate in mentoring and role modeling projects can establish an immediate connection with higher education personnel the moment they arrive at these institutions (Astin, 1982; Fleming, 1984; Parker and Scott, 1985; Pounds, 1987). This connection can affect students' higher education experiences.

#### *Mentoring as an Integration Tool*

Tinto (1993) in his book, *Leaving College* contends that academic and social integration influence students' decisions to persist in school or drop out. Tinto (1993) asserted that students arrive on campus with various built-in characteristics, including family backgrounds, pre-college educational achievements, academic abilities, and

other various personal attributes, all of which significantly influence rates of students' persistence. Some African American students enter college socially, educationally, and economically disadvantaged in comparison to their non-minority peers (Donovan, 1984; Eddins, 1982). By integrating the African American students into the social fabric of the institution, their chances of persistence and matriculation can be enhanced (Tinto, 1993). According to Astin (1984) and Tinto (1993), mentoring could be a useful tool that promotes the connection making between the student and the institution; it also enhances the integration of students into the social fabric of the institution.

#### *Types of Mentoring*

LaVant et al. (1997) defined two types of mentoring used in post-secondary education: a) formal mentoring and b) informal mentoring. Formal mentoring programs are designed to increase enrollment and retention of minority students and other students, as well as increasing student satisfaction with academic experience (James, 1989; Paratore, 1984). Informal mentoring is an ad hoc, spontaneous relationship, established by two or more individuals for the benefit of those involved (Jacobi, 1991). The extent to which informal mentoring is applied in higher education is unknown; however, evidence does support the notion that informal mentoring positively influences establishment of formal mentoring initiatives (LaVant et al., 1997). Since many informal mentoring relationships are reported to promote academic success, more extensive and formally structured models have resulted following their lead (Jacobi, 1991).

### *Research Studies on Mentoring African American Students*

The academic research literature on mentoring African American students in community colleges is sparse. Three research studies concerning the mentoring of African American students are presented in this section.

The mentoring program at the Prince George Community College (PGCC) was geared to implement successful strategies by connecting students of color to the institution and improve their retention rates (James, 1991). The purpose of mentoring program at PGCC was to establish and maintain constructive relationship with students of color. The mentors for this program were full-time and part-time faculty, staff, and administrators trained to provide supportive classroom environment and proper support services to these students (James, 1991).

This study examined the program's impact on students of color and tracked the differences in retention/persistence specifically between two groups of African American and White students, those who participated in the mentoring program and those who did not. Only the findings for African American students are reported in this section. The findings of this study indicated that 66 percent of the African American students in the participant group successfully completed 100 percent of their credit courses. Eighty percent of African American students from the participant groups returned to the college in the following semester. In the African American non-participant group, 51 percent of the students completed 100 percent of their credit courses, but only 73 percent of African American from the non-participant groups returned to the college in the following semester. The results of this study indicated that African American students who participated in the mentoring project

did significantly better than those students who did not participate in the mentoring program (Stromei, 2000). This study confirmed that strategies to promote the connection between the student and the institution could affect student retention and persistence.

In another qualitative study, Frierson, Hargrove, and Lewis (1994) examined the perception and attitudes of 18 African American students who participated in a summer mentoring research program at a large university. Eleven African American women and seven African American men participated in this study. Findings of this study signified that participants with African American or women mentors had more positive perceptions and attitudes toward research and the research environment than those with White male mentors. In addition, this study supports the perception that African American faculty presence is important in providing positive attitudes toward research and academic careers in African American students (Frierson et al., 1994).

Pope's (2002) quantitative study was part of a larger investigation that involved 375 minority students enrolled at 15 United States community colleges. Survey questions focused on minority student perception of campus climate, institutional diversity, mentoring, and administrative support for diversity. Only the findings for the mentoring segment of this survey are discussed in this section. For this study, Pope (2002) proposed that multiple levels of mentoring provide both formal and informal methods of mentoring for minority students. According to Pope (2002), formal mentoring was comprised of programming initiatives that community colleges conducted to enhance student success, and informal methods included faculty

accessibility and support and the presence of minority faculty and staff members on campus.

Twenty-five institutions were selected for this study, based on five regions of the country, Northeast, South, Midwest, Northwest, and West. Five institutions from each of these regions were selected using a stratified random sampling method from a list developed by the researcher. Of the 25 institutions selected, only 15 institutions elected to participate in this study. Participating institutions included five institutions from the South, five from the Midwest, three from the Northeast, and two institutions from the West.

The participants included 250 students of color who responded to this survey, female students accounted for 55.2% (n=138) and male students accounted for 44.8% (n=112) of the respondents. Ethnically, 12 (4.8%) of the respondents identified themselves as of Asian American descent, 28 (11.2%) identified themselves as of Hispanic, 174 (69.6%) identified themselves as African American, 22 (8.8%) identified themselves as Native American, and 14 (5.6%) identified themselves as multicultural. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 52 with an average age of 26.8.

The researcher posed four research questions in his study: (a) what aspects of mentoring are important to minority students? (b) what are minority students' perception of whether their current institution provides these multiple levels of mentoring? (c) is there a relationship between the perceptions of importance and the availability of these multiple levels of mentoring by minority students? and (d) is

there a difference in minority students' perceptions, based on race, of whether their institution provides multiple levels of mentoring?

The findings for the first research question identified aspects of mentoring important to minority students. This finding indicated eight (66.7%) students of Asian American descent rated their peers serving as mentors to them as being important. Similarly, only 18 (64.3%) Hispanics, and 120 (69%) African Americans responded affirmatively to this statement.

The findings for the second research question centered on the minority students' perceptions of their institution's provision of multiple levels of mentoring. The participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with their current institution's provision of each type of mentoring. The participants indicated they strongly agreed with the statement concerning the type of mentoring existed on their campuses. The participants also indicated that mentoring was very important for their success.

The findings for third research question focused on establishing a relationship between the perceptions of importance and availability of these levels of mentoring by minority students. Chi-square analysis indicated that students perceived that the services they deemed important were services that were available on their campuses, with the exception of faculty mentoring students.

The findings for fourth research question focused on whether there was a difference in minority students' perceptions, based upon race, of their current institution's provision of multiple levels of mentoring. The one-way ANOVA test results indicated significant differences in statements presented regarding mentoring

by the respondents. For example, Hispanic respondents had a significantly lower agreement than other students of color with the perceived availability of persons of color at their institution that they would consider as potential mentors.

In addition, Asian American respondents had a significantly lower agreement level than other students of color regarding the availability of peer mentors to assist them. And, Asian American students had a significantly lower level of agreement than African American students with the statement regarding the involvement of staff at their institution in the mentoring process. Furthermore, Asian American students also had a significantly lower level of agreement than other students of color regarding their individual participation in mentoring fellow students.

In conclusion, the findings of Pope's (2002) study suggested that mentoring was an important issue for minority students in community colleges around the U.S. The perceptions of these students regarding the aspects of mentoring were important. Minority students also identified that the availability of types of mentoring programs on their campuses were significant in providing success mechanism for their success. This is consistent with existing research (Pope, 2002).

In summary, my review of academic literature concerning role modeling and mentoring confirms that developing a mentoring program can enhance the student-faculty relationship. James (1991), Frierson et al. (1994), and Pope (2002) noted that students who interact and become involved in a mentoring relationship find greater satisfaction in their collegiate experiences than those persons who do not have this experience. This kind of satisfaction is consistently reported and experienced by minority students, particularly African American students and professionals fortunate

enough to benefit from having a mentor to advise them, teach them, and guide their efforts at crucial points in their educational, professional, and personal development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

LaVant et al. (1997) stated that mentoring is an effective tool in providing the support necessary to overcome the barriers that prevent many African American students from successfully completing college. Mentoring is also vital in contributing to the survival and empowering of African American students. It also enhances their ability to make plausible gains in the higher education milieu. Reported academic literature asserts and confirms that if African American students are to be successful in their pursuit of a degree in higher education, positive and creative intervention methods such as mentoring and role modeling must be developed at the institutional level (Frierson et al., 1994; Pope, 2002). Faculty, staff, and administrators also play a critical role in facilitating the connection between student and the institution. Hence, increasing student's satisfaction with the institution (James, 1991; Pope, 2002; Tinto, 1987, 1988, 1993). After all, mentoring in higher education continues to assist African American student development and their successful higher education experience (LaVant et al., 1997).

### *Synthesis*

Academic research literature of mentoring indicated that minority students' satisfaction and success ultimately depends on these students integration in the academic and social fabric of the institution (Frierson et al., 1994; James, 1991; LaVant et al., 1997; Pope 2002). Mentoring programs can expose minority students to a variety of individuals who are committed to ensuring that these students adjust to

life as a college student. Mentors can assist minority students to overcome some of the pre-college characteristics as well as balancing college responsibilities which often times serve as barriers to these students' success (Tinto, 1993). Additionally, students who participate in mentoring programs are much more satisfied with their college experiences than those who do not participate in mentoring programs (Fleming, 1984; LaVant et al., 1997).

Mentoring is nothing new. After all, Jawanza Kunjufu (1986), an educational consultant and lecturer in his book *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys* identified the importance of teaching, role modeling, and mentoring for African American boys before they are hardened by the ways of the street and build up a rap sheet the length of football field. Kunjufu (1986) noted that that many African American boys turn to the streets to learn how to become men because they don't have fathers at home and no one could step in to fill the void.

After carefully reviewing the literature presented in this section, there is a still a gap in the literature concerning mentoring and role modeling and African American students. Several studies presented in this section only focused on select group of African American students in four-year PWIs. Very few studies have been reported that explore the relationship between African American students' experiences and the gender and race of their mentors. Studying the relationship between African American students' experiences and their mentor (same race/gender or opposite race/gender) in community colleges should be an important consideration for future research.

In this section, I presented the literature of mentoring, expanded on the role of mentoring as a tool for student integration, and types of mentoring. The importance of preceding research literature is that factors such as mentoring and role modeling may impact African American students' experiences in their higher education journey.

### *Parental and Family Support*

Transitioning to college and navigating the terrain of higher education can be a challenging and stressful period for many students (Herndon & Moore, 2002; Lafreniere, Ledgerwood, & Docherty, 1997). Whether it is forging new friendships with peers, selecting classes, or being away from family for the first time, college students need support beyond the financial kind. Very often, the support comes from parents and family members. These individuals often are called on to provide encouragement, guidance, and reassurance about college and the student's potential. Strong parental and family support manifests into greater levels of confidence, efficiency, and motivation in the student (Herndon & Moore, 2002; Hrabowski, Maton, Grief, 1998; Moore, 2000). Yet, academic research literature on information concerning the relationship between parental and family support and African American students experiences in their educational journey is limited (Barnett, 2004; Herndon & Moore, 2002). In this section, I discuss three research studies that focus on the parental and family support and involvement for African American students.

### *Research Studies*

Hrabowski et al. (1998) conducted a qualitative study of the Meyerhoff male scholars program (N=60) and their parents at the University of Maryland Baltimore

County (UMBC) between 1989 and 1995. The Meyerhoff Scholars Program was a program designed for African American males gifted in sciences. The Meyerhoff Scholars Program was comprised of several components: (a) recruitment; (b) bridge program; (c) scholarship support; and (d) faculty involvement. The purpose of this research study was to examine the link between academic achievement and parental support.

Hrabowski et al. (1998) identified six factors that contributed to improved student academic achievement: (a) the importance of reading, beginning with parents (especially mothers) who read to their sons at a young age; (b) the parents' view that education is both necessary and valuable; (c) active encouragement on the part of parents toward academic success; (d) close interaction between the parents and their son's teachers; (e) strong parental interest in homework; and (f) considerable verbal praise.

In 1994 and 1995, the African American female director of the Meyerhoff Scholars program interviewed 33 mothers. During the same time, the African American male assistant director of the program interviewed 24 fathers. Data collection included the interviews of parents and sons in a group context where in a provided group setting, individual participants took turns addressing each interview questions. Prior to the start of each interview, parents completed a brief questionnaire. This questionnaire was comprised of demographic information and items that focused on various aspects of parenting behaviors.

Two separate sets of interviews were carried out with the sons. First, tape-recorded, semi-structured one-on-one interviews, focused on factors leading to

success in school were conducted with the Meyerhoff students at UMBC campus in the summers of 1991-1996. Of the 60 students in the final sample, 52 students were interviewed, by trained African American female graduates students. Second, in 1995 and 1996 the subset of sons of the parents interviewed who were still in college, as well as all sons from single-parents families whose parents had not been interviewed, were invited to take part in parenting-focused interviews by the African American male assistant director of Meyerhoff Scholar Program. Forty-seven interviews were conducted; 44 individual interviews in a group context (7 groups of sons), and three separate one-on-one interviews for those unable to attend the group sessions. The group based interview sessions (mothers, fathers, and sons) lasted between two and four hours, and were held on the UMBC campus.

Hrabowski et al. (1998) identified four common parenting themes upon the completion of their study: (a) determined and persistent academic engagement; (b) strict limit setting and discipline; (c) love, support, communication, and modeling, many of the sons emphasized the love and support they received from their parents; and (d) community connectedness and resource-beyond the nuclear family.

Hrabowski et al. (1998) characterized the determined and persistent academic engagement theme as the parents' active and persistent engagement in diverse facets of the educational endeavors of their sons. This included parents' active advocacy for their sons in terms of accurate academic placement of their sons and parents active involvement in teacher and parent organization.

Hrabowski et al. (1998) explained the strict limit setting and discipline theme as parents' involvement in instilling in their sons a well-defined sense of right and

wrong. The sons believed that this positively guided their development and protected them from problems, which beset many of their peers. Parents also emphasized the importance of strict limit setting and consistent, and sometimes using physical force to enforce rules.

Hrabowski et al. (1998) characterized the love, support, communication, and modeling theme as the sons' perception of their mothers in particular as the provider of love, nurturing, comfort, and guidance. The sons expressed that they had open communications with their parents. Parents were there when sons needed them. Not all sons had a father figure or male role model in their lives. The portrait that emerged from the group interviews (sons, mothers, and fathers) revealed that in many instances there were strong family ties between sons and their parents.

Hrabowski et al. (1998) identified the community connectedness and resource-beyond the nuclear family theme as the presence of influences from the extended family members, church, extracurricular activities, peers, and teachers. In terms of extended family, grandmothers and aunts were seen as especially influential in the sons' upbringing, and as contributing to their academic focus. Sons expressed the importance of their parents support involvements in extracurricular activities as one of the major factors contributing to their focus and success. A number of sons emphasized the importance of positive peer influence, especially at the secondary school level. These peer influences (African American or White students) were helpful for high achieving sons. The connectedness of parents and sons to larger community resources, the reinforcement of academic focus and achievement from

multiple sources outside family including peers in a number of cases revealed to be an essential component of sons' success.

In summary, parent and family active involvement, support, advocacy, determination, strictness, academic encouragement, demanding, and resourcefulness/ community connectedness were the most significant ingredients for this program participants' success. In the end, these factors contributed to the success of African American male scholars in Meyerhoff's program. Parents and family support also eased student's adjustment to college experiences as the student enters the college. Ultimately, parenting practices appeared to counteract the potentially negative contextual influences of neighborhood, peers, schools, and society. The qualitative study of Hrabowski et al. (1998) established a link between parent and family support and African American students' success in college.

In another quantitative study, Gloria (1999) examined the influence of social support, university comfort, and self-beliefs on the persistence of 98 African American under graduate African American students attending a PWI in the American Southwest. African Americans comprised only 2.9% of the student population. Of the 98 participants, 71 were women and 17 were men. There were 35 freshmen, 13 sophomores, 25 juniors, and 25 seniors. Gloria (1999) found that: (a) 36.8% of the participants' mothers and 37.8% of their fathers had a high school education or less; (b) 36.7% of the participants' mothers and 28.9% of their fathers had completed some college or two year college; and (c) 26.5% of the participants' mothers and 33.3% of their fathers had college degrees or post graduate education.

The participants were recruited from more than 20 education and liberal arts classes that met the general studies requirements.

Questionnaire packets distributed to participants were comprised of ten instruments that assessed social support, comfort in the university environment, self-beliefs, and persistence decisions. Gloria's (1999) study findings addressed information concerning each of the four categories of: (a) assessing social support; (b) comfort in the university environment; (c) self-beliefs; and (d) persistence. In this section, only the findings about the assessment of social support are included.

Social support consisted of support from family and friends and perceived mentoring from faculty and staff. Social support was a strong predictor of persistence for African American students. Analysis of the data revealed that most students felt encouragement from both sources of support (family members and friends). The findings also confirmed that having a mentoring relationship with faculty and staff, and support from family and friends buffered the African American students from potentially negative academic experiences at a PWI. Often times, these negative academic experiences force students without a support system to leave college.

In another qualitative study, Barnett (2004) hypothesized that African American families and other kinship networks serve an integral role in supporting African American college students on predominately White campuses. This study investigated: (a) the quality of life for African American students on a predominately White campus; (b) what enables some of these students to survive in an often hostile environment; and (c) whether family involvement among African American college

students promotes social and intellectual competence, adaptation to and involvement within the university, and decreased stress.

Barnett (2004) used stratified random sampling to select 50 African American undergraduate college students at a large, coeducational, academically selective, urban university. Of the 50 participants, 24 were men and 26 were women. The average age of the sample was 21 years old. The sample was comprised of 5 fifth-year seniors, 17 seniors, 14 juniors, 10 sophomores, and 4 freshman. Participants were enrolled in three of the four academic programs and represented 32 majors.

Data collection for this study included an individual interview of each participant featuring open-ended and closed ended questions. The interview format permitted a more fruitful extraction of information relevant to the impact of social supports among African American students and perceived family support than a closed ended only interview style. All interviews were audio taped, transcribed, and verified twice to ensure accuracy of the responses.

Barnett (2004) identified seven findings for her study: (a) ethnicity of participants; (b) participants' family structure; (c) participants' family income; (d) importance of family for participants; (e) participant's intent to attend college; (f) communication and interactions between parents and participants upon leaving for college; and (g) emotional support that participants expressed.

Thirty-five of the 50 participants identified their ethnic backgrounds as African American; four students identified their ethnic background as Biracial (Black and Caucasian), six students identified their ethnic background as Caribbean or West

Indian (five Jamaican, one Trinidadian), and five students identified their ethnic background as African (three Nigerian, one Ethiopian, and one Ghanaian).

The family structure for the participants in Barnett's (2004) study was as follows: (a) sixty-six percent (33) of the participants were raised in a two-parent household; (b) twenty-three percent (16) of the participants were raised by their mothers only; and (c) two percent (1) indicated other family members raised this participant. Barnett's (2004) study indicated that the median family income for the sample was \$57,770.00 per year.

Reporting on parental education of her participants, Barnett (2004) indicated that college attendance was high among the parents of the participants in this sample. Eighty-four percent (42) of the participants reported that one or both of their parents had some form of post-high school experience (i.e. trade school or some years of college). Thirty-eight percent (19) of the participants came from homes where both parents were college graduates, and 14% (7) of the participants in the sample had parents who had post-baccalaureate experience ranging from J.D. to Ph.D. to M.D.

Reporting on the importance of family, Barnett (2004) also indicated that her participants stated it was the encouragement they received from their families that guided them in the direction of college. This encouragement was manifested in several forms: (a) parents motivation and praise during childhood choice of selective or private schools for child to attend; (b) parents assisting with the organization of college applications and options; (c) parents discussion of career choices; and (d) parents choosing toys or books that reflect particular career choices, and having books and reading materials around the home.

Barnett (2004) indicated that 96% of the participants in this study had always known that they would attend college. Attending college for the participants was a given and the next logical step in their life cycle. Ninety-eight percent of the participants reported that their parents were the main motivating forces in their decision to attend college and 96% of the participants indicated that the decision to attend college was made well in advance of high school. Participants reported that their parents' expectations for them to attend college were communicated to them very early. The participants also indicated their families were instrumental in not only providing them encouragement and expectation for them to attend college, but also made financial sacrifices to send them to private schools to ensure that they were able to pay for the college tuition once admitted.

Barnett (2004) reported that the participants indicated that as they left for college, their parents gave them advice and encouraged them to practice good study skills and habits, stressing the importance of setting priorities and being responsible, bracing them for possible racial affronts and managing race relations, discussing stress management, and generally preparing them for the future. The majority of the parents set standards of academic excellence by attending college themselves and passing the wisdom they gained on their children. The participants also indicated they were satisfied with the preparation and advice they received from their parents prior to leaving for college. The common themes among parents advice ranged from: (a) how proud were the parents for the accomplishments of their children; (b) how the parents communicated to their children to navigate the stress of attending a PWI; and (c) how to set priorities.

Barnett (2004) reported on participants' communication and interaction with their family during the time the participants were in college. Upon leaving for college, the participants reported on an average they visited home or saw their parents four times a semester. Participants also used telephone calls as another mode of communication with their parents. The interaction, communication, and the notion of being able to talk to someone whom the participants could relate was important to participants in dealing with the challenges they encountered in college (i.e., academic or social problems).

Barnett (2004) also described that familial emotional support played an important role in the lives of participants. For example, 70% of males and 80% of females in the study reported that it was their parents' support and encouragement that helped them to persist in college. Forty percent of the students reported that peers were very significant in helping them to persist in college, and 46% of the participants reported that it was their own determination that enabled them to persist in college.

In summary, this study found that many parents prepared their children for college by giving them advice ranging from developing study skills and habits, choosing selective schools and programs of study, setting priorities, being responsible, and managing race relations. The parents also encouraged and were supportive of their children academic efforts. Parental support continued even after participants left home. Participants continued to seek guidance and nurturance of their parents. Seventy-six percent of the participants indicated that it was their parents who helped them persist in their efforts to graduate.

Participants in this study were also active in student organization and came from educated families where their parents encouraged them to attend college and supported their efforts once they were in college. Barnett (2004) indicated that having the parents attend college did not appear to be prerequisite of giving good advice, but participants reported that it was helpful to have someone who had been through experiences before to give information. Participants whose parents did not attend college reported that their parents were helpful in organizing information about college, taking them to college fairs and recruitment meetings, talking out problems and providing insight in social and academic situations, and calming them down in anxious situations.

Participants also indicated that they received plenty of encouragement early in their academic pursuits. Parents also served as an emotional base for participants. On-going communication and interaction between participants and their parents provided the participants a safety net of knowing that there would always be someone to whom they can turn as the participants encountered challenges in college. This sense of family gave these participants the security that no matter what happens, the family love and protection will be unconditional and ever present. The family involvement among African American students promoted social and intellectual competence, adaptation to and involvement within the university, and decreased stress (Barnett, 2004).

In summary, the works of Hrabowski et al. (1998), Gloria (1999), and Barnett (2004) focused on the educational journey and achievement of African American students and concluded that active parents involvement plays an important role in the

lives of their children by providing them plethora of support in many fronts. The many aspects of support were: (a) social; (b) financial; (c) spiritual, or moral; (d) advocacy; (e) emotional; (f) academic encouragement; and (g) community connectedness which were most significant to their children's success and academic achievement. The common strands from the works of Hrabowski et al. (1998), Gloria (1999), and Barnett (2004) are that parental support and involvement, mentoring relationships with staff and faculty in the institutions created a social support system for African American students. This social support system also promoted a comfort level for African American students in their education journey. Moreover, this comfort level allowed the African American students to overcome any form of stressful encounters they faced in their educational journey. Regardless of the kind of support given, it is clear that parental guidance plays a tremendous role in the academic success of African American students in all three research studies presented in this section. Using the academic research presented in this section, I can conclude that African American students who have strong parental and family support are more likely to be successful and report positive experiences in PWIs (Barnett, 2004; Gloria, 1999; Hrabowski et al., 1998).

### *Synthesis*

Often times, the academic literature focuses on reasons why many African American students do not persist in the higher education pipeline by focusing on African these students' achievement using a deficit approach (Gloria, 1999). The works of Hrabowski et al. (1998), Gloria (1999), and Barnett (2004) focused on the educational experience and achievement of African American students using a

positive approach. Gloria's (1999) study confirmed that African American students who develop mentoring relationship with faculty and staff could connect with their faculty and perhaps someone in the institution who would provide them guidance (academic or non-academic) as well as facilitate their transition to college. Support from family and friends could also be significant in the success of African American students. Together mentoring and support can be instrumental in the academic achievement of students. Moreover, mentoring and the support of family and friends could enhance the social support that African American students desperately need at PWIs (Barnett, 2004; Hrabowski et al., 1998).

A noteworthy finding from the research studies presented in this section is the multi-faceted role of parental and family support in the lives of their children. For example, it seems that parental involvement had not only an advantageous effect on students' academic performance (Barnett, 2004; Gloria, 1999; & Hrabowski et al., 1998), but also parental and family support effected their career development (Barnett, 2004).

Another noteworthy finding from the research studies presented in this section is that the early parental support and encouragement, increased parental interaction after participants had left home, participants' interactions in a cultural community, having someone to whom these participants can turn in uncertain times of crisis, and faculty and mentor support improved the quality of life for African American students at a PWI. This also enabled the African American students to survive in an often-hostile environment. The family involvement among African American college students promoted social and intellectual competence, adaptation to and involvement

within the university, and decreased stress (Barnett, 2004; Gloria, 1999; Hrabowski et al., 1998).

In this section, I discussed research studies that focused on the parental and family support and involvement for African American students. The significance of preceding research literature is that factors such as parental and family support and involvement may impact African American students' experiences in their higher education journey.

### *Student-Faculty Interactions*

The student-faculty relationship has long been noted as a significant predictor of academic achievement along with other outcome variables such as educational aspirations, attitudes toward college, personal development, and persistence (Chapman & Pascarella, 1983; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1988; Tinto, 1987; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985). Similarly, Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) review of the literature on student-faculty contact and college outcomes suggests that quality of the contact between students and faculty should be examined in greater detail in determining the academic outcomes of students. A student, for instance, may have very little contact with the faculty, but what contact there is may be so positive or negative that the limited interaction may still somehow demonstrate a significant effect on student's academic performance (Davis, 1994, 1998). Other findings also indicate that African-American student-faculty relationships not only influences student's achievement related outcomes, but can also be one of the factors that influence students' perception of the campus climate (Allen & Haniff, 1991; Smith & Allen, 1984).

In this section, I discuss two research studies and one qualitative dissertation concerning student-faculty interactions.

### *Research Studies*

In a descriptive research study, Simms, Knight, and Dawes (1993) reviewed academic literature related to institutional factors influencing the academic success of African American men. In this descriptive study, Simms et al. (1993) identified several institutional factors influencing the academic success of African American men: (a) teachers attitudes and expectations of their students; (b) teaching approaches and course content; (c) forms of classroom communication; (d) norms of school system; (e) educational placement; (f) faculty involvement (mentoring); (g) classroom environment; (h) academic and personal support services; and (i) extracurricular activities. One common thread that permeates in the descriptive study of Simms et al. (1993) is the active teacher's role both in teaching and supporting of his or her students inside and outside the classroom. The interaction between students and their faculty is of great importance in order for the students to perceive that they integrated in the social milieu of college (Simms et al., 1993). The authors' finding also concluded that many African-American male students at PWIs reported that their relationships with faculty members and peers were negative, and that they avoid interaction with them inside and outside the classroom (Simms et al., 1993).

In another qualitative study using retrospective interviews, Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, and Smith (2004) examined the experiences of African American Ph.D. students at a predominately White Carnegie (I) Research Institution in the Mid-West region of the United States. All students included in this study were either seeking or

recently finished the Ph.D. degree in the field of Education with some differences in their specific specializations. Eight full-time students participated in this study. Five of the students were women and three were men. Participants were interviewed using an open-ended interview schedule of thirteen questions. Each interview was conducted in a face-to-face format and ranged from ninety minutes to over two hours. Interviews were conducted during Spring 2000 semester. Research questions were mainly derived from the literature on student retention, recruitment, and factors associated with the successful completion of degrees. The questions focused on definitions of an inclusive culture, satisfaction issues, key aspects of graduate school experience, factors impacting success and areas needing development in the doctoral training (Lewis et al., 2004).

All interviews were transcribed. Data analysis included coding the transcriptions in three phases; open coding, refinement of coding, and axial coding. In the final phase, key themes, and patterns, were identified and developed that transcended each of the coding categories (Lewis et al., 2004). Four key terms emerged from this analysis: (a) feelings of isolation; (b) relationships with peers; (c) negotiating the system; and (d) we stand out. The theme related to negotiating the system is significant for my study and is the only theme discussed in this section because I reviewed the other emergent themes in the racism/prejudice and family/parental support sections of my literature review.

All participants expressed the importance of obtaining support as soon as one arrives at the university. Participants described how they learned to negotiate the university culture to their advantage by locating available support programs and

identifying an advisor as quickly as possible. One student commented that there was no program to meet with other students prior to starting the classes. Having such program would have been nice to develop a bond or just know who people were prior to class. Among other participants' comments under negotiating the system theme was the participants' rapport with faculty (Lewis et al., 2004).

One participant characterized that the rapport with the faculty has been extremely good and [I] think that has been the biggest aspect of my retention. Despite the fact that there were not any African American male professors, so far faculty and staff have been extremely helpful; even some of my White professors can relate to the struggles as this participant commented. The participants also suggested forming relationships with as many staff and faculty as possible. Some of the participants discussed venturing out to persons outside of their academic department in order to find support systems. These participants discussed the importance of mentoring and building alliance to support their success. One student described the key was to seek out support from day one upon entering the university (Lewis et al., 2004).

The key findings related to faculty and student interactions from Lewis et al. (2004) study stressed that faculty and university administrators need to become more sensitive to specific needs of the African American students brought into graduate study in a PWI. The authors asserted even on a campus dedicated to increasing diversity, as African American students arrived, they were on their own to cope with an environment largely unfamiliar to them. Lewis et al. (2004) recommended that

special programs that could recognize and address the diverse needs of these students could facilitate students' transition on campus.

*Dissertation*

Bilal (1996) in a qualitative dissertation examined the experiences of 16 African American students who were enrolled or who had at one time been enrolled at Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, North Carolina. The author conducted focus group interviews. After examining the participants' interviews in this study, the author revealed that negative student-teacher relationships and financial difficulties were the primary reasons that some students dropped out temporarily or left the college permanently. Conversely, for students who remained enrolled or graduated, positive student-teacher relationship, high self-esteem, and help with financial challenges proved most significant in their decision to persist. Other themes that emerged from Bilal's (1996) study were the significant role of support from family, faculty, and friends. The author also indicated that certain African American students might be more vulnerable than others when they enter the community college environment. For these students, having a negative relationship with teachers and financial concerns could result in a decision to depart from the college scene.

In summary, the academic experiences that students have are important to their overall success (Simms et al., 1993). For students, the primary link to the academic life of a campus often begins with interactions with faculty both inside and outside of classroom. Research has found that the role of faculty, particularly inside

and outside the classroom is equally important in retaining students (Bilal, 1996; Lewis et al., 2004; Simms et al., 1993).

### *Synthesis*

The outcomes of the interactions between the students and faculty inside and outside of the classroom are multifaceted. For example, the interactions between students and faculty may result in improved college grades, increased students' satisfaction with college or university, decreased feelings of alienation and isolation, improved students' sense of belongingness in the college or university, and may ultimately shape students' perception of their experiences in college or university (Bilal, 1996; Lewis et al., 2004).

The academic literature concerning student's interactions with faculty theme reported that student and faculty interactions influences student's social involvement and ultimately increases his or her academic involvement and achievement. An increase in academic involvement for many students may also mean an enhanced degree of satisfaction with college experience (Bilal, 1996; Lewis et al., 2004; Simms et al., 1993).

In this section, I discussed research studies concerning student-faculty interactions. The significance of preceding research literature is that factors such as student-faculty interaction may impact African American students' experiences in their higher education journey.

### *Aligning Teaching/Learning Styles of the Students*

Another emergent theme in the academic literature concerning African American students' experience in higher education is the alignment between learning

style of the students and teaching style of faculty. The impact of aligning student's learning style with teaching style has been the focus of many studies (Aragon, 1996). Learning style research at all levels suggests that culture influences the learning process and outcome, students' preferences (Aragon, 1996). For example, in his dissertation, Aragon (1996) noted that students' learning preferences affect their achievements, and the ways and means that students process information. Other researchers indicated that when teaching strategies are aligned with the learning styles of students, positive learning outcome results (Anderson, 1988; Aragon, 1996; Dunn and Griggs, 1995; Guild, 1994; Joanssen & Grabowski, 1993). Faculty teaching style that allows each member of the learning community to bring to the college experiences his or her own unique cultural style and ways of viewing the world can provide a fertile milieu in creating positive experience for students from different culture group (Aragon, 2000).

Another key finding in Aragon's (1996) dissertation is that a student's culture provides the conceptual knowledge for a set of tools that he or she brings to the learning environment. Very often, there is discordance between the cultural styles and worldviews of African American college students and their professors, typically resulting in poor development and learning outcomes for the students and a less than satisfying teaching experience for the professors. Even African American students and African American professors who share a common ethnic heritage can be separated by cultural styles and worldviews that reflect individual class differences and cultural discordance within the prevailing college culture (Schwitzer et al., 1999).

“When professors are in tune with their students’ cultural styles and worldviews, they understand their students’ verbal communication and body language, preferred modes of discussion and participation, time and space orientation and religious beliefs, and preferred style of learning. These professors are better prepared to develop the kinds of learning opportunities that will engage and motivate their students to master challenging educational materials and goals.” (Schwitzer et al., 1999, pp. 197-198)

In this section, I discuss four research studies that focus on aligning teaching and learning of students in classrooms.

### *Research Studies*

Sanchez (2000) provided a theoretical model for measuring Hispanic and Native American students’ learning styles by drawing upon Tinto’s (1997) work. Tinto (1997) asserted that classrooms might be the only place where the student and faculty meet; classroom is the crossroads where social and academic integration occurs. Sanchez (2000) stated that it might be the lack of cultural appropriateness and the utilization of cultural tools in some college classroom makes it impossible for minority students to feel socially integrated with what is happening in the classroom.

Sanchez (2000) indicated that the American education system (based of Euro-American) cultural concepts do not allow opportunities for minority students to employ their culturally specific tools. She asserted that the learning preferences of minority students have been ignored until recently due to a lack of information about the relationship between learning styles and students’ persistence. She provided an example of special programs that are aimed at curbing retention challenges that minority students faced at Parkland College in Champaign, Illinois. She elaborated that Parkland College designed classroom activities to engage the learners in processing and synthesizing different types of information in college. These activities

were geared to provide minority students with an opportunity for: (a) immediate feedback; (b) participation; (c) collaboration; and (d) concrete experiences in classrooms. Sanchez (2000) stated that when these four factors were applied to classroom environment, they provided minority students with the opportunity to: (a) examine new information and subject matter; (b) make sense of the information; and (c) verify the validity of the information and its relationship to their personal experiences and prior knowledge.

In another study, Zamani (2000) provided a synthesis of academic research literature concerning the approaches to teaching, advising, counseling, planning, learning, success, and achievement for students of color. She stated that the approaches to teaching, advising, counseling, planning, learning, success, and achievement for students of color are based on theories derived from research on predominately Euro-centric male population. Zamani (2000) asserted that an Euro-centric educational system that does not accommodate students of color could create an invalidating environment for students who do not fit a particular mold. She further elaborated that the alignment between teaching and learning styles of students of color will prevent students of color from being branded as deficient and marginal using the prevailing Euro-centric evaluation tools (Zamani, 2000).

In a review of articles published in CCJRP from 1990 to 2000, Harbour, Middleton, Lewis, and Anderson (2003) also reported a critical need for the community colleges to demonstrate a different approach to student success in ways that acknowledge, accept, and intervene on behalf of diversity for underrepresented populations. These authors used the data and perspectives provided by CCJRP

authors as reflected in articles published from 1990 to 2000. Harbour et al. (2003) identified two broad themes in this review: (a) dominant culture and (b) privilege and assimilation. These authors' study signified that impact of learning styles on the experience of students in their educational endeavor. Their study concluded that instructional approaches should address learning from a position of diversity where the host's cultural pattern is one of several approaches utilized, not the standard from which all others are compared and measured. This will enable community college faculty to focus on educational equity as well as educational access.

In another qualitative study, Dayton (2004) examined factors that influenced adult students' success by interviewing 22 students and 8 administrators, counselors, and instructors in three California community colleges. Of the 22 student participants, 19 were women and 3 were men. The age of participants ranged from 20 to 57 years old. The author did not provide information about race and ethnicity of her participants but she indicated that they were from diverse race and ethnic background (i.e., Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, and American Indian). Thirteen of the participants had high school education or less upon entering community college. Two participants possessed a Bachelor's degree and were returning to school to enter a new field. Participants for this study were mainly enrolled in vocational career technical education programs. The author conducted face-to-face interviews of participants on college campus. Interview questions were comprised of open-ended questions in order to allow interviewees to discuss aspects of their experience most relevant to them.

The author also contacted the administrators at each of the three community colleges who had worked on grants serving disadvantaged student populations. These contacts led to interviews with instructors, counselors, and administrators. The range of work experience for instructors, counselors, and administrators varied from three to fourteen years' of experience working with re-entry students.

The findings of Dayton's (2004) interviews of her student participants indicated that several factors influenced her participants' success in college. These factors were: (a) external forces, circumstances that were beyond the participants' control; (b) finance and family, balancing family priority, and juggling finances; (c) securing meaningful work, choosing education because it may lead to securing meaningful and fulfilling work; (d) strained finances; (e) establishing supportive network, supportive network inside and outside of college; and (f) academic progress, staying on track in order to complete studies and educational goals.

The findings of Dayton's (2004) interviews of instructors, counselors, and administrators also revealed other themes that influenced students' success. Only instructors' approaches to teaching are discussed here. Dayton (2004) indicated that several instructors supported their students by promoting the sharing of students' life experiences and work experiences in college classroom settings. Instructors' evaluations of students not only included formal individual written exam methods but also group exams were included. In addition, minority students were encouraged to keep journals in their native languages. Instructors' classroom teaching tools included visual biographies/ autobiographies. One instructor noted that it was very difficult for some of her minority students to speak out in class because it was not a

part of their culture and background. This instructor stated that she had to adjust her teaching method(s) in order for her minority students feel comfortable and competent in teaching/learning situations. The feeling of being comfortable in classroom setting increased students' participation.

In summary, research studies discussed in this section indicated the significance of aligning teaching/learning styles of students in classrooms. For example, Sanchez (2000) and Zamani (2000) concluded that promoting culture specific instructional methodologies, learning styles in the classroom, and the variety of support minority students receive is critical in enhancing minority student classroom experiences in community colleges.

Harbour et al. (2003) also signified that instructional approaches should address learning from a position of diversity where the host's cultural patterns is one of several approaches utilized, not the standard from which all others compared and measured. The findings of Dayton's (2004) indicated the importance of including teaching practices that promotes minority students' feelings of being comfortable and competent in classroom setting. The common thread from the works of Sanchez (2000), Zamani (2000), Harbour et al. (2003), and Dayton (2004) is the significant role that aligning teaching and learning styles of students can play in classroom settings. Moreover, the preceding academic literature indicated that the alignment between teaching and learning might affect students' learning outcomes.

### *Synthesis*

The works of Sanchez (2000), Zamani (2000), Harbour et al. (2003), and Dayton (2004) supports the notion that it is important for instructors to acknowledge

their minority students, use culturally specific instructional tools and methodologies in their classroom settings. Using these tools and instructional methodologies can validate minority students' learning style preferences and value the cultural landscapes these students come from (Sanchez, 2000; Zamani, 2000). Furthermore, when teaching strategies are aligned with the learning styles of students, positive learning outcomes results.

In this section, I discussed research studies that focused on aligning teaching and learning of students in classrooms. The significance of preceding research literature is that factors such as aligning teaching/learning style of the student may impact African American students' experiences in their higher education journey.

#### *Synthesis and Critique of the Literature*

In this chapter, I chose to focus on research articles and research studies that may have significant impact for my study. Seven themes emerged after I reviewed several specific research articles and studies from the academic literature relating to African American students' experiences in their education. These themes were: (a) institution type; (b) campus climate; (c) racism and prejudice; (d) role modeling and mentoring; (e) parental and family support; (f) student-faculty interactions; and (g) aligning teaching/learning styles of the students. My review of the literature indicated that there was wide array of research on factors that predicted African American students' academic achievement and retention. However, there was limited research that investigated the perceived or holistic experiences of African American students in the community college settings. A thematic synthesis and critique of my chapter two follows next.

Reporting on the *institution type theme*, I reviewed five published research studies and four dissertations. The research studies by Fleming (1984), Garibaldi (1991), Nettles et al. (1999), Chavous (2000), Flowers (2002), the dissertations by Alexander (1998), Snowden (1997), Ludman (1998), and King-Saulsberry (2002) have some common threads. These threads indicated that: (a) African American students find the HBCUs as a hospitable and caring environment; (b) the special care that HBCUs in these studies exhibit toward African American students plays a critical role in providing a positive experience for African American students. This positive experience may also facilitate African American students' satisfaction and affect their stay at these institutions; (c) African American students participate in activities and feel comfortable in an environment that reaffirms their racial identity and ethnicity; and (d) African American students at PWIs may have to invest extra energies in order to fit in the PWIs environment or become congruent to the college or university settings. In some ways, this may exhaust their academic energies and perhaps affect their persistence and satisfaction at PWIs.

Collectively, the academic research literature of preceding authors concerning the institution type theme signifies the perception that HBCUs are generally viewed as institutions that are student-centered and nurturing. These institutions may be better prepared in providing their students an environment that is supportive, nurturing, and caring. For African American students, the perception of such an environment that embraces them may facilitate their persistence and shape their experience. The chief critique of the literature review concerning the institution type

theme was the limited reporting of literature about the holistic experiences of African American students at the predominately White or Black community college settings.

In examining the *campus climate theme*, I reviewed the research studies by Schwitzer et al. (1999), Brown (2005), Rankin (2005), and the dissertations by Gilliard (1996) and Turner (2003). The academic research literature of preceding authors revealed the significance of campus climate on African American students' experiences and their perceptions of the environment in their academic journey at PWIs or HBCUs. Collectively, these studies established a link between the perception of campus racial climate, African American students' experiences, and achievement.

Moreover, the preceding literature concerning the campus climate theme indicated that: (a) African American students display a comfort level with campus environment that is engaging and inclusive; (b) African American students' perception of HBCUs indicate that these institutions provide a climate that is nurturing and supportive; and (c) students of color may experience harassment at PWIs (Brown, 2005; Gilliard, 1996; Rankin, 2005, Schwitzer et al., 1999; Turner, 2003).

Taken together, research studies included in the campus climate section also signified the importance of campus climate and perception of African American students in their educational journey. Since campus climate is a dynamic milieu and is constantly changing due to increasing students' diversity, researchers and scholars have posited that campus climate is both influenced by and exert influence on the people who comprise them. A major gap in the literature of the campus climate

theme was the limited reporting of African American students' experiences in community college settings as well as establishing a link between the community college campus climate and African American students' holistic experiences.

Expanding on the *racism and prejudice theme*, I reviewed three research studies followed by Tinto's (1988, 1993) theory of social integration and Steeles' (1997) theory of stereotype threat. The academic research literature confirmed that: (a) African American students encounter racism and prejudice at PWIs as they embark on their educational endeavor; (b) the racism, prejudice, overt or covert acts of discrimination may create a sense of isolation and alienation for African American students; and (c) the feeling of isolation and alienation may also impact African American academic achievement. Therefore, it may also exhaust these students' academic energies and perhaps cause their departure (Getz, 2000; Green et al., undated; Marcus, 2003).

Tinto (1982, 1988, 1993) posited that African American students' interactions with their professors and their peers (same race or White) could be instrumental in facilitating their integration in the social sphere of the institution. Guiffrida's (2003) study confirmed that African American students' social integration could be enhanced through their participation in African American student organizations. Often times, African American students connect with their professors by participating in these organizations on campus (Guiffrida, 2003). Sanchez (2000) and Herndon and Moore (2002) asserted that faculty plays a critical role in creating a community in the classroom where the African American student can feel comfortable and perceive to be a part of college community. The common thread from the studies by Guiffrida

(2003), Sanchez (2000), and Tinto (1982, 1988, 1992) signifies that social integration can be a key in forging positive experiences for African American students. African American student participation in student organization and connections with faculty inside and outside the classroom can enhance their social integration in the institution.

In the literature review section concerning racism and prejudice, Steele (1992, 1997) also explored another dimension of African American students' experiences on their educational journey. This author asserted that a preconceived notion about certain ethnic group concerning their abilities and aptitude certainly introduces a threat to stereotype for that particular group. This threat could influence students' self esteem, their academic self-concept, and therefore, stigmatizing certain minority groups (Steele, 1997).

Collectively, the preceding academic research literature concerning the racism and prejudice theme emphasized: (a) African American students encounter racism, prejudice, and discrimination; (b) African American students lack of integration in the social sphere of the college; and (c) the stereotypes prevalent in PWIs can be the key ingredient in forging negative experiences for African American students in their higher education journey. Moreover, for African American students who perceive as being undervalued and incompetent, coping and adjustment to college environment may become a difficult and a challenging process. This difficult and challenging process can facilitate these students' departure from college without accomplishing their academic goals. The major gap in the literature reported in this section was the limited reporting of literature about the holistic experiences of African American students in community college settings and dealing with racism and prejudice.

Elaborating on the *role modeling and mentoring theme*, the academic research literature of mentoring indicated that minority students' success ultimately depends on these students successfully becoming a part of the academic and social fabric of the institution (Frierson et al., 1994; James, 1991; LaVant et al., 1997; Pope 2002). Mentoring programs can expose minority students to a variety of individuals who are committed to ensuring that these students adjust to life as a college student. Mentors can assist minority students to overcome some of the pre-college characteristics as well as balancing college responsibilities which often times serve as barriers to these students' success (Tinto, 1993). Additionally, students who participate in mentoring programs are much more satisfied with their college experiences than those who do not participate in mentoring programs (Fleming, 1984; LaVant et al., 1997).

Collectively, the preceding academic research literature concerning the mentoring and role modeling theme supports that mentoring and role modeling can serve as useful tools for students' success, academic achievement, and integration in the social fabric of the institution. A chief critique for research studies presented in this section was the gap in the literature concerning mentoring and role modeling and African American students' experiences in community college settings. Several studies presented in this section only focused on select group of African American students in four-year PWIs. In addition, very few studies have been reported that explore the relationship between African American students' experiences, the gender, and race of their mentors. Studying the relationship between African American students' experiences and their mentor (same race/gender or opposite race/gender) in community colleges should be an important consideration for future research.

Reporting on *parental and family support theme*, the academic research literature of Hrabowski et al. (1998), Gloria (1999), and Barnett (2004) established a relationship between faculty, staff, and parents and family support and educational experiences and achievement of African American students. Gloria's (1999) study confirmed that African American students who develop mentoring relationship with faculty and staff could connect with their faculty and perhaps someone in the institution who would provide them guidance (academic or non-academic) as well as facilitate their transition to college. Support from family and friends could be significant in the success of African American students (Hrabowski et al., 1998). Together mentoring and support can be instrumental in the academic achievement of students. Moreover, mentoring and the support of family and friends could enhance the social support that African American students desperately need at PWIs (Barnett, 2004; Hrabowski et al., 1998).

Two noteworthy threads permeate throughout the research findings relating to parental and family support theme. The first thread was parents and family support which played a multi-faceted role in the lives of their children. For example, it seemed that parental involvement had an advantageous effect on students' academic performance (Barnett, 2004; Gloria, 1999; Hrabowski et al., 1998). Parental and family support also affected participants' career development (Barnett, 2004). The second thread was early parental support and encouragement. This early parental support and encouragement was supported by: (a) increased parental interaction with participants after participants had left home; (b) participants' interactions in a cultural community; (c) having someone to whom participants can turn in uncertain times of

crisis; and (d) faculty and mentor support improved the quality of life for African American students at a PWI.

Collectively, parental and family support enabled African American students to survive in an often-hostile environment. The family involvement among African American college students promoted social and intellectual competence, adaptation to and involvement within the university, and decreased stress (Barnett, 2004; Gloria, 1999; Hrabowski et al., 1998).

Taken together, the academic literature of preceding authors concerning the parental and family support theme established a link between African American students' experience, achievement in their educational journey, and faculty, staff, and parents and family support (Barnett, 2004; Gloria, 1999; Hrabowski et al., 1998). However, there was a gap in the reported literature concerning the affect of family and parental support and African American students' holistic experiences in the community college settings.

Expanding on *student-faculty interaction theme*, the academic research literature indicated the outcomes of the interactions between the students and faculty inside and outside of the classroom was multifaceted. For example, the interactions between students and faculty may result in improved college grades, increased students' satisfaction with college or university, decreased feelings of alienation and isolation, improved students' sense of belongingness in the college or university, and may ultimately shape students' perception of their experiences in college or university (Bilal, 1996; Lewis et al., 2004).

One common thread from the preceding academic research literature concerning the student-faculty interactions theme is that a student's interaction with faculty influences his or her social involvement and ultimately increases student's academic involvement and achievement. An increase in academic involvement for many students may also mean an enhanced degree of satisfaction with college experience (Bilal, 1996; Lewis et al., 2004; Simms et al., 1993). Collectively, the academic literature of preceding authors confirmed that student-faculty interactions play a significant role in the academic and social integration of students and shaping their college experiences. The significant gap in the literature was the limited research addressing the relationship between student-faculty interactions, African American student's achievement, success, satisfaction, and experience in the community college settings.

Reporting on *aligning teaching/learning styles of students theme*, the academic literature of Sanchez (2000), Zamani (2000), Harbour et al. (2003), and Dayton (2004) supported the notion that it was important for instructors to acknowledge their minority students, use culturally specific instructional tools and methodologies in their classroom settings. Using these tools and instructional methodologies can validate minority students' learning style preferences and value the cultural landscapes these students come from (Sanchez, 2000; Zamani, 2000). Moreover, when teaching strategies are aligned with the learning styles of minority students, not only positive learning outcomes results, but also minority students may not be perceived as marginal and deficient using the Euro-centric evaluation tools (Dayton, 2004; Zamani, 2000).

Taken together, the academic research literature of preceding authors concerning the alignment of teaching/learning styles of students theme supports the importance of aligning faculty teaching style(s) with the learning styles of minority students. This alignment may influence minority student achievement, satisfaction, and ultimately shape their experiences in college. One chief critique of preceding research was a gap in the academic research literature addressing the alignment between teaching and learning styles of African American community college students. Moreover, how the alignment between teaching/learning styles may affect African American students' learning outcomes in the community college settings.

### *Conclusion*

In Chapter Two, I chose to focus on several specific research articles and studies that may have significant impact on my study. Seven themes emerged from these publications. These themes were: (a) institution type; (b) campus climate; (c) racism and prejudice; (d) role modeling and mentoring; (e) parental and family support; (f) student-faculty interactions; and (g) aligning teaching learning styles of the students.

I discussed, reported the findings, summarized, synthesized, and critiqued the academic research literature related to each of the seven themes. Collectively, I concluded that: (a) for my research study, all seven themes were important; (b) all seven themes might not only serve as a foundation for my research study, but also, these themes would justify and would support the relevance for my research study; (c) I used care to not to let the preceding literature shape or color my participants' stories as I was mindful that other researchers have emphasized the significance of

these themes; (d) for future research concerning a study of African American students' holistic experiences at UCC, the significance of preceding academic research literature is that all seven themes may affect African American students' experiences in their higher education journey; and (e) I became cognizant that my participants might report experiences similar with this research literature. In Chapter Three, I will elaborate on the research methodology for my research study.

*“It is by going into the abyss that we recover treasures of life. Where you stumble, there lies your treasure. The very cave you are afraid to enter turns out to be the source of what you are looking for. The damned thing in the cave that was so dreaded has become the center. You find the jewel and it draws you off.”-Joseph Campbell*

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

Chapter three describes the research design for my study of African American students' holistic experiences at UCC. I will offer my rationale for this qualitative research and more specifically, my plan of inquiry. This chapter also details my methodology/implementation, the site, the participants, data collection methods, data analysis methods, ethics/reciprocity, ensuring the goodness of the methodology (trustworthiness), alignment of theoretical/epistemological perspective and methodology, and researcher's perspective/ reflections.

### *Research Design and Rationale*

I employed a qualitative design because I was interested in understanding how African American students would describe their holistic experiences at UCC. Qualitative design provided a holistic understanding of events, situations, and phenomenon in a natural setting without a preconceived notion (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### *Qualitative Research Paradigm*

A paradigm represents a patterned set of assumptions concerning reality (ontology), knowledge of reality (epistemology), and particular ways for knowing about reality (methodology) (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). A paradigm is not a

methodology but more of a philosophy or approach that guides how the research is to be conducted (Creswell, 1998). I used the qualitative paradigm for my study.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) define qualitative research as any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by the means of statistical procedures or by the means of quantification. Qualitative research is conducted in natural settings rather than controlled one. It assumes that humans use what they see, hear, and feel or make meaning of social events. It relies on a variety of data collection techniques (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Marshall and Rossman (1989) add that qualitative research methodology values the participant's views of reality and seeks to discover these views in an interactive process allowing the participants to create the research data in their own voice or words (Rolle, Banning, & Davies, 2000).

Patton (2002); Rossman & Rallis (1998); Bogdan & Biklen (1992); Eisner (1991); Strauss & Corbin (1990); Merriam (1988); and Lincoln & Guba (1985) each described the characteristics of qualitative research. A synthesis of their work is as follows. In regard to qualitative research design strategies, these authors state that the aim of qualitative research design is to study real-world situations in a non-manipulative/non-controlling manner. Qualitative research design is field focused and the participants are not explored apart from their contexts; it is open to adaptation of the inquiry, without getting locked into rigid designs. Qualitative research design tends to be an emergent design that is a function of interaction between the researcher and the participant, both working together to influence the outcome. The research design boundaries will permit multiple realities to emerge rather than the preconception of the researcher. The researcher can purposefully select the

participants based on their ability to satisfy the criteria pertaining to research purpose and scope. The researcher can develop information rich case(s) that offers insight into the purpose and scope of the study.

Concerning the data collection strategies, these authors add that qualitative data can be observations, interviews, documents, thick descriptions, images, audiovisual materials, and direct quotes. The primary data gathering instruments are human beings. Data that emerges is descriptive (participant's own words). The researcher, or the researcher and the participants are used to interpret and evaluate the meaning of participants' reality and the mutual construction of reality. The interaction between the researcher and the participants occurs through a dialogue. The researcher must be aware of his or her bias, belief, and stance throughout the research process. The researcher strives to develop a deep understanding of the participants' situation and condition without passing judgment. However, the researcher investigates issues related to research in detail (in depth and breadth) without being constrained in analysis by categories. The researcher pays close attention to processes and assumes that change is ongoing.

Relating to qualitative data analysis strategies, these authors note that the researcher assumes each case is unique. The qualitative research is rich and thick in detail. Data is interpreted in regard to the particulars of a case rather than generalizations. The researcher focuses on discovery rather than confirmation; and ends with synthesis of the data. The guiding theory may emerge over the course of the study in a qualitative research approach. The researcher focuses on the whole rather than the parts, looking for interdependence and complex system dynamics.

S/he does not make broad application of the findings because the findings may only relate to a particular locale, individual, or groups. The researcher owns and is reflective about his or her own voice. S/he is self-analytical and balances the subjectivity and objectivity. The researcher will conduct and present a fair and unbiased investigative study that is in the best interest of his or her participants. S/he will affirm the trustworthiness of the study by employing credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

The qualitative research approach was an effective means of capturing African American students' experiences for my study. My interest in this study was not to measure or develop a causal and effect relationship or establish comparisons using statistical and numerically focused research processes that quantitative research approach is best known for. Instead, I was interested in the discovery of and describing the experiences of my participants at UCC. Therefore, qualitative research approach allowed me to attain the data and knowledge needed to allow for a meaningful analysis of African American students' holistic experiences for my study.

#### *The Phenomenological Research Method*

Husserl (1931) stated that phenomenologists try to understand rather than to explain a human phenomenon in terms of causal antecedents or to correlate it with other human or non-human phenomena. As I alluded earlier, the categories of literature reported on African American students' experiences did not investigate the holistic experiences of African American students in contemporary higher education. Instead, these studies focused on issues and factors affecting the enrollment and retention/persistence of minority students. Selected studies from each of the

categories also focused on African American students as a subgroup among their minority peers. My study focused on developing a holistic understanding of African American students' experiences at UCC.

My research project examined and described the "lived experiences" of African American students at UCC. The themes that emerged came from each participant's unique perspectives and voices on their interaction with the environment, administrators, faculty, staff, and peers (same race or other races) using in-depth face-to-face interviews. In turn, I used these themes to develop the overall students' experiences; "the essence" concerning a phenomenon as described by the participants through each participant's unique stories (Creswell, 1998, 2003). I understand that Phenomenology is not only an appropriate; but, perhaps the best qualitative method to use for doing my study because no other method emphasizes the discovery of the essence of a shared experience(s) for my participants. Moustakas (1994) presented procedures that researchers can follow to conduct phenomenological research. I employed a data analysis method similar to but not the same as Moustakas's (1994) method of phenomenological reduction to develop the essence of African American students' experiences at UCC (Willig, 2001). This procedure will be discussed in the data analysis section.

### *Methodology and Implementation*

For my study, I employed phenomenological method to understand the holistic experiences of African American students. How I might understand the experiences of African American students would be shaped by my a priori personal and professional experiences, and reflections, as well as through my participation and

dialogue with the participants in this study using face-to-face interview techniques. I used a phenomenological inquiry approach to investigate the experiences of my participants. According to Patten (1990), the phenomenological inquiry approach is based on the assumption that there is an essence or essence shared experience for several individuals (Merriam, 2002). This form of inquiry approach focuses on the idea that people interpret every day experiences from the perspective of the meaning it has for them. I employed the phenomenological approach for my study because it allowed me to discover the meaning of African American student's holistic experience at UCC. Phenomenology not only provided me with a method to develop the essence of a shared experience(s) of my participants. But also, it was suited to help me understand the essence of a shared experience(s) of my participants.

#### *Description of the Study Site*

RCCCD is located in the Midwest region of the U.S. serving six counties, over a geographical radius of sixty miles, and an overall population base of 470,000. RCCCD includes three comprehensive community colleges each offering liberal arts, vocational and career technical education, and continuing education programs (IRPE Report, 2004). RCCCD's credit enrollment is 10,513. Roughly five percent of students are African American students. This research project was conducted at the Urban Community College in the River Cities Community College District. UCC enrolls 6,000 credit students. It has the largest concentration of African American students. The enrollment of African American students at UCC is approximately 400 students (IRPE Report, 2004). UCC is located in a bi-state area separated by a major river in a predominately White middle-class community with a population base of

35,000 (IRPE Report, 2004). This community is typical of other predominately White towns in the American Midwest and its major employers include insurance and banking headquarters, regional hospitals, and high technology manufacturing firms. Very few African American students reside in the community where UCC is located. The majority of these students including other students of color commute to UCC from the surrounding bi-state towns and cities every day. UCC does not have student housing. Man's and Woman's golf and soccer are the major athletic programs at UCC.

#### *Selection of Participants and Data Collection*

I applied for the review of my research study and gained approval from the Human Subjects Committee at CSU, and the President of UCC prior to beginning any phases of my study. I worked closely with an African American full-time faculty and an African American Academic Advisor at UCC to recruit nine participants for my study. I have known these individuals since 1999 and we have developed relationships based on trust and mutual respect, and a commitment to the success of all UCC students. Both individuals are active in the African American Student Club, Student Services, and Trio program. I introduced the study to these two individuals (as gatekeepers) so as to gain their trust and credibility. I emphasized my preference of participants to both individuals in their recruitment efforts, prefacing that I was looking for participants from a cross section of students at UCC: (a) who were native of the community and resided in the community or surrounding area; (b) individuals who had more experience in UCC versus individuals with less experience in UCC; (c) individuals who were active in the college community and its activities; and (d)

individuals from both liberal arts and vocational/career and technical education programs of study. These individuals passed the information about the study to student(s) who then would contact me indicating his/her interest for participating. As a back up plan and if I would not identify an adequate number of participants, I developed a flyer introducing this study. I would post flyers in the designated area(s) of the college announcing the study and requesting participation. Potential participant(s) would be invited to contact the African American faculty member or the African American Academic advisor for information about my study. These individuals would request potential participants to contact me. I did not use the fliers because I successfully recruited nine participants from the referrals by the African American faculty member and the African American Academic Advisor.

I informed my participants about the purpose of the study and that s/he would have the option to terminate the interviews and her participation in the study at any point. Next, I asked my participants to read and sign an informed consent statement prior to the interview. The consent form included a written statement that would explain the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of the study, and gave my participants an opportunity to withdraw prior to beginning the study. The participants were also informed verbally that they could end the interview at any point if so desired. I conducted two interviews with each participant. The first interview was approximately 90 minutes long; the second interview was approximately 45 minutes long. I requested permission to audiotape the interviews, and I audio-taped and transcribed both interviews. I used a semi-structured qualitative interview format of open-ended questions that related to issues of this study. All interviews were

conducted at UCC in a location away from my office. I worked with my participants to establish times and dates for the interviews that were mutually acceptable. This provided some flexibility to accommodate their work schedule, school, and family commitments. At the conclusion of each interview, I gave each of my participants the option to write down additional information that s/he thought important to add in the follow up interview.

The follow up interview were scheduled approximately two-three weeks after the first interview and after I had reviewed the initial interview materials. The second interview served as an opportunity to explore areas that needed further clarification and/or further elaboration. Participants were invited to use this time as an opportunity to further expand on their experiences. At the beginning of the follow-up interview, I asked each of my participants if s/he had any clarification to make or any additional things that s/he could recall since the first interviews. Next, I asked my points of clarification and followed up on my questions from the initial interview. Prior to concluding the follow up interview, I asked each participant if s/he had any additional information to add. At the close of each interview, I individually thanked my participants for their participation and invited them to contact me if they would have any later questions, comments, or concerns about the study. I promised each of my participants that I would provide them each with a copy of my dissertation.

#### *Data Analysis*

I initially read the transcript of each interview in order to get a sense for the entire interview and derive the perspective and the sense of meaning for each participant. I interpreted the data that I collected in order to develop a textual

description of the participant's stories. These stories revealed what my participant(s) experienced, or how my participant interpreted his or her experiences. It was in my participant's telling of his or her story that I discovered his/her truth and the way the participant experienced the social world at a particular time and place of inquiry. I analyzed data to form conceptual insights.

I identified preliminary key concepts and themes emerging from the data. I integrated my field and observation notes with my analysis of the transcriptions. The addition of these notes to transcriptions not only enhanced the depth and breadth of gathered information from each of the interviews, but also, it represented a cohesive history of my research (Mile & Huberman, 1994). I shared with each participant his or her transcripts of the interview(s). This member-checking technique ensured the accuracy of information that I compiled for each interview. I requested that each participant verify or add to his/her own transcript if s/he felt that components of the interview were missing or misrepresented in the transcripts. After this process was completed, I employed an inductive data analysis method that is similar to but not the same as Moustakas's (1994) method of phenomenological reduction to develop the essence of African American students' experiences at UCC (Willig, 2001). My data analysis method is detailed in eight stages. A brief description of each stage follows next: (a) *Epoche*-the phenomenological data reduction requires the researcher to refrain from judgment (Creswell, 1998). Husserl (1931) referred to "epoche" as the freedom from supposition. In this stage, I set aside my prejudgment and began with an unbiased and a receptive presence to approach the data (Husserl, 1931). I bracketed out my own perceived ideas and notions about the phenomenon

(experiences of my participants at UCC); (b) *Bracketing*-in this stage, I placed the focus of my research in brackets and everything else was set aside so that the entire process was solely rooted on the African American students' experiences at UCC and research questions; (c) *Horizontalization*-in this stage, I treated every significant statement that my participants made relevant to the topic and gave them equal value. I divided the transcriptions into statements. I initially treated every statement of my participants as having equal value. Later, I deleted the statement(s) irrelevant to the topic and question and scrutinized those that were repetitive or overlapping; therefore, I ended up with only the horizons; (d) *Thematic labeling*-in this stage, I identified and labeled themes that characterized each section of the text noted from the horizontalization stage; (e) *Structuring themes*-in this stage, I introduced structure into analysis of my data. I listed themes from the thematic labeling stage and developed a cluster of themes. Using this structural technique, I organized the horizons and themes and developed a coherent textual description(s) of the phenomenon (within-case). I viewed the materials from various viewpoints and perspectives. I employed imaginative variation to think about and establish possible structures and dynamics (within-case). Imaginative variation enabled me to understand that there was not a single inroad to truth, but that countless possibilities could emerge that might intimately be connected with the essence and meaning of my participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994); (f) *Essence of clusters*-in this stage, I assigned names to cluster(s) of themes from the structuring theme stage in order to capture the essence of my participant's experiences (within-case). The aim of this step was to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience. Developing the essence of clusters

was the underlying and precipitating factors that accounted for what was being experienced; in other words the “how” that speaks to conditions that illuminate the “what” of experiences for my participants; (g) *Within-case summary*-this stage involved the production of a summary table of the structured clusters, themes, and quotes that supported or illustrated the theme. The summary table reflected the meaning or essence of the phenomenon; and (h) *Integration of cases*-in this stage, I moved from within-case to cross-case. Each within-case summary table of the study was integrated with each other to produce a list of “master” themes that reflected the experiences of my participants in this study as a whole. This stage was accomplished by bringing all the cases together at the end of the study by using the summary table(s) from each within-case summary for each of my nine participants. I used five componential analysis tables (Appendices G through K, Tables 2-6) to discover similarities and differences for each of the participant’s experiences at UCC (Spradley, 1979). The use of these data displays (tables and matrices) supported my data analysis because data generated in my research study was voluminous (Creswell, 1998). In the end, the integration of the cases stage generated a list of master themes that captured the essence of the meaning of the shared experiences for my participants.

### *Ethics*

Several authors expand on ethics and ethical issues in qualitative studies (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). These authors’ emphasize that in effectively dealing with ethical issues, the researcher must possess a heightened sense of awareness about various ethical dilemmas, rather than simply

applying the rules that the literature prescribes. I believe that ethics and ethical issues should expand beyond the permission from the Human Subject Committee or a simple consent form that my participants were asked to complete at UCC. For me, the overall ethics and ethical stance for this study was an intrinsic one as my study's aim was to reveal my participants' experiences and the meaning of their experience(s) (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Beyond this ethical stance, I adhered to ethical practices in conducting the research. There exists a moral trajectory as Lincoln and Guba (2000) noted-the way in which we know is tied up with both what I know and my relationship with my research participant(s). Concerning my study, I implemented the following to safeguard my participants' welfare throughout the data collection phase (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003).

I provided my participants the opportunity to withdraw at any time. The participants were informed that s/he could ask questions at any time during the study. I did not exert power, manipulate, or control over the participants; my participants were not coerced into participation in this study. The identities of my participants remained confidential to ensure their privacy. I explained the purpose of my study to my participants; the nature of my research and how likely this study might impact the participants was also included. I elaborated on what my participants could anticipate from my study and the possible benefits of the study for my participants.

I was careful with my approach and the results of my study so my participants did not perceive that I would be using their stories to advance my own agenda (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Beyond the ethical issues these

authors prescribed, due to dynamic, fluid, and flexible nature of qualitative research, Shank (2002) uses a metaphor, “seven deadly sins of qualitative research,” to caution the researcher that s/he must take a introspective look at his or her responsibility to confront issues such as introducing competitiveness, appropriation, rigidity, superficiality, sentimentality, narcissism, and timidity to qualitative research. Therefore, I exercised caution in my approach throughout this study to conform to Shank’s recommendations.

### *Reciprocity*

I informed my participants that they would not be compensated for their participation at the beginning of my study. I was cognizant that my participants would be investing their own personal time by participating in this study. However, I believed that monetary compensation would be perceived as a means for inducement (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Instead, my participants gained some insights about their personal lives, practice, and the ways and means which they managed their life challenges and crises from their participation in my study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### *Ensuring the Goodness of the Methodology*

This study was conducted on campus at UCC. The interviews were held in a location away from the researcher’s office. The recruitment of African American students was not a major concern because there were 400 African American students enrolled at UCC at the time this study was conducted. Moreover, the researcher had excellent rapport with the African American faculty member and the African American Academic Advisor. Both individuals are active in a variety of activities that African American students participate at UCC. These individuals’ involvement

on campus activities was a key in facilitating the recruitment of African American students for this study. Resources were not needed to conduct this study. I provided each participant with refreshments (i.e. soft drinks and light snacks) for each interview. Next, I employed four procedures to address trustworthiness of this study.

Trustworthiness of the research related to the researcher's ability to conduct and present a fair and unbiased investigative study that was in the best interest of the participants (Creswell, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) used credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability to affirm the trustworthiness of a naturalistic approach.

#### *Credibility*

Credibility is concerned with the establishment of how confident the researcher is with the "truth" of the findings. After the audiotape interviews of each participant were developed from oral to written form, I shared the transcriptions with my participants. In addition, I kept field notes and observation notes after each of the interviews (reflexivity). I requested each participant to read his or her transcription. Then, I added or omitted information that s/he felt missing or needed to be elaborated upon. This member checking technique ensured the accuracy of data (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

#### *Transferability*

Transferability is concerned with the degree to which the findings can be applied to other setting (generalizability). I developed dense, rich, and thick description of my participant's experiences and his/her background information. In addition, I used purposeful sampling in the selection of my participants in order to

learn about their experiences at UCC. Transferability of findings or design procedure was not appropriate to other settings. This study was conducted in a naturalistic setting and dealt with human experiences. However, the research technique/ methodology can be replicated.

#### *Dependability*

Dependability is concerned with the degree of repeatability or replication. I consulted with the methodologist who reviewed the data, data analysis, and the interpretation of data. My interaction with the methodologist strengthened the study design. This technique was used as a means to review the essence that emerges from African American students' experience at UCC. I also used a code/recode procedure (coded the data and then waited for a period of time and re-coded) to establish dependability of data.

#### *Conformability*

Conformability is concerned with the degree to which the findings are based on the condition of the research. I developed an electronic audit trail of all research documents for this research study. The audit trail included: interview journals, observation and field notes, audiotapes, and verbatim transcripts of the interviews for the entire research period. The audit trail afforded the methodologist the opportunity to follow steps that I took to verify the results of this study.

#### *Alignment of Theoretical/Epistemological Perspective and Methodology*

The alignment between theoretical/epistemological perspective and methodology was imperative in keeping my study coherent, relevant, and on target. I constantly checked, followed, and moved back/forth between the theory/

epistemological perspective and the methodology that I established for this study. The alignment between these elements provided me the opportunity to construct a coherent argument about African American students' holistic experiences at UCC by interpreting their voices, experiences, and stories and relating them to theoretical/epistemological perspective using the methodology (qualitative research and research questions). Carefully moving back/forth between these elements provided me with the opportunity to add meaningful layers (rendering a subjective understanding and an interpretive understanding) without necessarily contradicting the entire aim of research study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I was cognizant that given the fluid and dynamic nature of qualitative research, there might be a chance that a misalignment between the theoretical/epistemological perspective and methodology might create a research study that could be disarrayed and fragmented. Therefore, I worked carefully to avoid this outcome.

#### *Researcher's Perspective/Reflections*

I brought to this study my own experiences. In my experience as a student, faculty, and an administrator I observed how community colleges are referred to as democratic colleges and how their names has been publicized as the mirror of this democratic society (Klincheloe, 1995). However, these institutions have not fulfilled the dreams of a democratic college (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). They have a checkered history where the promise is never kept for all students (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). Rhoads and Valadez asserted that community colleges often failed the test of democracy when it comes to minority and White low-income students.

Very often, these students are marginalized right at the beginning of their college experience in the institution.

As I reflected upon my personal experiences as an international student in the U.S. nearly thirty years ago, my interactions with the non-minority students made me feel like a marginalized individual. I have lived in the U.S. close to thirty years. I still consider myself a homeless person, not in the sense of physical shelter but from the perspective of belongingness and my own social concept. I am caught between the complexities and challenges of who I am, and who I should portray in order to be perceived as legitimate in the eyes of the majority White population in U.S. I often use a metaphor of being “a guest in someone else’s house” when I reflect and expand upon my experience in this country (Sotello Viernes Turner, 1994).

Concerning my study, I attempted to analyze, construct, and unfold my participant’s experience at UCC by addressing the issue of reflexivity. This issue allowed me to reflect critically on the self as a researcher, “the human as an instrument” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183). As a researcher, I reflected on who I am in the research process and how my own biography and life experiences might shape the study. Therefore, I became aware of the multiple identity and dimensions that I brought to this study (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). For example, I shared with my participants my life experiences, as I wanted them to understand my own history and perspectives. The sharing of my life story with my participants also established a rapport and a sense of trust between us. How I might understand the experiences of African American students at UCC was shaped by my a priori personal and professional experiences, reflections, as well as through the participation and

construction of a dialogue with my participants in the study and documenting their experiences. I became a connected knower that treated my participant not as an object, but as an actor, a knower, and a center of experience. I used subjectivity in constructing my way of knowing (Kohn, 1990).

My inter-subjectivity stemmed from looking for a figure, constructing it carefully by painting a picture of my participant's experiences convincingly. Therefore, I entered a collaborative relationship with my participants. The truth of what my participants expressed was constructed through the truths of their experiences, as I tried to capture the "lived experiences of my participants" and make meaning of these experiences. The only way I could understand them was through interpretation, and by paying close attention to the contexts that shaped their creation and to the worldviews that informed them.

I was fully aware that my experiences did not mirror the African American students who participated in my study (Merriam, 2002). But, I was able to relate to the experiences of my participants because of my life journey. Therefore, for my study, I became cognizant of my biases and did forego of any pre-conceived notions about the experiences of African American students at UCC due to my background, personal and professional affiliations, and experiences in the U.S. as a student, faculty, and an administrator. Throughout the research process, I followed Husserl's (1931) advice that a phenomenologist must see the inherent logic of human experience and articulate that logic or sense faithfully, without distortion.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I described the research design for my proposed research. It also offered a rationale to support qualitative research design and the plan of inquiry. This chapter described information about methodology/implementation, the site, the participants, data collection methods, data analysis methods, ethics/reciprocity, ensuring the goodness of the methodology (trustworthiness), alignment of theoretical/epistemological perspective and methodology, and researcher's perspective/reflections. The findings for my study will be presented in Chapter Four. My interpretations of these findings will be articulated in Chapter Five.

*“A phenomenologist must see the inherent logic of human experience and articulate that logic or sense faithfully, without distortion.” Husserl*

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS**

### Introduction

This chapter presents the findings/results for the study of African American students' holistic experiences at UCC. In review, chapter one introduced my study. Chapter two focused on several specific research articles and studies concerning African American students' experiences in higher education. Chapter three described the research design and the methodology for my study.

I employed a phenomenological method to understand and discover the meaning of African American student's holistic experiences at UCC (Husserl, 1931). According to Patten (1990), the phenomenological inquiry approach is based on the assumption that there is an essence or essence shared experience for several individuals (Merriam, 2002). This form of inquiry focuses on the idea that people interpret everyday experiences from the perspective of the meaning it has for individual(s). Phenomenology was suited to help me understand the essence of a shared experience(s) of my participants.

The findings for this study will be presented in relation to ten interview questions that provided a starting point for my study. I will first provide a brief description of the study site. Next, I will provide an overview profile of the characteristics of all participants as depicted in Table one. This will be followed by a discussion of each of my participant's profile and a summary of within case analysis for each profile. The analytical process I utilized in this study followed the traditional steps of doing a participant within case analysis followed by a cross-case analysis.

From these two steps the essences of the participant's lived experience was made salient by four major domains that emerged: (a) expectations and motivations; (b) attributes; (c) interactions and rapport; and (d) transformation and self-discovery. A brief description of these four domains is included in this chapter.

Chapter Four will also expand on each of my participants' experiences with a focus on how their experiences are related to and support the four domains noted above. In the Appendices G through K, Componential Analysis Tables 2-6 will give transparency to the inductive analysis that allowed for the four domains to emerge from the within case analysis. The cross case analysis included all emergent themes in order to find patterns, similarities, and differences which answers the basic question, "how was the phenomenon experienced?" (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, a dynamic look at the four domains will be presented as a summary to the chapter; my interpretation of the essence of my participants' experiences will conclude chapter four.

#### *Description of the Study Site*

For the purposes of establishing a common background, in this section, study site will be described in the study site's own literature and records. RCCCD is a located in the Midwest region of the U.S. serving six counties, over a geographical radius of sixty miles, and an overall population base of 470,000. RCCCD includes three comprehensive community colleges each offering liberal arts, vocational and career technical education, and continuing education programs (IRPE Report, 2004). RCCCD's credit enrollment is 10,513. Roughly five percent of students are African American students. This research project was conducted at the Urban Community

College in the River Cities Community College District. UCC enrolls 6,000 credit students. It has the largest concentration of African American students; approximately 400 African American students are enrolled at UCC (IRPE Report, 2004). UCC is located in a bi-state area separated by a major river in a predominately White middle-class community with a population base of 35,000 (IRPE Report, 2004). This community is typical of other predominately White towns in the American Midwest and its major employers include insurance and banking headquarters, regional hospitals, and high technology manufacturing firms. Very few African American students reside in the community where UCC is located. The majority of these students including other students of color commute to UCC from the surrounding towns and cities every day. UCC does not have student housing. Men's and Women's golf and soccer are the major athletic programs at UCC.

As students travel the winding road that leads to UCC, from one side they see farmland, woods, prairie lands, and modular storage buildings; from the other side they see an upscale high school, a number of upscale residential areas occupied mainly by the Caucasian residents of the River Cities area. Upon entering the grounds of UCC campus, students see some green spaces that the high school uses for softball and soccer on one side; on the other side, students see woods and prairie land areas with some wild life.

#### *Participant's Profile and Characteristics*

In this section, I will present the information that I gathered from my first and follow up interviews with each of my participants in a narrative summary format. These summaries can be referred to as "participant's profile" (Seidman, 1991). Each

participant profile is a focused description of their experiences at UCC over an extended time period (Mile & Huberman, 1994). Developing each participant's profile is used to locate "rich pockets" of meaningful data for this qualitative study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These profiles also include a with-in case structure that provides my readers a good idea who the participants are and the major thematic aspects of their experiences at UCC.

Table one includes general information related to each participant's profile. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, each participant selected a pseudonym.

TABLE 1

PARTICIPANT'S GENERAL INFORMATION PROFILE-CHARACTERISTICS

Participants*→ Demographic Data ↓	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Age	44	18	27	22	41	31	30	24	36
Gender*	F	M	M	M	M	F	M	F	F
Children	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Major ***	AAS	AA	AA	AAS	AA	AA	AAS	AA	AAS
First Generation	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Married	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Years at UCC	3.5	1/2	2	3	1/2	2	2	3	3
Employment	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Enrolled in TRIO****	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No

Note.

\* Participants: 1=Doreen; 2=Rayhab; 3=Robert; 4=Kenneth; 5=Kevin; 6=Annette; 7=Trey; 8=Natish; and 9= Mary

\*Gender: F=Female; M=Male

\*\* AAS-Associate of Applied Science Degree; AA-Associate of Art Degree

\*\*\* TRIO Student Support Services at UCC is a federally funded Student Support Services Grant designed to promote academic and personal success for students who qualify. Trio services will help students at UCC in many ways, primarily with individualized tutoring/workshops based on their academic and personal needs as well as cultural activities that will add to their education and help them grow personally (IRPE, 2004).

### *Brief Description of Four Domains*

In this section, I will provide a brief description of four domains that emerged from the cross-case analysis in my study: (a) expectations and motivations; (b) attributes; (c) interactions and rapport; and (d) transformation and self-discovery.

The *expectations and motivations* domain is used to define each of my participants' expectation and their motivation for attending UCC. The expectations and motivations of my participants for attending UCC are wide and varied. The common thread from my participants' stories confirms that my participants value education. Other samples of the salient master themes that support the expectations and motivations domain are "bettering life for self and family," "proving self and improving self-esteem," "taking control of life and a desire for autonomy," "achieving stability and goals," "securing employment," "needing a support system," "locus of control," and "academic self-concept." Table two from Appendix G includes the master themes that will support the expectations and motivations domain.

The *attributes* domain is used to define my participants' personal characteristics in the context of: (a) *enabling qualities (assets)* sub-domain and (b) *inhibiting qualities (deficits)* sub-domain. Each of my participants in this study possesses the above noted attributes. *Enabling qualities* are *assets* or *positive qualities* or *influencers* that promote positive or pleasant experiences. Samples of salient master themes that support the *enabling qualities* sub-domain are attributes such as "being powerful," "problem solver," "outgoing and social," and "direct, upfront, honest, and caring." *Inhibiting qualities* are *deficits* or *influencers* that prevent my participants from having positive or pleasant experiences. Samples of

salient master themes that support the *inhibiting qualities* sub-domain are attributes such as “weak academic and social self-concept,” “weak locus of control,” and “cautious engagement.” Table three from Appendix H includes a complete list of master themes that will support the attributes domain.

The *interactions* and *rapport* domain will be described separately. The term *interactions* defines my participant’s interactions and transactions with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC. In other words, the term *interactions* encompasses my participants overall encounters with the college community including faculty, staff, administrators, and their peers. The term *rapport* defines my participants’ relationship with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC. A sample of salient master themes that support the academic interactions sub-domain are “college community is pleasant, welcoming, and approachable,” “positive rapport,” “typecast and stereotype,” and “misalignment of teaching/learning.” Table four from Appendix I includes a complete list of master themes that will support the academic interaction sub-domain. A sample of salient master themes that support the non-academic interactions sub-domain are “encountering racism and prejudice,” “cautious verbal and on-verbal expressions and engagement,” and “pre-played and careful engagement.” Table five from Appendix J includes a complete list of master themes that will support the non-academic interaction sub-domain.

The *transformation* and *self-discovery* domain defines how attending UCC or participating in this study could change the lives of each of the participants and the new perspective(s) they may have gained. A sample of salient master themes that support the transformation and self-discovery domain are “assessing life transactions

using someone else's experiences, values, and standards," "developing a sense of not underestimating self," "believing in self, improving self-confidence," and "yearning for autonomy." Table six from Appendix K includes a complete list of master themes that will support the transformation and self-discovery domain. The above noted four domains are now being used to present the within case profiles as a way to organize the descriptive material.

### Doreen's Profile

Doreen is 44 years old. She is majoring in the Allied Health program at UCC. She is a first generation college student. Her parents only completed their eighth grade education and they dropped out of school. She has 15 siblings. Doreen has been enrolled at UCC for 3.5 years. She initially majored in the Nursing program but switched to another Allied Health program. She thought that becoming a Nurse would require her to work in a fast paced environment in the hospitals or private clinics. Doreen held several entry jobs in hospitals and private clinics. She completed her GED prior to coming to UCC. Doreen is a single mother of four teenagers. For each of the two interviews, she wore two-piece blue and gray suits that gave her a professional appearance. She wore a light amount of make up, her hair was brushed straight, and she wore a ruby earring, a gold chain, a bracelet, and a watch. I noticed a healed scar which was two inches long on her right forearm.

#### *Expectations and motivation*

Doreen's expectation and motivation for attending UCC is to better herself. Her past experience(s) in an abusive marriage, being made feel inferior, and peer pressure from college educated friends have given her the drive to complete her

education at UCC. Doreen reported, “I always felt that I was not smart. This may be due to my family, the people around me. I always thought that I needed to do better, still a part of me wants to prove that.”

Doreen not only views education as a means of proving herself and to improve her self-esteem. But also, she believes that education provided her with the opportunity to be productive. Doreen mentioned, “education has given me a venue to process situations, assess, think critically, and analyze my situation to become a part of the community. Because of education, I became well-rounded.”

### *Attributes*

Some of the personal attributes that Doreen mentioned confirm that Doreen is creative, professional, focused, ambitious, and goal oriented. She views these attributes as her assets. Doreen thinks because of her business sense and her leadership skills she can interact well with the college community. Doreen elaborated, “being professional and business minded make me successful at UCC. These skills contribute to my positive experiences at UCC. Because of these skills, I can integrate with ease at UCC. My peers at UCC see me as a leader.”

Doreen noted that she does not have time for activities at UCC because of her job outside the college, time commitment for her business, her studies, and her children. However, Doreen is engaged in community outreach programs outside UCC. She adds, “I am motivated, focused, and determined. I want to be a role model for my children. Education is my key in becoming self-sufficient and a way of bettering my situation.”

Doreen used the following descriptors to describe herself, "I am social, confident, resilient, and motivated." Describing her relationship with her peers, she added, "I have been through a lot, I listen to challenges that other students may have, I reach out to people who can help me; I want to finish my degree at UCC, get a four-year degree." Doreen is also a problem solver. She is self-sufficient. She noted, "I approach challenges with a positive attitude. I have self confidence and can devise solution(s) for challenges that I encounter at UCC."

Doreen's greatest challenges stem from her decision to change her major several times. She adds, "it prolonged my length of stay at UCC. But, nothing sets me back." Doreen identified the completion of her studies at UCC as a major accomplishment and her greatest success. She stated, "I can finally see that I accomplished something as I see a closure to my educational journey at UCC. For me, this is a successful moment."

During my first and the follow up interviews with Doreen, she provided some examples of influencers in her life. One such negative influencer is her relationship with her ex-husband. Doreen added, "I wanted to be a model. I moved to California so I could participate in auditions. I did some rehearsals for plays, musicals, and photo shoots in California. He stopped all of my activities because he was jealous." Doreen's relationship with her ex-husband influenced her self-esteem.

As a positive influencer, spirituality plays an important role in Doreen's life. For example, Doreen started our follow up interview by speaking about her experience as being a Muslim wife, "my ex-husband forced me and the children to convert and practice Islam." Doreen's experiences as a Muslim woman helped her to

integrate the best practices of Christianity and Islam in her daily interactions at UCC. She reports, “spirituality controls how I conduct myself with other people. I draw on these practices in my daily interactions at UCC.” Doreen stated that she is strong. She defined “the meaning of being an African American female” as “someone who is strong, powerful, smart, intelligent, proud, ambitious, self-sufficient, and do it for your self.”

### *Interactions and rapport*

Doreen asserted that her academic experiences at UCC have been pleasant and welcoming. She senses that UCC is a comfortable place. Doreen feels that her peers, faculty, staff, and administrators at UCC are helpful to her. She asserted, “my teachers see me as someone sincere who is trying very hard. Therefore, they are helpful to me. They reach out to me. I feel that I am teacher’s pet.”

Doreen reflected on her positive experiences with her peers at UCC. She noted, “I am easy to get along with. Students of the same or different races become interested in my outside activities. I am a concert promoter. But, I keep my relationship with my peers at a professional level.”

At UCC, Doreen spoke about her support system. This support system consists of faculty, her peers in the study group(s), student success center, and the availability of writing and math labs for tutoring. Doreen sums up her experiences at UCC as, “pleasant, comfortable, confident, safe, and filled with the feeling of self-discovery. UCC is a welcoming place.” Doreen mentioned that she has excellent rapport with faculty, staff, administrators, and students at UCC.

Expanding on her non-academic experiences at UCC, Doreen confirmed that she did not experience prejudice or racism at UCC. Doreen reflected on her experience with prejudice and racism outside UCC, at age 17, when she applied for a Pharmacy Technician's job in a hospital in the South. She recalled, "my supervisor hired a Caucasian female. He informed me I would have not been able to latch on the terminology." Doreen explained that in her life, she may have come across prejudice or racism, but because of her personality she chose not to focus on it.

Doreen is sophisticated about race and color issues. In expressing her experiences with textile and clothing, Doreen added, "everyone is helpful to me and they treat me the same when I dress formal or dress informal at UCC."

#### *Transformation and self-discovery*

Doreen indicated that by attending UCC she could become a contributing member of her community. In addition, Doreen was able to improve her self esteem and confidence. She reported, "I discovered that students perceive me as a leader."

#### Summary of within case analysis for Doreen

Doreen's holistic experiences at UCC are the by-products of the interplay between her personal attributes and her interactions with the college community. Doreen's personal attributes can be viewed as her assets and/or liabilities. On one hand, her enabling qualities can be viewed as her assets that help her to develop a level of sophistication, agility, hardiness, and mental toughness needed when she encounters challenges at UCC. On the other hand, her inhibiting qualities such as lacking self-confidence and having a low self-esteem could be viewed as liabilities for Doreen. She noted that prior to coming to UCC these attributes (deficits or

liabilities) made her feel marginal and helpless. Doreen has overcome these because of her experiences at UCC.

Doreen posited that she employs her enabling qualities as she interacts in the college community. These assets also facilitated her transition and influenced her experiences at UCC. Moreover, by having positive exchanges and interactions with instructors, staff, and administrators who are approachable and helpful, Doreen perceives that UCC is a caring, welcoming, and hospitable place. Ultimately, Doreen views UCC as a place where she is valued and the college community is willing to help her achieve her goals. These perceptions coupled with Doreen's ability to successfully pass her coursework at UCC enable her to develop a sense of belongingness both academically and socially at UCC.

Taken together, Doreen's assets and positive experiences provide her a vision for viewing education as a means of self-improvement, and a key for social stability. Therefore, Doreen perceives that by attending UCC, she could become a functioning and contributing member of her community.

#### Rayhab's Profile

Rayhab is a single male student at UCC. He graduated from a high school in the River Cities area. Rayhab is 18 years old. He is majoring in the Liberal Arts program. Rayhab recently completed his second semester of studies at UCC. His mother completed a high school diploma. Rayhab's father dropped out of high school after completing ninth grade. Rayhab is in the TRIO program. Rayhab has four siblings and six step siblings. His attire was casual when we conducted our first and the follow up interviews. His hair was wrapped with a dark cloth. He had on tennis shoes,

dark blue sweat pants and a bright red sweater. He had a unique piercing directly below his lower lip and his tongue was also pierced. Rayhab shaved his face. He is light-skinned. His skin color is olive complexion. Rayhab has green eyes and wore a light amount of makeup. He had a neat appearance.

#### *Expectations and motivations*

Attending UCC is an option that Rayhab's parents find a good fit for him. For instance, he adds, "my parents want me to study criminal justice; I want to become a model and act." Rayhab does not have a job and receives financial support from his parents. Rayhab came to UCC right after graduating from high school. Eventually, he wants to attend a HBCU because he feels that UCC does not have enough diversity. Rayhab noted, "at a HBCU, I would encounter and interact with more African American students. And, HBCU will give me the opportunity." Rayhab's assumptions are that at a HBCU, his experiences will be different from UCC. He currently feels isolated at UCC. In general, Rayhab's expectations are to be accepted at UCC.

#### *Attributes*

Appearance, being conscious of how to interact, and what others perceive and interpret about Rayhab's appearance are themes that permeate from his voices. Rayhab is expressive and thinks that his appearance will create perception and interpretation by others about him. These perceptions and interpretations by others in turn causes Rayhab to develop a feeling of being uncomfortable at UCC; a feeling of being insecure and becoming unsure of himself. For example, Rayhab asserted students stare at him because of what he wears, how he wears his hair, and his

piercing. He mentioned, “staring experience makes me think that people talk about me or they do not like me.”

Rayhab is a problem solver who can navigate his way at UCC. When he faced challenges with social and academic support, he signed up for TRIO services. He is social and gets along with his peers in the Volunteer Club at UCC. Rayhab and other club members raised funds for children’s gifts for the holidays. Rayhab is talented. He spoke briefly about his experience of not being selected for the drama club tryouts. He adds, “I know that I am talented. The faculty advisor in charge of the drama club overlooked me and other students of color. I am over it, I am moving on.”

Rayhab is sophisticated about race and color issues. On one hand, for Rayhab and students like him to be accepted by the non-minority students at UCC means that they must forego and change over their identities, and become something that the non-minority want them to be. On the other hand, Rayhab asserted, “I am who I am, I am my own man and accept me for who I am.”

Rayhab pays close attention takes pride in his appearance. He also wants to be accepted by his peers. Being accepted at UCC is a significant influence in shaping Rayhab’s experiences at UCC. He identifies being accepted by other students at UCC as his biggest challenges. He asserted,

It is not academics, my challenges stem from my own perception about myself that I am not a perfect person. I am overweight and I dress different and -- I mean, just being accepted feels nice for me. I am working out, so I may be accepted at UCC by all kinds of people.

One form of negative influencer for Rayhab is having opposing views and divergent intentions from his parents. These views and intentions may impact

Rayhab's experiences at UCC in a negative manner. For instance, Rayhab wants to attend a HBUC but his parents decided for him to go to UCC. They even chose his major. Perhaps, these divergent views and opposing intentions can create dissatisfaction for Rayhab.

#### *Interactions and rapport*

Rayhab's academic experiences at UCC can be summed up as such that he perceives some faculty members may typecast African American students and form a stereotype about them. For instance, Rayhab reported, "if you go to see faculty nappy, with dirty clothes, they feel you do not want to be there. If you go there well-dressed and groomed, they feel you want to be there and they will help you." Expanding on his peers' experiences for being typecast and stereotyped by their faculty members in classes, Rayhab offered another example, "if they see Black people in the back. They assume that African American students are doing nothing but talking, and faculty feel that they have to, talk to them, they don't want to feel like they are racist." Rayhab also perceives that faculty at UCC have "pity" on African American students. For example, he focused on faculty having "pity on these students" by saying, "I have not had this experience at UCC. But, I feel that teachers have to pretend to be nice to these students so they can get through their classes."

Rayhab is in the TRIO program. He expressed that his experiences with staff in this program has been very helpful. Rayhab confirmed, "TRIO support systems provided me the social and academic support systems that I needed to stay and continue with my studies at UCC." Rayhab concludes, "TRIO personnel are approachable."

Commenting on his non-academic experiences at UCC, Rayhab thinks that there is a direct relationship between being accepted and the financial ability to pay for college. He thinks that finance separates him from other students at UCC. Rayhab spoke about his peers of different race and ethnicity. He adds, “there are popular and unpopular groups at UCC. The popular group wears nice clothes and they clique. The unpopular group is the have-nots. This is stereotypical. Students from this group are also here to learn.” Rayhab admitted that he was in the popular group.

Rayhab defines the experience of being accepted in and out of classroom at UCC in two fronts: (a) interactions with the college community and (b) the clothing and textile he wears. For Rayhab, acceptance in terms of interactions with the college community at UCC means, “at UCC, by acceptance, I mean, when people come up and talk to me and ask about my piercing and show interest, and they interact with me.”

For Rayhab, acceptance in terms of clothing and textile is paramount. Rayhab reflected on instances when students at UCC stared at him because of what he wore or his appearance. He added, “I believe what I wear impacts my interactions and relationship at UCC. Therefore, I must be careful what I wear. Staring experience makes me think that people talk about me or they do not like me.”

The outcome for being accepted for his interactions with the college community followed by Rayhab’s clothing style(s) creates a good feeling for him.

He adds,

It is like when someone come up to you and they didn’t come up to you before and say, hi to you, it feels kind of good, because that person is now

noticing you because you got a different style or a different, thing going on with you.

Rayhab is aware of race and color issues at UCC. In addressing racism and prejudice, Rayhab thinks, “Caucasian students are not as accepting of African American students as they are accepting of other minority students at UCC.” Skin color is also an important issue for Rayhab at UCC. He adds, “my skin color gives me the opportunity to be accepted in certain circles and not accepted in other circles. I am light-skinned, some people who are darker than me usually look at me, and they turn their nose up.” Conversely, Rayhab concentrated on being light-skinned and his interactions with the faculty at UCC and the students, “with teachers, it is not a big thing, but with students it feels nice, a Caucasian person comes to me and talks to me, but they see my friends, and they are dark skinned and they don’t talk to them.”

Rayhab experienced racism and prejudice at UCC by other students. He added, “you have to act White to be accepted by the Caucasians. This is about clothing, using the same lingo and mannerism. If you are not one of them, then, they discriminate.”

#### *Transformation and self-discovery*

Rayhab’s main goal is to be accepted at UCC by the college community. He did not comment on transformation and self-discovery at the first and second interview.

#### Summary of within case analysis for Rayhab

Rayhab’s motivation for attending UCC is beyond his control because of financial support from his parents. Rayhab’s parents decided that he should attend UCC, contrary to his desire for attending a HBCU. He is making the best of a

circumstance that is beyond his control. Involvement with the TRIO program provides Rayhab the opportunities to connect academically and socially at UCC so he does not feel isolated.

Rayhab's viewpoint about having rapport with faculty at UCC reveals that he perceives faculty at UCC may typecast and stereotype African American students. His holistic experiences at UCC are a collective interplay of his identity, a desire for being accepted, and having relationships with the college community including his peers at UCC. His ultimate goal is to become the center of attention at UCC. In other words, for Rayhab, UCC personifies a fashion catwalk. Rayhab is a young African American man who is playful, fun loving, energetic, sexy, and with a will do almost anything attitude. At UCC, Rayhab employs alignment to achieve his goals.

Alignment deals with a set of coping strategies that Rayhab employs in order to be accepted by individuals at UCC as a "being." He reflected that acting White in terms of speech pattern(s), appearance, dress, and carrying conversation could facilitate this notion of being accepted for him at the UCC. This may also mean that Rayhab and students like him must forego their identity to be accepted. This mode of adjustment for Rayhab means that he is caught up in a conundrum between who he is and who he should portray in order to be accepted at UCC. An Individual who gains acceptance using this mode of adjustment can be identified as a conversionist. Rayhab's position and mode of adjustment may be consistent with the conversionist discourse. As a conversionist, Rayhab manages to abandon expressive styles in language, dress, and hair associated with the way of life of his African American peers in order to achieve his goal of being accepted by the Caucasians at UCC.

## Robert's Profile

Robert is 27 years old. He is married and has a two-year old daughter. Robert did not attend a high school in the River Cities area. Robert is majoring in the Liberal Arts program. He has been at UCC for two years. He will graduate in spring 2006. After graduating from UCC, Robert plans to look for a job so he can support his family. His parents did not continue their high school education beyond 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Robert is a first generation student. He has five siblings. Robert is a veteran of the first gulf war. Robert is in the TRIO program. His attire was casual when we met for our first and the second interviews. He wore tennis shoes, dark gray sweat shirt and black pants. Robert has short hair and his face was shaved. He is a tall young man with broad shoulders. Robert's appearance was casual, yet meticulous.

### *Expectations and motivations*

Upon graduating from high school, Robert attended another community college in the Midwest. He played basketball at this college. Prior to finishing his studies at this college Robert joined U.S. Army and was stationed in the Middle East. As a U.S. Army Specialist, Robert worked in the Logistics Division. Two years ago, Robert left the Army and started his studies at UCC.

Robert's expectations and motivations for attending UCC is to better himself. He adds, "I have a family and have to do better for myself and my family." Originally, Robert wanted to pursue an Allied Health program. He discovered that it would take him a long time to graduate from this program. Therefore, he changed his major. After graduating from UCC, "I need to get a job and support my family," Robert noted.

### *Attributes*

Robert used descriptors such as being “social,” “a serious student,” “a cordial person,” “a loner by choice,” “being singled out,” “hesitant,” “a watcher,” and “a resilient person” when he spoke about himself. In addressing being a social person and a serious student, Robert commented, “I am here to get an education. My mother always taught us to use our ‘Please-P’ and ‘Thank You-T’. I use my ‘P &T’ in and out of the classroom.”

In describing his experience as a loner at UCC, Robert elaborated, “when I think of being a loner, it is like you have a tunnel vision when you are in the classroom; that is how I describe it. That is what I envision when I think of loner. Focusing on being a watcher at UCC, Robert adds, “I watch over my shoulder. I am trying to change that to where everybody is not out to get me. It is a hard to let go of what you grow up doing.”

Robert equates the experience of being “singled out” at UCC as an eerie feeling. He reported, “people are intimidated by my size. They see me, they automatically form a stereotype. If I do not smile, they may think that I am angry.”

Commenting on fulfilling his family commitments, Robert wants to focus on school. He asserts, “I do not take time for activities outside the class at UCC. This is due to my family commitments. I only participate in the TRIO program.”

Robert reflected on his experiences in the U.S. Army. He believes that U.S. Army made him “resilient, adaptable, and a persistent person.” He adds, “to me resiliency means that I keep on going no matter what. I also believe that UCC has made me a resilient person. This also comes from by watching my grandfather.”

Robert believes that passing his classes at UCC are his most significant accomplishment. Focusing on positive influencers in his life, Robert mentioned that three entities shaped his life experiences: (a) his mother; (b) his late grandfather; and (c) the U.S. Army.

Expanding on his relationship with his mother, Robert asserted that his mother is his confidant, “my mother taught me a lot.” Robert uses the term “broker” when he describes his mother. Robert stated, “my mother is the driving force in our family but my father is the fuel. I am closer to my mother than my father. Robert gets excited when he describes his mother, suggesting a strong bond between him and his mother. The strength of this relationship reveals itself in Robert’s non-verbal expressions because every time Robert speaks about his mother his eyes sparkle and he would smile.

Another significant individual in Robert’s life is his late grandfather. Robert is affectionate about him. Robert stated, “my late grandfather is my role model. I draw a lot from my grandfather’s experiences, relationships/interactions with others, dealing with people of different races, and work ethics.” The strength of relationship between Robert and his grandfather is evident each time Robert speaks about his grandfather, his eyes beam with happiness and his face lights up. Robert also disclosed that he lives his life according to his grandfather’s principles and rules. Robert asserted, “I often question myself, how would my grandfather address a given situation when I encounter one.”

Focusing on the U.S. Army, Robert added, “U.S. Army helped me to adapt to anything. Because of all the people that I met and things I went through, Army made

me a well-rounded person.” Collectively, Robert believes that a supporting mother that provides him guidance and advice when he needs it, a strong grandfather that he can model after, and his experiences in the U.S. Army are positive influencers in his life. He draws on all three entities as he continues with his life journey in and out of UCC.

### *Interactions and rapport*

Focusing on his academic experiences at UCC, Robert stated that he is watchful and careful about his surroundings at UCC. He is hesitant and operates in a calculated mode in his interactions at UCC. Robert makes cautious engagements; most of Robert’s engagements are pre-played. For example, he assesses every situation and would use carefully assessed actions in terms of his verbal expressions and his non-verbal expressions when he communicates with the college community at UCC. Robert asserted, “I examine where to sit, look over my shoulder, and play by the rules. I anticipate for the next thing to happen; may be for the best or for the worse.” Robert models after his grandfather as he tries to establish relationships or rapport with students and the college community at UCC as “take it for what it is.”

He adds,

My grandfather taught me to keep my eyes open. I am always watchful, keep it to myself, control my own behavior, vigilant, nervous about what is going on around my back, content, and make friendship with others cautiously. I am a loner by choice. I do not tell people about my business.

Expanding on his non-academic experiences at UCC, Robert mentioned that he was enrolled in the TRIO program. Robert added, “TRIO provided me academic and social supports and interaction with a lot of diversity at UCC. TRIO gives me one-on-one with the teacher. I have helpful experiences with TRIO.” Beyond

Robert's experiences with the TRIO at UCC, he reflected on his experience with diversity at UCC. Robert reported, "UCC does not have a lot of diversity. I recognize that there are students within their own cliques at UCC. I am indifferent toward cliques at UCC. This is how I stay safe and mind my own business."

Focusing on appearance and clothing, Robert mentioned that he is hesitant how he is perceived based on the clothes he wears at UCC. Robert added that he is concerned with the perception clothing will leave on people. For instance, he added, "people form perception about others because of their clothing. Appearance is the first thing people see. Therefore, I take precautions and that's why I do not wear that stuff."

In defining the meaning of being an African American male, Robert used the following descriptors to describe the meaning of being an African American male, "a survivor, warier, fighter, a person who works very hard, self-sufficient, makes sacrifices, struggles, and resilient. These are the epitome of being an African American man."

Robert also expanded on his first encounter with racism and prejudice at UCC. He cited that one of his African American peers was told that she could not bring her grandfather in to complete her competencies for her lab projects. Other non-minority students were allowed to bring their family members. Robert felt that this was a double standard.

In describing racism and prejudice, Robert stated, "racism and prejudice can be viewed like a wind. Wind is there, you do not see it, and you can feel it. This is how I look at racism and prejudice." Robert confirmed that he did not experience

racism and prejudice at UCC. "If prejudice and racism is there, I do not notice it," Robert concluded.

### *Transformation and self-discovery*

Robert revealed that he experienced a transformation after reading the transcription of our first interview. According to Robert, three forces drive his transformation and self-discovery: (a) Robert living the life according to his grandfather's credo; (b) Robert's realization that he will need to become his own man (become independent); and (c) coping his life in the Midwest and trying to change his standards and ethics. He offers three examples to firm up the forces that created his transformation and self-discovery. The first example is Robert's reflections on how his grandfather's experiences played an important role in his life. In other words, Robert admits that he is living his life through his grandfather's experiences. He processes things through his grandfather's lens (belief and value system). He added,

I go to school to get my education, be as strong as my grandfather. He is the pillar of many things in my life. I have gotten over the fear of looking over my shoulder in the classroom because I sit in the front row. I just started thinking that everybody wants to get an education just like. I am changing my ways.

The second example deals with Robert's realization that he has to live his life based on his own standards; he has to become his own man. This may mean that Robert has to forego his grandfather's belief and value system. He adds, "I can't live by his rules because, his days and time were different from mine. I must think and act for myself. I still live with his memory, spirit, and moral code."

In the third example, Robert is at odds with the standards and ethics of living in the Midwest because he is from the South. He expands, "my beliefs and ethics are

different from my wife's who is from here. I am used to the down South standards and ethics. I am trying to learn these things as I live in the Midwest.”

Taken together, Robert contributes his transformation and self-discovery to dynamics of three forces. He must (a) separate himself and break ties from his grandfather's credo; (b) become an independent thinker, be adaptive, and flexible; and (c) change his ethics and standards as he continues to live in the Midwest.

#### Summary of within case analysis for Robert

Robert's motivation for attending UCC is to obtain a degree, get a job to support his family, and have a better life. Robert equated completing school as his major life accomplishment. Robert's interaction and rapport with approachable/helpful faculty, staff, and administrators affords him the opportunities to pursue his goals at UCC. As a purposeful, watchful, and goal oriented young African American man, Robert's holistic experiences are significantly influenced based on his grandfather's values and belief systems.

Robert's engagement(s) at UCC are pre-played. He is always hesitant, careful, and conscious both in terms of his verbal/non-verbal expressions and appearance. This notion of being watchful and having a pre-played mode of engagement/adjustment at UCC may be psychologically taxing and tiresome for Robert. Being perceived that Robert is constantly being watched or what others in the college community may perceive about him can also drive Robert in a direction of wanting to be left alone and being guarded about his actions. To some extent, this notion of being guarded and wanting to be left alone permeates from Robert's voices. He uses descriptors such as “being left alone by choice,” and “hesitant and watcher”

to describe himself. Robert is trying to be adaptive, flexible, and an independent man. As he put it, "I want to be my own man." UCC provides Robert with self-actualization and self-discovery experiences.

Robert's involvement with the TRIO program at UCC gives him the opportunity for social and academic engagement that he needs at UCC. TRIO may also give Robert the opportunity to integrate both academically and socially at UCC. This can be a positive experience for Robert. Beyond TRIO, centers of influence in Robert's life are his grandfather, his mother, and the U.S. Army. These centers of influence are also his support system and crystallize his experiences at UCC. Additionally, Robert is sophisticated about race/color relations and racism/ prejudice issues. He is also cognizant that he may be the only minority student in his classes at UCC. However, he employs coping strategies such as pre-played mode of engagement and adjustment to create a milieu for himself so he can pursue his goals in a guarded manner.

#### Kenneth's Profile

Kenneth is 22 years old. He is a single parent. Kenneth has been majoring in dual Transportation Technology program(s) for the past three years at UCC. He is a soft-spoken young man with a calm demeanor. Kenneth's parents both completed their post secondary education. He has three siblings. Kenneth's attire was casual when we conducted our first and the follow up interviews. Kenneth wore an expensive dark green National Football League leather jacket, white National League baseball hat, tennis shoes, dark green football jersey and blue jeans pants. He has short hair and his face was shaved. His appearance was neat.

### *Expectations and motivations*

Kenneth moved from Chicago to the River Cities at age 13. He graduated from one of six local high schools in the River Cities area. Kenneth has been working with his father in their family owned auto-towing business for a while. He offers several reasons for attending UCC. For instance, his motivations and expectations are, "I want to be in charge of my future and make my plans. By going to UCC, I can get a degree. I am a single parent. UCC gives me the opportunity to stay local and be with my son."

### *Attributes*

Kenneth used descriptors such as being "someone who is knowledgeable about his abilities," "a steady person," "a leader," "purposeful," and "a perfectionist" to describe himself. For instance, Kenneth stated, "I have to be on top of my game. I think that my peers perceive me a leader and they follow me. My motto is, to know what you want and make sure you get it." Expanding on being an ambitious young man, Kenneth stated that he works two jobs after he leaves UCC every day. He reported that, "my goal is to own our family business. Graduating from UCC will validate and affirm my expertise of working on cars."

Kenneth did not face many challenges at UCC. Kenneth adds, "I tell myself what needs to be done and I will get them done. Being successful is to know that you can have pretty much whatever you want. A feeling of reaching out and getting it." Kenneth equates graduating from UCC a successful moment and a major accomplishment. Therefore, his desire to graduate from UCC serves as an influencer for him at UCC. Other driving forces(s) for Kenneth is that he has a can-do-attitude.

He is determined, self-directed, and goal oriented. He is a confident and ambitious young man. He asserted, "I don't feel anybody is over me. If one man can do it, I can do it. Color and background has nothing to do with my goals."

Additionally, having a supportive family and family members who can be role models also plays significant role in Kevin's journey at UCC. For instance, Kenneth adds, "I have a close-knit family. I model after my father. He is goal oriented. I have to be a role model for my brothers and my son. Having family support and knowing that they are there, is a positive experience."

#### *Interactions and rapport*

Focusing on his academic experiences, he stated that he has a decent memory. He just listens to his teachers in his classes; he does not have a learning preference. He gets the lessons in the classroom and he goes to the lab and gets them done. He does not recall any major academic challenges or barriers in college. Kenneth is determined and a problem solver. He adds, "I tell myself what needs to be done and I will get them done." He finds his instructors approachable and helpful.

Expanding on his non-academic experiences, Kenneth stated, "people are helpful to me and they are there when I need them." Kenneth equates the feeling of being at UCC as being at home. Kenneth contributed the comfort factor that he experiences at UCC to having the opportunity to meet individuals with the same level of interest. He adds, "people ask where do I want to start and they aim me in the right direction. I equate my college experiences to like a family experience." Kenneth concluded that being at UCC is a pleasant experience for him.

Commenting on how he conducts himself in the college community at UCC and his rapport with his peers and faculty member, Kenneth added,

I am cautious. I am low-key, quiet, laid back, and calculating. My approach is to analyze situations. This mode of operation allows me to become aware of what is going on around me. I am situational.

Kevin disclosed that he has excellent rapport with his peers and faculty members. Expanding on race and color issues and addressing the meaning of being an African American male, Kenneth stated, "I am indifferent toward race and color. I can do and achieve as much as the next man. I am determined." Kenneth's experience with racism and prejudice is based on his personal experiences from his inter-racial relationships, mostly with the parents of his partner(s). In these situations, Kenneth puts the responsibility of being accepted on them. Kenneth concluded that having the wrong perception allows one to decide and perceive about a person in the utmost negative way. Kenneth did not experience racism and prejudice at UCC.

Expanding on clothing and appearance, Kenneth spoke about how he may be perceived by others when he wears an expensive jersey and a hat. He commented, "people see you, they classify you as a 'gang member,' or 'selling or doing something illegal.' I think people are focused on negative things. People cannot accept that I am successful because I work hard, they go for negatives."

Kenneth confirmed that he did not experience a different treatment in his interactions with the college community at UCC because of what he wears. He adds, "I don't let stuff like this bother me. I am going to do what I want to do."

### *Transformation and self-discovery*

Transformation and self-discovery for Kenneth can be translated into instances when other students perceive him as a leader. In addition, by coming to UCC and completing his course of study, Kenneth believes that he can validate his expertise.

#### Summary of within case analysis for Kenneth

As a goal oriented and an ambitious young man, Kenneth's expectation and motivation for attending UCC is to validate his expertise by pursuing and finishing his degree. Kenneth and his family value education. His family provides him a stable support system. Being situational, watchful of his actions and not being reactionary facilitates Kenneth's experiences at UCC. However, this will also influence Kenneth's conduct as such that he becomes guarded. Beyond having a calm demeanor, Kenneth's ability to work in his family business allows his peers to perceive him as an expert and a leader. This sense of having a follower-ship can further validate his expertise.

Kenneth is cognizant of race and color issues throughout his life span based on his personal experiences. He is apprehensive that his appearance gives people an impression that he is engaged in illegal activities. This causes some frustrations for him. Kenneth identifies the college as a comfortable place; he also identifies/ compares his relationship with his peers, faculty, staff, and administrators similar to his own family relationships. Kenneth equates having family relationship similar to everyone working together and trying to get things done. Ultimately, Kenneth's self-reliance, his ability to devise solutions, his sophistication about race/color relations,

and his relationships/interactions with an approachable cadre of college community personnel at UCC influences his experiences. Therefore, he identifies his experiences at UCC positive and pleasant.

#### Kevin's Profile

Kevin is 41 years old. After finishing high school in Indiana, Kevin enlisted in the U.S. Navy. As enlisted Navy personnel, Kevin toured around the world two times. Kevin's father was also a military man in the U.S. Armed Forces. Because of his extensive travels, Kevin is sophisticated and well rounded. After leaving U.S. Navy, Kevin worked as a mayo-medicine technician in the state of Nevada. Mayo-medicine deals with the treatment of soft muscle tissues.

Kevin moved to the River Cities area because he wants to become a Chiropractor. Kevin is a first generation student. He has two siblings. Kevin completed his second semester of liberal arts studies at UCC. He is majoring in the pre-chiropractic program. Kevin is a single parent. He has a son and a daughter. Kevin's parents both graduated from high school. Kevin is in the TRIO program. His attire was casual when we conducted our first and the follow up interviews. He wore tennis shoes, blue jeans and a gray sweatshirt. Kevin has a neat appearance. He shaved his head but wore a goat tee beard. Kevin speaks softly and has a clam and mild demeanor. He is articulate.

#### *Expectations and motivations*

Kevin's expectation and motivation for attending UCC is to become a Chiropractor. Education is very important to Kevin. He recalled a comment by his uncle, "do not forget your education, it can make a difference for you. It did for me."

He chose to major in the Chiropractic studies because of his own injuries when he had a motorcycle accident. Kevin developed a passion and an interest for the field of chiropractic treatment. By attending UCC, Kevin's expectation is to focus on school, to establish and maintain a form of stability in life. He is determined and convinced that education will provide him the opportunity for stability and the ability to settle down.

### *Attributes*

Kevin uses descriptors such as being "uncertain/unsure and lacking self-confidence," "a problem solver," "a survivor," "determined," "a self-reliant person who focuses on the positives," "cautious about building relationship and a closed-off person" "a hands-on learner" "a well-rounded person," and "a resilient person" when he describes himself. A fear of uncertainty/being unsure of himself is projected from Kevin's voice (inflections) when he speaks about his experiences at UCC. This fear of uncertainty/being unsure may confirm that Kevin may perceive that he is inadequate. He poses a question and expands on his perception, "I am not taken seriously at UCC. Maybe, they want me to go there for their benefit. As for having a sense of uncertainty, I fear failing. I am this old geezer sitting with a group of younger students."

Expanding on being a problem solver and a self-reliant person, Kevin indicated that he worked very hard to overcome a sense of being negative and cynical about his experiences at UCC. For example, he stated, "it has been a distraction for me. I tried to shake it off. I relied on people to give me direction, feedback, and just general support. This did not happen; I had to take my affairs into my own hands."

Kevin admits that he is slow and apprehensive in building relationships. The root cause for this apprehension is that Kevin questions the assets versus liability of developing relationships and establishing friendships before opening up to people. In summarizing being a closed off person, Kevin asserted, "it is my upbringing. I was never raised in the same town, same house, with same friends at the same school. Since I started at UCC, some of my peers have moved; starting friendships over again is a difficult task." Being a closed off person causes Kevin to assess every situation and make careful engagement because he knows that his stay at UCC is limited. Relationship building is energy consuming for Kevin. Therefore, he pulls back and is hesitant and apprehensive in establishing and maintaining relationships.

Commenting on being a hands-on type of learner, Kevin reflected on his learning style. He adds, "I learn in small group setting by watching. There is a mismatch between my learning styles and my teacher's teaching styles. I feel being by-passed. I find bridging my practical skills and skills that I am being taught difficult." Kevin's meaning making of the mismatch between his learning style(s) and his teacher's teaching style(s) makes him feel inferior. He adds, "this mismatch between teaching and learning styles causes me to develop a feeling of anguish and a feeling of being made inferior."

For Kevin being a well-rounded person stems from his perceptions of being sophisticated because of being exposed to different cultures, customs, and traditions. For example, he adds,

I assimilate better than others in the world of non-minorities. I am the only person who could crossover. African Americans should conform to the ways of the majority in order to minimize their challenges. My friends have to lead a double life in order to survive.

By being a well-rounded person, Kevin believes that he does not lead a double life. Kevin employs this coping strategy to gel his relationship with the college community at UCC. Expanding on being a resilient person, Kevin admitted, "I am still here; I am resilient. A resilient person can run into the same brick wall day after day, regardless of how bloody the forehead or the knuckles get from trying to get up, get over this wall."

The personal attributes that Kevin collectively recounted can confirm that he is a serious individual; he is willing to achieve goals by setting his mind to it. Kevin asserted that his greatest sense of accomplishment and success is the notion of not giving up and pursuing his academic goals at UCC. Kevin added, "I refuse to accept failure. My experiences at UCC are psychological. I have to use my head. At UCC, I have never been discriminated and the support I need is there."

Kevin also reported that three forces influenced his transitioning process at UCC. These are: (a) a lack of support systems; (b) rearranging life style; and (c) employing coping strategies in dealing with adversity and diversity.

Kevin describes that there is a lack of support system in his life. He identified this support system as having a spouse, having peers with common interest, having familial connection, and being able to have connection with college personnel at UCC. Having a stable and a steady support system is significant for Kevin. Kevin asserted, "each time I relocate, I have to invest, develop, and acquire a new support system. I have to build relationships with everyone all over again. This causes an exhausting experience for me." Kevin originally wanted to finish his pre-chiropractic courses at UCC and later to transfer to a school in the South. After one year of

studies at UCC, he changed his mind and decided not to move. He adds, "I developed a social circle and support system at UCC. I developed some roots at UCC." Establishing and having the reassurances that Kevin has a support system and a social circle may create a sense of comfort level for him at UCC.

Having to rearrange and forego life style amenities, and making adjustments at UCC is another influencer in Kevin's transition to UCC. For Kevin, this meant that he had to reconcile with being a person with monetary and non-monetary support to someone who is now a student at UCC. This transformation and life style adjustment for Kevin basically translated into, "I feel alienated. After you spent time to build up relationships, a certain lifestyle and social circle, then you have to start from scratch. Now, I do not even have disposable monies to do extra things. This frustrates me."

Reconciling with a given situation by turning negative transactions into positive outcomes is a form of coping strategy that helps Kevin in his transitioning process at UCC. Kevin adds, "I had to disassociate myself from thinking negative. Those negative thoughts put me in a dark place within my own mind and my own experience."

Kevin does not pay attention to race and color lines in his interactions with his peers at UCC. He adds, "all men are equal." Kevin describes the words of Malcolm "X" and his experiences from the U.S. Navy to convey his belief on race and color lines,

His belief on race and color changed after he made the pilgrimage to Mecca. He became accepting of man for what man stood for. In the military and in combat situations you have a common goal; that is to survive. Therefore, you cross the color line, because they may not matter.

By coming to UCC, Kevin feels isolated and alienated. In his former life style, Kevin had the monetary and non-monetary resources; at UCC, he does not have the same things; therefore, this notion of changing and adjusting his life style can be overwhelming and exhausting for him. However, Kevin is resourceful and a problem solver. The coping strategies that he employs in dealing with adversities and diversity issues such as race and color line can expedite his transition at UCC.

#### *Interactions and rapport*

Kevin's academic experiences at UCC are not positive. He identified three factors that contributed to his academic experiences. These are: (a) differences between traditional and non-traditional students; (b) rapport with the faculty members; and (c) faculty teaching style(s) and students' learning style(s). Relating to significant differences between traditional and non-traditional students at UCC, Kevin asserted, "traditional students that I encountered are not goal oriented." Focusing on the rapport with faculty, Kevin stated,

I am labeled a non-traditional student. These teachers are not sensitive to the special skills that I bring to the classroom. I feel that I am treated irrelevant and my academic ability is invalid. For example, my English teacher felt that my personal life story was not valid and good enough to satisfy a course requirement in my English class. Another example, one of my teachers told an international student, if you cannot get it; then, you should not be in my class. Only a handful of students persist in my classes.

To promote a better faculty and student rapport, Kevin adds, "I wish that my instructors could identify with and communicate with each person as an individual in their classes."

Commenting on the teaching/learning styles at UCC, Kevin confirmed that there is a mismatch between teaching and learning styles in the classroom. This

mismatch causes Kevin to spend extra times to make sense of what he is studying. Kevin adds, “this will cause me frustration.”

Kevin needs reaffirmation that his unique individual experiences are valid. For example, Kevin internalizes every aspect of his relationship(s) with his instructors at UCC. At UCC, Kevin’s understanding of these relationships forges and shapes his academic experiences. On one hand, Kevin perceives that faculty at UCC can create a positive academic milieu for students by being open and sensitive to their needs, and celebrating and empowering their students. On the other hand, by matching their teaching styles to the learning styles of their students, faculty can reinforce and promote a positive academic experience for their students. Collectively, the outcome of positive faculty and student relationship is that students like Kevin develop a positive self-esteem and self-confidence in their journey at UCC. Kevin summarizes his thoughts about the relationship with the faculty members at UCC, “show an interest, allow students to bring in their real life experiences, and celebrate students’ experiences, instead of simply discarding students’ real experiences.”

Focusing on his non-academic experiences at UCC, Kevin’s comments reveal a feeling of being disappointed and unable to develop a trust level with the college community. For example, his comments have three dimensions: (a) goals and time lines; (b) sensing a comfort factor; and (c) relationships with advisors. In addressing the goals and timelines dimension, Kevin asserted, “I am caught in two worlds; a world set by my rules and timelines, and a world that UCC set out for me. These timelines and approaches clash all the time. This causes me to become frustrated and feel inadequate.” Expanding on the comfort factor dimension, Kevin adds, “I do not

have another adult who I can confide, console, or share domestic responsibilities with at UCC. My main goal is to take care of my son, get an education, and move on.”

Focusing on his relationship with the advising personnel and staff, Kevin feels that at UCC his advisors also do not take him seriously. He adds,

I feel they are not looking for my best interest and they do not take me seriously. Not being taken seriously to me means I am just a body, a number, and income for UCC. I feel UCC brings in minority students to increase diversity without thinking it through. I am struggling here. There are times that I resent being at UCC. I thought about dropping out. My experiences at UCC have been humbling and frustrating.

Taken together, the interplay among the goal and timelines, having a sense of comfort factor, and the relationship with his academic advisor(s) influences Kevin’s experiences at UCC. Kevin’s experiences reveal a sense of not being in control, being disappointed, and frustrated as he interacts with the college community at UCC. Kevin commented how TRIO helped him transition to UCC and minimized his frustrations.

Kevin stated that the TRIO program gives him the social boost and confidence he needs. Kevin finds TRIO students as individuals with the same common goals who want to better themselves. He can network with these students. Kevin added, “TRIO program provided me the support system that I need when I run into problems; TRIO is the feeling of community. Without TRIO, I will be more secluded.”

Kevin’s experiences with the TRIO program are positive. TRIO provides him a support system that he needs in order to transition at UCC. Having a feeling of being included in the college community are very important to Kevin. Without TRIO, Kevin will be isolated. Expanding on being a source of inspiration for students at

UCC, Kevin thinks that the depth and breadth of his experience may be intimidating to his peers at UCC. He believes that his success and life experiences may be intimidating to students as they may perceive him a sell-out,

As I became successful; I forgot about my people and my roots. They may perceive me as being better than them. This is the younger African American crowd at UCC. People of my own age may have an easier time because they share the same levels of responsibilities and commitment.

Kevin summarizes his understanding and experiences with diversity at UCC. He adds, "UCC want to welcome all of this diversity, but I don't believe they completely understand what it takes to speak in ways that each individual can come out ahead."

As Kevin focuses on his own experiences at UCC, he uses the metaphor of "fighting a one man war" to describe his experiences at UCC with the college community. He adds, "I am here and fighting off on my own. I have this feeling of uncertainty. People do not know who I am and do not know my needs. They are dictating to me before knowing me and my needs."

Defining the meaning of being an African American male, Kevin used the following descriptors, "being an ambassador" and "having a vision." He stated, "the stereotype of African American, the movie and TV stereotypes, go get a 40 and twist one up, and then go do a drive-by. I want to show the community that we can blend in just like anyone else." Kevin believes that for African American male, this stereotype is a significant challenge. Conversely, Kevin believes that the African American women coped differently with the same stereotype and challenge. He adds, "Black women is getting educated and becoming a part of corporate America. This is

leaving the stereotypical Black man behind. There are so many odds against the Black man. I am a role model and a mentor.”

Focusing on racism and prejudice, Kevin reflects on several of his experiences with racism and prejudice throughout his life span as a child, a young man, and an adult. However, none of Kevin’s experiences with racism and prejudice are related to UCC. Kevin defined that racism and prejudice are the same; both are driven out of ignorance. He used a term “FEAR which stood for False Evidence Appearing Real” to describe why people feel and act; he posited, sometimes “perception is viewed a reality.” Despite of not experiencing racism and prejudice at UCC, Kevin commented that UCC is indifferent towards the needs of diverse students including the way these students think and learn.

Describing his experiences with textile and clothing, Kevin reported, “I am viewed, treated, and perceived by others because of my clothing. As I change the way I look, people do not know how to take me unless they ask me. I am conscious of myself.” Being conscious for Kevin also means that he must become watchful and calculate his mode of operation at UCC (i.e., what to say, how to act, and what to wears). Together, Kevin’s mode of operation and being conscious of himself may facilitate Kevin’s transition at UCC.

#### *Transformation and self-discovery*

After Kevin reviewed the transcriptions from our first interview, he noted that some things have changed for him. Kevin reflected on a moment of self-actualization in his journey at UCC. He stated, “I changed my approach since our last interview. My

intention is that if there is an opportunity to touch somebody else's life to help me become a better person. I am definitely there. I am trying to establish some roots."

#### Summary of within case analysis for Kevin

Kevin values education. He perceives that education will provide him an opportunity to settle down and achieve stability in his life. Kevin's first hand experience at UCC is his perception that he is not valued, validated, and reaffirmed by the college community. Therefore, these experiences convince him that he is not important and is neglected. As a minority student, Kevin is dissatisfied and disenchanted with UCC.

Kevin's sources of dissatisfaction and disenchantment with UCC originates from many sources: (a) mismatch between teaching style of his instructors and his learning style; (b) interaction and rapport with the college community; (c) dealing with traditional students; (d) lack of support; and (e) disinterested college community about the plight of minority students. Collectively, the interplay among these sources will provide Kevin a perception of: (a) not being able to meet his goals and deadlines; (b) not being accepted; (c) being invalidated and unaffirmed; (d) being taken seriously; and (e) being typecast and stereotyped based on verbal and non-verbal expressions (clothing and textile).

Kevin is a sophisticated non-traditional student. His understanding of race/color relations and prejudice/racism are mainly based on his personal experiences beyond UCC. Based on his observations, Kevin perceives that minority students are often brought to UCC as a means to window dress this college; to

provide a symbolic commitment and a perception that UCC values diversity. He adds, "this is not fair."

Being a closed off person is a term that Kevin uses to describe himself because he does not feel integrated and affirmed at UCC. Together, not being integrated and affirmed drives Kevin into isolation; therefore, he develops a feeling of being a closed-off person. A feeling of being a closed off person also guides Kevin to be cautious about developing relationships and maintaining his friendship. However, Kevin's involvement with the TRIO at UCC, compensates for the isolation that he encounters at UCC; TRIO provides him the opportunities to make social and academic connection(s) at UCC.

Kevin's holistic experiences at UCC are the collective interplay of being accepted and affirmed as an individual who brings to UCC a broad array of skills and experiences. Unfortunately, Kevin thinks that UCC does not celebrate and/or take into account his personal experiences. Kevin's ultimate goal is to feel celebrated, noticed, and affirmed for the broad array of skills that he brings to the college. Kevin employs alignment to navigate and achieve his goals at UCC.

Conformity and conformance aspect of alignment worked well for Kevin. For instance, Kevin stated that he accepts things as they are. Another mode of adjustment is the way Kevin acts, his speech pattern(s), his appearance, and carrying on conversation. Collectively, for Kevin, these modes of adjustment and conformance could facilitate a notion of being accepted at the UCC. These coping strategies may also be consistent with the conversionist discourse. Kevin expresses that conformity and conformance may pave a path of success and acceptance for other African

American young men. He equates being accepted and finishing school as a successful experience at UCC.

#### Annette's Profile

Annette is 31 years old. She is a single mother and has two children. Annette is majoring in the Liberal Arts program at UCC. She also plans to complete the Nursing program. Annette has been enrolled at UCC for the past two years. Annette is a first generation student. She has 10 siblings. Annette obtained her diploma from Arkansas. Annette's mother did not complete her education beyond the sixth grade but her father graduated from high school. Annette's attire was casual when we conducted our first and the follow up interviews. She wore blue jean pants, a red/pink shirt, and a dark jacket. She wore some make up and her hair was arranged neatly. She wore some jewelry. She took pride in her appearance. Annette looked very tired.

#### *Expectations and motivations*

Prior to coming to UCC, Annette worked as an entry-level health care worker in a private River Cities clinic. Without formal training, she discovered that she had to work as an entry-level health care worker all of her life. Annette chose to attend UCC for three reasons: (a) her friend worked at UCC; (b) she thought that she would have a better chance of interacting with her teachers because of small class sizes; and (c) lowest tuition at UCC. Annette values education. She is passionate about education. Her expectations and motivations for attending UCC can be summed as she noted, "education is my ticket to a better life. I chose UCC to obtain a job with a better pay."

### *Attributes*

Annette uses descriptors such as being “a social person,” “goal-oriented,” “self-confident,” “problem-solver,” “self-directed,” “motivated,” “model student,” and “purposeful and determined” when she describes herself. She adds, “I am a social person. I make friends quickly. I have a laidback attitude and a bubbly personality. I get along with everyone. I am approachable.” Annette stated, “these characteristics helped me to relate to people. These attributes helped my experience at UCC.”

Relating to being a goal-oriented person, she mentioned, “I take my education at UCC very seriously, because when I transition to work after college, my mistakes can cost someone’s life. I like to be held accountable for my actions.” In describing herself as a person who is self-confident, Annette added, “I am sure of myself. Most of the time, I am the only African American student in my classes. This really does not bother me. I do not notice color lines. I have a can-do-attitude.” Annette disclosed that her number one priority is to get an education. She reports, “I am not here to make friends. By going to UCC, I found my self-worth, and self-confidence.”

Annette equates and compares the challenges of being a single parent with going to UCC. She believes that being a single parent is very difficult and challenging. Annette asserted, “at first, I did not think that I would last; once I started my coursework, I noticed that I could do this. Education is an irreplaceable treasure for me. I hold education in high regards.”

Commenting on being self-directed, motivated, and a problem solver, Annette alluded, “I take the initiatives to navigate my journey at UCC. I was using TRIO tutoring services; now, I do not use tutoring services. I developed a system. I became

aware of the services that are available to me.” Beyond TRIO, Annette is active in the Art Club. She asserted that the Art Club gave her an opportunity to learn about her own culture. Annette stated, “I want to be a Renaissance person.”

Focusing on being a model student, Annette described, “there is a negative perception about African Americans. I am trying to prove this perception wrong.” Annette believes that she is a resilient person. She is strong and can do what she sets her mind to do. She asserted, “I am an enduring type of person. I believe that power of positive thinking, my upbeat attitude, and being energetic are causes for my resiliency and success at UCC. I see different markers of success in my journey at UCC.” Therefore, she speculates, “nothing holds me back.”

Annette is purposeful and determined. She mentioned that she could not afford to be hindered by failing a class. She has her own goals. Annette added, “I have so many things that I must do. I need to provide for my kids and others who depend on me. My experience may tell them that they can do it.” Collectively, the attributes that Annette recounted not only helps her journey at UCC but also shapes her experiences, achievement, success, and accomplishments at UCC.

Expanding on her accomplishments at UCC, Annette stated that her experiences with teachers and students from similar background gave her a boost. She adds, “my experiences have been lovely at UCC. My success and achievement in school has boosted my self-confidence. When you see a closure to your efforts, you get motivated.” Annette asserted that she sensed an overwhelming experience by completing her courses at UCC. She internalized this sense of accomplishment, “it increases my self worth.” She equated her success at UCC as winning large sums of

money. She discloses, “my experiences taught me not to underestimate my abilities. I concluded that if I set my mind, I will be able to do it.”

Beyond Annette’s attributes, her experiences at UCC are guided by five sources of influences: (a) having a stable support system; (b) interactions with helpful people; (c) family needs; (d) learning lessons from mistakes made; and (e) spirituality. Expanding on having a stable support system, Annette confirmed that she did not get support from her family. Instead, Annette’s support system came from her peers at UCC, church, and friends outside UCC.

Another influencer is that Annette developed a feeling that people were helpful to her at UCC as she encountered challenges at UCC. She expands, “I get support from my peers, tutors, faculty, and staff. They are helpful to me. Tutors, faculty, and staff went beyond the call of duty. This is a touching moment for me.”

Having a desire to provide for her family is another influencer in Annette’s life; having a desire to provide for her family also provides a sense of purpose for Annette’s attendance at UCC. She adds, “passing or failing a course is in my control. I have other people who depend on me, my family and people of my own race.”

Commenting on lessons learned from her mistakes, be willing to take risks, and thinking positive are other influencers in Annette’s life. These strategies allow Annette to reconcile with a negative situation; she adds, “I look at things and my experiences at UCC in a positive manner. If I were to look at things negatively, I would be under a lot more stress. I learned to move on and learn from my mistakes.”

Spirituality and religion has been a major force in Annette’s life. She reports, “power of religion and spirituality helped me get through hard times. If a door closed

on me, another door would open for me at UCC. I am mindful of my own actions at UCC and in control of my destiny.” Collectively, having a stable support system, interaction with people who are helpful, having a purpose for attending UCC, learning lessons from mistakes made, and spirituality become drivers and influencers that shape Annette’s experiences in one dimension. In another dimension, she would feel motivated and compelled to continue and persist with her studies at UCC.

#### *Interaction and rapport*

Annette expanded on her academic experiences at UCC in two fronts: (a) at the beginning, Annette did not know what to expect and (b) as she met students with the same level of interest, and in the same situation, Annette developed a comfort level for being at UCC. Expanding on dealing with uncertainty, she adds, “I had a fear of unknown. I had to juggle several priorities. In addition, I was out-of-school for a while. I just did not know what I was going to face and expect.”

Having found students with the same level of interests and goals was also helpful for Annette in developing a comfort level at UCC. For instance, Annette adds, “having met people (church and school) with the same goals helped experiences at UCC. I figured out that I was not on my own and there were avenues to help me. My fears disappeared. I became comfortable at UCC.” Annette also noted, “my relationship and interactions with my teachers can be expressed as an ‘ah-ha moment’ for me. Having approachable and helpful teachers can be a wonderful experience. Taken together, having a fear of unknown and uncertainty may have had a potential for setback for Annette. Instead, by developing relationships with peers who had

similar goals, by drawing on external support system(s), and having positive rapport, Annette averted the risk for setback(s).

Describing her experiences with the TRIO program, Annette added that having the ability to access TRIO services provided her with the academic support. She noted, “because I could identify with my tutor, I developed a comfort level with my teacher’s teaching style. My teachers’ teaching styles maximized my learning.”

Annette expanded on her non-academic experiences at UCC. She stated that it is the way you carry yourself, not the color of your skin that will determine your interactions at UCC. She noted, “if they see you take initiative, they go the mile for you. When you are nice and courteous to people, they will do things for you. I act serious and treat people with respect; they are helpful to me.”

In expressing her experiences with textile and appearance, Annette mentioned that people could judge you by what you wear. She stated,

Stereotype(s) can be found because of appearance. There was a time when I wore large hoop earrings. I could feel their eyes on me. This made me feel uncomfortable. I do not follow the stereotype clothing. There are people out there that do not give an opportunity to those who look different or wear different clothes, as they would perceive someone’s clothing or color of skin as threatening.

Annette concluded that Caucasians may form a racial stereotype toward minorities because of their ethnic styles. She claimed that she did not have an ethnic style. She adds, “I smile a lot. I dress average.”

In defining the meaning of being African American female, Annette adds, “we have a strong heritage. We are enduring; being an African American female means that we endured a lot of obstacles throughout history.” Annette did not experience prejudice or racism at UCC. She believes that there will always be racial stereotype.

Annette reported, "Racism and prejudice are just words to me; I am tolerant of people but I do not have time for ignorant people." Focusing on stereotype and being typecast, Annette adds,

People have a fear factor about African Americans, how they go about getting what they want. It is a fear of unknown. There are times that the physical size of African American men may scare off people of different race. African Americans are perceived as loud, impolite, lazy, aggressive, and shiftless.

Annette believes that the root cause of stereotyping or typecasting that the African American men have to endure may come from their approaches and dealings with life issues in general. For example, Annette summarizes her beliefs,

Education is not fast for African American men because they may have a quick get rich attitude. This approach takes them in the wrong path. They find the value of education after they are locked up. African American women are passionate about education. African American women in general are nurturers. They learn by listening to experiences of others.

Using these assumptions, Annette concluded that the experiences of African American men and women may also be different from one another at UCC.

#### *Transformation and self-discovery*

As Annette continues with her journey at UCC, she experiences a sense of understanding for her own ability, believing in self, having self confidence and better self-esteem; thus, concluding that she can actually make it at UCC. For Annette, this is a sense of self-actualization and moment of discovery. She asserted,

I was hesitant upon my entry to UCC. But I confirmed my competence and abilities. I had hope and I saw it become a reality at UCC. My achievement at UCC transformed my life outside the college to a positive experience. If I achieve things at UCC, I will feel confident at home. My success at UCC, make my children feel good at home. My experiences at UCC made me a strong person all the way around.

### Summary of within case analysis for Annette

Annette's expectations and motivations for attending UCC are to provide a better life for her family and herself. She is an ambitious young woman. Education provides Annette an opportunity to become a contributing member of her community. Annette states that UCC provides her a learning environment that she can easily interact with her instructors and the college community. Annette's transition and journey at UCC was not smooth upon her entry to school. She felt uncertain, isolated, and lost at the beginning of her studies at UCC. Soon after her arrival at UCC, Annette discovered TRIO services. TRIO provided Annette an opportunity to meet students with the same level of interest. Therefore, she developed a comfort factor at UCC. Annette expressed that TRIO has given her an opportunity to make social and academic connections.

Annette's experiences at the college community are influenced by: (a) having a stable support system; (b) interactions with helpful people; (c) family needs; (d) learning lessons from mistakes that she made; and (e) spirituality. Annette believes that these influencers and her personal attributes have given her a perception that her experiences at UCC are pleasant and comfortable. For Annette, having pleasant and comfortable experiences translates into fewer uncertain, psychologically taxing situations.

Annette is sophisticated about race/color relations and racism/prejudice. She noted that the college community at UCC can form a perception about students through their verbal and non-verbal expressions; or, presumptions that may be based on misinformation and may not be factual. Annette is cognizant that at times, she is

the only African American student in her classes. Annette stated that she watches herself and her actions all the times. She is careful about her verbal and non-verbal expressions. Her mode of adjustment is to walk away from conflicts and potentials encounters with the college community. Her nature is to be watchful. She tries to maintain a level of civility in her interactions with the college community at UCC. This coping strategy and mode of adjustment is one aspect of alignment that Annette employs to facilitate her experiences at UCC. By employing this mode of adjustment which is a form of conversionist discourse, Annette maintains a sense of where she is, who she is, and how she should act. Moreover, this mode of operation and engagement facilitates her transition and shapes her experiences at UCC. Ultimately, this mode of operation and engagement may leave Annette and students like Annette vulnerable and compromised.

#### Trey's Profile

Trey is 34 years old. He has been at UCC for four years. He is majoring in Construction Management program. His mother did not complete her education beyond the 11<sup>th</sup> grade at high school. Trey did not disclose information about his father's education. He has four siblings. Trey is married but does not live at home. He has five children. Trey completed his GED prior to coming to UCC. He stated that he always wanted to go to college. Trey was a dancer in high school, as part of a dance troupe he traveled to many colleges and universities in the Midwest. Prior to graduating from high school, Trey's life style changed. He developed relationships and friendships with the wrong street crowds which landed him in prison twice. Trey did not disclose the length of his prison terms.

Commenting on his life style, Trey described, “street life became a major priority and took the center stage in my life.” After leaving the prison for the second time, Trey decided that he never wanted to go back to prison. Therefore, he chose to pursue his studies at UCC. Trey’s attire was casual when we conducted our first and the follow up interviews. He wore tennis shoes, blue jeans and a black sweatshirt. During our second interview, he wore a black tee-shirt with an embossed white logo “Hustler Inn.” Trey had a neat appearance. He had short hair and shaved his face. Trey speaks very loud. He gets excited. He is expressive, yet polite and articulate. He looked extremely tired.

#### *Expectations and motivations*

Trey’s life journey has not been very easy. Trey recalls, “I had rough beginnings. I lived my life for others. It used to be that my way was the only way.” Trey compares his former life style as someone who lived by the “sword” and led a “hard-core life. After serving two prison terms and coming to UCC, the new Trey refers to himself as “a guarded palace,” “a temple,” “a whole new being,” and “a whole new person.”

Trey’s motivation for attending UCC is to further his education. He offered four reasons for attending UCC: (a) UCC is convenient; (b) his desire to get an ethical understanding of the world; (c) gain work experience; and (d) become a better man, and a better father. By attending UCC, Trey can maintain his employment and spend time with his children. This is convenient. Trey equates the ethical understanding of the world as being a “well-rounded person.” He views education as “an opportunity to improve his self worth.” Trey believes in life-long learning. He wants to pursue a

four-year college degree. Trey compares the trial and turbulence of his life to standing on an escalator that goes up and down without predictions. He adds, “things are fine for one moment and then become sour. I try to stay in control.”

By being in control, Trey believes that he can set priorities and stay focused at UCC. Trey notes, “school is a major priority for me. I learned to set goals and not to be led into temptations.” Reconciling and turning negative life challenges to positive outcomes is nothing new in Trey’s life. He stated, “I do not linger on the past.” Trey views education as a means of introducing stability to his life. He elaborated on the calming affect of education in his life. He adds, “I was inspired by my friends to attend college. I believe that education will bring togetherness, a loving atmosphere, a spirit of being one; this is a worldly thing.”

#### *Attributes*

Beyond being in control and having the ability to set priorities, Trey used descriptors such as “being insecure,” “cautious engagement and adjustment,” “being persistent,” “confident,” “resilient,” “willing to reach a balance,” “being self-directed,” “conscious,” “having a vision,” and “having ability to problem-solve,” to describe himself. Trey’s past experiences from living by the street codes causes him to constantly question or wonder about his current situation at UCC. The constant mode of questioning causes Trey to become insecure and apprehensive. He adds, “I just don’t know what the outcome is going to be. Where is this going? What can happen? And then when the unexpected happens I am like, wow. It is just a never-ending question.”

Expanding on staying focused and being persistent, Trey adds, "I want to do the good things for my family. I don't want to go back to the old life style I had before." Trey is careful about his engagement in the college community, "I try to keep things in check. Keeping things in check facilitates my transition at UCC." Commenting on being persistent, Trey spoke about his personal experiences outside UCC when he successfully obtained a full-time job at a local Plastics Manufacturing Plant. He stated, "I called every Monday, Wednesday and Friday for three weeks, because I wanted that job. When she called me in, I put on the best outfit I had; I went down there, I talked to her with common sense." By staying focused and being persistent, Trey believes that his efforts will not be derailed at UCC.

Trey equates being confident as having an "aura" about himself. He adds, "this aura sends a wrong message. When I first meet people, I give off a perception of being a bad guy because of my image, but when people get to know me, they say, I am a fine young man." Therefore, Trey adjusted his demeanor to minimize the negative image. He reports, "instead of holding my head down, now, I hold my head up, and I smile." For Trey, this adjustment changes his image so everybody begins to see him in a positive light.

Expanding on making cautious engagement, Trey mentioned that he calculates, assesses the situations and environment as he interacts with the college community. He asserted, "these calculations helped my transition at UCC. But they cause psychological and emotional exhaustion for me." However, Trey believes that he is a resilient individual. He asserted, "I don't think there is nothing that I can't do. I mean if I put my mind to it, I can accomplish all things."

Attending UCC gave Trey the ability to reach a balance between his former life and today's college life. Trey describes, "the crossover between my former life in the street and the current college life is never over. You can take a brother out of the hood, but you can't take the hood out of the brother." Being self-determined and goal-minded shapes Trey's experience inside and outside the class. Trey stated, "I have a goal and must achieve it. I do not interact with no one. I want to be able to walk upright and be respected. I will overcome distractions, and I will stay the course."

Trey labels his experience of coming to UCC as an experience that his life has come to a full-circle according to the challenges of his life journey. Therefore, he describes that he is a conscious young man. He adds, "I made a lot of bad decision. Now at UCC, I have a second chance, and a lot of us don't get that, to make right all the wrongs, you know." Trey noted that he has a vision. He asserts, "I ultimately want to work with the inner city kids. I want to be a respected community member."

Having the ability to prioritize and solve problems is another attribute that facilitated Trey's experiences at UCC. He adds, "I assess each situation carefully and weigh out consequences of my actions. At UCC, I learned to problem solve and devise a positive solution. This is different prior to my attending UCC." Trey identifies his biggest challenges at UCC as being, "accepted by people in general. I have this self-pride that is a mad pride. I do not ask for help. I expect people to give me assistance."

Commenting on his accomplishments, Trey asserted that his greatest success has been that given his background, he never envisioned coming and being at UCC as

an option. Trey adds, “my proudest moment is when I will post my diploma from UCC on the wall. I want to be remembered. I want my name ring after I am gone.” Collectively, the interplay between these attributes shapes and influences Trey’s experiences at UCC.

Beyond the noted attributes that Trey recounted, other forces such as: (a) religion and spirituality; (b) Trey’s source(s) of inspiration; (c) having a stable support system; and (d) overcoming the negative perceptions (i.e. self and by others) and self control are common threads from my conversations with Trey during our first and the follow up interviews. Together, these forces influence Trey’s experiences at UCC.

Expanding on spirituality and religion, Trey added, “religion and spirituality is my first line of support. When I left the prison, I had to grasp at something. This was religion. I can do anything through God.” For Trey, his inspiration comes from three sources during the turbulent times of his life: (a) he compares his life challenges to challenges that the character in the book “Roots” faced; (b) Trey thinks that the transformation in his life style is a similar transformation that “Brother Malcolm X,” experienced after his pilgrimage to Mecca; and (c) Trey’s life journey, the good and the bad can be equated to experiences that Job the prophet experienced. Comparing himself to the character in the “Roots,” Trey cites, “in my transitions, I moved through man-child stage. I literally became chicken George. I am content. I have a sense of responsibility.”

Trey compares the transformation that he experienced after coming to UCC with Malcolm “X” experiences upon his return from Mecca. Trey adds, “I had to

change my approaches and views. I used to get what I wanted from people by manipulating people. Now, I rely on other ways to accomplish things.” Trey asserted that his new approach is a humbling experience. For Trey a humbling experience means to be able to realize his self worth, self pride, and that he is earning what he has for now. He reports, “I am doing it the most honest way.”

Expanding on his source of inspiration from the book of Job, Trey commented that he wrote the story of prophet Job in long hand when he was in jail. He adds, “like the prophet Job, I had everything, then, I lost everything. I have always known that there was somebody watching over me. I just didn’t want to accept it until now.”

Beyond his sources of inspiration, Trey also focused on two different support system that also influenced his experiences over his life span: (a) past support system and (b) present support system. The first support system existed prior to Trey coming to UCC. This support system mainly came from someone in the street who Trey refers to as his “street mentor.” After Trey’s mentor passed away, Trey questioned the life in the street. Trey experienced how fragile life could be after he saw his mentor passed away. Therefore, Trey developed a coping strategy to assess every situation, reconcile, and weigh his actions. He replicates the same strategies at UCC. This mode of operation shapes Trey’s experiences at UCC. For example, Trey thinks about his children all the times before making reactionary decisions. His major priorities are his children, his religious beliefs, and education. Trey adds, “I am trying to make the best of my given situation at UCC by making better choices now. School is a start.”

After coming to UCC, Trey developed a second support system. He adds, “I believe as I associate with the right crowd, I am able to stay on the right track and try to obtain my educational goals. My support system of today is different from yesterday.” Today, Trey associates with positive people; whereas, before, it was the opposite.

Attending UCC provides Trey the opportunity to chip off the roughness of his past life from living by the street code. Interactions with the college community and his peers at UCC allow Trey to develop relationships and forego his past experiences. Admittedly, crossing over between former life experiences and transitioning to new life is challenging for Trey. He admitted that he still lives a double life. Trey discloses, “I must constantly remain vigilant not to revert back to my old life style.”

Perception is another influencer that permeates from my conversation with Trey. For Trey, perception can be examined in two fronts: (a) Trey’s self-perception and (b) the perception of Trey by others. For instance, prior to coming to UCC, Trey presumed that he would not be accepted at UCC. In contrast, he adds, “I was accepted and I didn’t have to reach to them. They reached for me.” Expanding on the perception of how Trey may have been viewed by others, Trey described that he had to deal with the notion of being told by his peers that he would not amount to anything. He mentioned, “it sets you back. I had to be mindful, take the time to envision what I want to do. I have been envisioning college ever since I was a teenager.”

Trey is grateful for the opportunities that UCC had to offer him. He adds, “give me the benefit of the doubt, a chance, and opportunity. Stop making

assumptions and do not judge me just because I come in with a look of street.” However, because of these perceptions, Trey admits that he would keep his guards up. After a while, when he is comfortable with his surroundings, he will let his guards down. Trey notes, “leaving a positive impression is something that I constantly strive for. I am trying to convey a message that I am an upstanding citizen.”

Taken together, a combination of attributes that Trey expounded and the interplay among influencers such as: (a) spirituality/religion; (b) Trey’s source(s) of inspiration; (c) having a stable support system; and (d) overcoming the negative perceptions (i.e. self and by others) shapes and crystallizes Trey’s experiences at UCC.

#### *Interactions and rapport*

Trey has utmost respect for education and classroom. He adds, “it is nurturing, it is school for thought. It is like a holy ground and a safe haven.” Focusing on the academic conditions at UCC, having a rapport with someone is about everything, Trey asserted. Trey experiences that his teachers are reaching out to him. He has established a positive relationship with his teachers. For Trey, these experiences collectively provided a fertile ground of being affirmed and accepted at UCC. He adds, “I have chemistry with my instructors. They empowered me. They see my potential and reached out to me.”

Expanding on his positive exchanges with his teachers, Trey admits that at one time, his teachers would not have done this. Trey stated that they would have outcast him. He reports, “but once they got to know me and saw that I was making a

difference in my life. They say, yes, he is a good young man. Let's help Trey." Trey adds, "my experiences with my instructors are unforgettable."

Focusing on his learning style, Trey stated that for some classes, he needed to have the subject matter broken down to his level. Therefore, he stated, "they break it down to the most elementary understanding so I can comprehend it. My instructors see me struggle, they won't want me fail." Trey's experiences with his teachers provided him an opportunity for affirming his own abilities. Trey concludes, "this is something that I am taking to my grandkids for future; this is what will make me to go to college."

Expanding on his non-academic experiences at UCC, Trey believes that by attending UCC, he has become situational, developed skills to logically work on his problem solving skills, carefully assess a situation, and act accordingly. He adds, "I am trying to become a conscientious young man." Trey described that starting at UCC was a good start and a fantastic experience for him. He asserted,

I have been envisioning going to college since I was a teenager. Never thought I would make it, now that I am here, I am mindful and thankful. When students and faculty see me act the way I act, they speak with me and respect me. UCC is a boost of positive energy.

Trey mentioned that the oddest part of being in college was that he was among strangers. However, Trey added that he knew that he might have complications and needed assistance and help. But this help was available to him at UCC. Trey refers to being at UCC as coming back to reality. Trey understands that he cannot employ street tools and techniques to survive and interact at UCC. He reported,

UCC was a new territory. I felt out of place. I had to change my speech pattern, communicate with the staff and with other people and be able to elaborate on things with a conscious mind, not with a slang or slick talk.

Trey's assumptions for "facing stereotype" mainly came from his communication skills. He adds, "my language was broken. My first class was Business Law. I can't tell you anything positive about the law, but I can tell you everything negative about the law." On the contrary, after being at UCC, Trey felt that he was accepted. He stated, "UCC is comfort zone for me. When I am here, I know what problems are going to face me. I am up to that challenge. But when I leave, I have to deal with worldly affairs that are different and unknown."

Commenting on the meaning of being an African American, Trey stated, "I am proud to be African American and I love my Black people. Race and color are not significant to me. What really matters is that what you put in is what you get out at the end." Trey does not want to be categorized based on his color. He adds, "I did not come from a monkey, don't categorize me. I am a man, you are a man, treat me with respect and honor. I think the society's perception of African American man is stereotypical."

Addressing prejudice and racism experiences at UCC, Trey mentioned that he never faced or experienced prejudice or racism at UCC. He adds, "I am an outspoken person. I will try logically to diffuse it. Words do not make a man." Describing racism and prejudice, Trey adds, "both words are rooted in ignorance. Racism and prejudice are man made words with no merit. I would use them if I hated you."

In expanding on his relationship with the college community at UCC, Trey stated, "People are helpful. I have a feeling of achievement at UCC. What you want to achieve, you can achieve here if you go about it the right way." The essence of Trey's journey at UCC is that he is trying to walk a straight line by not listening to

negative voices because there are consequences with negative voices. Trey uses terms such as “being polite,” “respectful,” “helpful,” and “honest and truthful” as means of his coping strategies to produce positive outcomes out of a negative situations and encounters.

Commenting on his relationship with his peers, Trey stated, “I do not clique with a special group of students in their enclaves.” Instead, Trey mentioned that he is a universal man. He refers to himself as a “freelancer.” Trey mentioned that belonging to a clique could be demeaning. He repeatedly stated, “do not put me in a category and don’t label me. I am a man. I feel, bleed, and have emotions the same as you.”

Trey crossed over between race relations and color lines at UCC. He is not sensitive to skin color and ethnicity. At UCC, “my life experience has taught me to cross over, not to pass judgment. I came out of ignorance state by coming to school. I choose friends that I can learn from. My friends can contribute to my asset.”

Going to school and being a father are major priorities in Trey’s life. Trey is aware of activities at UCC because he has family commitments. He stated, “my children depend on me. I am trying to provide and establish a structure for my children.” As he reflected, “this was missing from my life.”

The conversation with Trey about textile and articles of clothing focused on self- interpretation of his appearance when he wears articles of clothing which are comfortable to him. This causes concerns, stares, and a perception of Trey by others in the college community. For instance, he recalled a time when he wore a tee shirt with the movie character Scar-Face holding an Uzi to class, “despite, students liking

my tee shirt, they kept on staring at me. I felt their eyes on me. I wonder if students' reactions/perceptions might have been different if the student wearing this tee shirt was Caucasian." Expanding on the perception of clothing and textile, Trey alluded that you are perceived by what you wear. He adds, "you give off an aura by the way you present yourself. In a nutshell, clothing makes a man and clothing is fitting of a man." For Trey clothing is an outside body thing; not the spirit. He adds, "do not judge a book by the cover, read the book. I did not feel comfortable to wear casual clothes at first. As I got a feel for my classes, I wore tee shirts, and blue jeans. I became comfortable."

#### *Transformation and self-discovery*

The "old Trey vs. the new Trey," is one aspect of transformation and self-discovery in Trey's life span at UCC. This life span reveals itself in the form of reflections that Trey provided between who he was prior to coming to UCC and who he perceives to portray after being at UCC during this time. Trey maintains that coming to UCC changed his life,

I am at odds with who I was before and who I am now at UCC. I employ proper English and intelligent conversations with my significant other at home now. This causes some frictions. At UCC, I am in a guarded palace. So when I go back into that world, it is like taking candy from a baby.

Another form of transformation for Trey is that he wants to be remembered and personified. Trey asserted,

The life that I have now is a good one. That is the picture that I want. I remember seeing my aunt's picture in one of my instructor's office at UCC. I want to be immortalized like my aunt.

The transformation and self-discovery that Trey experienced at UCC, could give him the ability to tell others about his story and how his experiences could change their

lives. For example, he concludes, "I used to live a good life by ill means. Now, I am earning everything. I made a full circle. I reached a balance in my life, God gave me a chance."

#### Summary of within case analysis for Trey

Trey's life journey is a colorful landscape that has taken him through many places. Two most noted places that Trey has traveled since his teenage years are serving prison terms and attending UCC. Trey's experiences and encounters gained from prison and UCC are at the two opposite sides of a young African American male's life spectrum. Trey refers to coming to UCC after serving his prison terms as a place where "his life is coming into full cycle," "his eyes is opening up," "Trey is becoming a guarded palace," and "Trey is achieving a life style of stability and harmony." Excitement beams from Trey's voice and his facial expressions brightens each time he speaks about his experiences at UCC. He finds the college community helpful, pleasant, and UCC a comfortable and safe place. Trey confirms that coming to UCC transformed his life.

The transformation that Trey experienced at UCC would not be possible without a college community that is caring, helpful, approachable, and welcoming. Trey indicated that he experienced a college community that took him as a broken young man and provided him multifaceted opportunities to learn, gain trust, and be accepted.

Trey characterizes his experiences as exceptional, fantastic, and unforgettable experiences at UCC. He claims that the college is a boost of positive energy for him. According to Trey, UCC is a place that he can turn negatives encounters/transactions

into positive outcomes. Although, Trey has to constantly work at reconciling his life styles; a life style based on street codes, interactions, problem solving skills; and a life style that he has to lead in order to be perceived a law abiding citizen who is pursuing his education at UCC. Coming to UCC, requires Trey to set aside his street smartness and life style.

The conformity and moving away from his street life style is challenging for Trey. Moreover, the interplay between Trey's two life styles is constantly a raging and psychologically exhaustive battle. It requires Trey to put his guards down, change his own self perception, and establish a mind set that constantly guides him to employ coping strategies in order to achieve stability at UCC. The interplay between Trey's two different life styles confirms that Trey must be flexible, adaptive, and be able to cope with changes that he may encounter at UCC.

Trey's mode of adjustment and engagement is also calculated to promote a perception that compensate for the first impressions that Trey personifies. At the first impression, Trey may look tough, be intimidating, and unpolished; but overall, he is a reformed young man who values education and his goal is to pursue his education at UCC. Trey believes that education will allow him to establish a better life for himself and his family; he views education as a means of stability. Trey refers to being at UCC as a major life accomplishment. In Trey's life journey he has experienced enough negative things that being at UCC is a positive and refreshing experience for him. Although, Trey confirmed that at UCC, he encountered pockets of individuals that typecast and stereotyped him based on their first encounter, impressions, and

interactions. Soon after, these individuals got to know Trey; their opinions and perceptions about Trey changed.

Trey is a sophisticated young man who is cognizant of race/color and racism/prejudice issues. He is aware that he may be the only African American student in most of his classes. Trey uses his personal attributes as his assets to navigate and negotiate transactions at UCC. However, Trey's verbal and non-verbal expressions (clothing and textile) create an opportunity for him to be constantly vigilant how he conducts himself at UCC. This means, Trey is constantly watchful about what he says, how he conducts himself, and what he wears at UCC. Trey asserted that in a given situation, he assesses the situation and weighs out his actions before he acts on it. This mode of adjustment, ability to reconcile, and engagement requires Trey to employ self-determination and self-control. Ultimately, Trey's transition and experiences at UCC may be shaped by the dynamic interplay among the attributes that Trey noted as well as the influencers that he recounted. For Trey, as he analyzes his transition and experiences at UCC, acceptance, having a stable support system and the ability to establish and maintain relationship may mean that he is "mattered," "validated," and "affirmed."

"Mattering," "being validated," and "feeling affirmed" collectively may shape Trey's belief system. Therefore, Trey may perceive that he is an important entity at UCC, he has become the object of attention at UCC, and finally may conclude that UCC as a whole cares about and appreciate him. Having a college community that is approachable, staff, faculty, friends, and peers who are willing to establish

relationships with Trey convinces him that he can overlook the visages of his past life style, and be accepted in the social and academic spheres of UCC.

#### Natish's Profile

Natish is 24 years old. She is majoring in the Liberal Arts program. She has been attending UCC for three years. Natish graduated from a local high school in the River Cities area. She has an older sister. Natish plans to transfer to a four-year private college after graduating from UCC. Her parents both graduated from college. Natish's attire was casual when we conducted our first and the follow up interviews. She wore tennis shoes; light green sweat pants, and a gray sweater. Natish is light-skinned with light sandy curly hair. She wore light make up, had on a wedding band and high school ring, and a neck chain. Her appearance was neat. Natish is articulate, expressive, and polite.

#### *Expectations and motivations*

Shortly after graduating from high school, Natish attended a four-year out-of-state university. After one year, she returned home to the River Cities area because of health reasons and started her studies at UCC. Pursuing educational opportunities is a major priority and expectation for Natish. She holds education in highest regards. Natish adds, "my parents took care of us, and I have an obligation to fulfill my commitments, that is to finish school." Natish offered four reasons for attending UCC: (a) UCC is close to home, it is convenient; (b) she can receive support from her family and friends. She stated, "by coming to UCC, I can gain support from my parents and friends;" (c) affordability, she adds, "I wanted to get an education but did

not want to take advantage of my family's monetary resources;" and (d) Natish can remain employed and attend school.

### *Attributes*

Natish used descriptors such as being a "problem solver," "goal oriented," "motivated and self-directed," "resilient," "older soul," "having the ability to assimilate," "hesitant and cautious" when she described herself. These attributes facilitated Natish's transition and experiences at UCC. For example, in describing being a problem-solver, Natish provided an example of her interactions with the Foundation and the Pell Grant Offices. She adds, "basically, you just have to be persistent and go back and forth till you get it done and accomplish or get what you want."

Natish also stated that she was a goal-oriented student. She stated, "I wanted to study child psychology. Ultimately, I would like to work as a recreational planner." Describing about being motivated and self-directed, Natish adds, "unlike the elementary and secondary schools where you get pushed through, in college there is no one to push you through. You are pushing yourself. So you have to have the motivation for yourself."

Natish also commented that she was a resilient person. She adds, "a resilient person overcomes anything and continues on. I had complications after coming here. It crossed my mind to say forget the whole deal. I continued because I knew if I left, it would impact my future."

Natish acts like a mature person. She believes that she has an "older soul." Having an "older soul" may be due to the fact Natish always acted like an older kid.

She confirmed that she got this from being around her grandparents, “I was always around older individuals. I was interested in their stories, experiences.”

Natish’s experience with living in a mostly predominately White neighborhood and community influenced her experiences and perceptions as such that she described this experience as having to live in two-worlds. Living in two worlds for Natish means that she is caught with the experience of living in a Caucasian community; and has to endure another set of complications as she transitions back to the inner city. She commented that over her life span by being introduced to Caucasian community from early stage of her life, these experiences taught her lessons that she used to assimilate with ease at UCC where the majority of the students are Caucasians.

Natish commented that she had limited involvement with activities at UCC. These activities included tutoring in the computer lab for English courses, and some activities with TRIO. Natish mentioned that she did not want to take on too many activities at UCC because she had a job and was overwhelmed with school at the beginning. Expanding on her activities at UCC, Natish mentioned, “my experience in tutoring students was nice. Tutoring was a fun experience.” For Natish, having the ability to help students gives her a sense of accomplishment.

Natish confirmed that having a successful experience at UCC is a positive experience and a sense of accomplishment for her. She notes, “it was like a situation that is improving me, towards a better future. I guess when you say positive, it is moving me somewhere. It is pointing me into a better direction for different choices.” She described that she is cautious of how she conducts herself. For

instance, she adds, “I watch how I act and how I talk. I think that people of my race create problems. I must be careful how I put myself out there; I don’t want to be vulnerable.”

Beyond the attributes that Natish recounted, one source of influence and inspiration in Natish’s life is her grandmother. Natish adds, “my grandmother used to say to provide for yourself and your family; do not rely on men. I always wanted to be like my grandmother. My grandmother is a source of inspiration to me.” Natish expressed that the survival lessons that she learned from her grandmother were the key ingredient for her success at UCC, “by drawing from my grandma’s life experiences, I would not give up on things at UCC.” The notion of not giving up permeated in Natish’s voices when she explained her experiences of moving back home shortly after she started studying at the four-year university. Natish noted that after she discontinued her studies at the four-year university, moved back home, and transferred to UCC, she was depressed because she could not meet her goals, plans, and timelines. But, by drawing from her grandmother’s experiences, Natish cited, “this instilled in me a sense of not giving up.”

Having a feeling or perception of being accepted is another source of influence that shapes Natish’s experiences at UCC. For example, she expanded on the meaning of being accepted at UCC. Natish adds, “to me being accepted means that working with you as you are, the majority of my teachers really did work with me knowing that, I really was trying. I felt like I was accepted that way.”

Lacking connection and or knowing familiar people that African American students can connect with at UCC can influence their experiences at UCC. Natish stated,

A lot of the African American students do not have the experience or the knowledge to navigate. It is not all about UCC, it is about life. You are learning to sell yourself in the society. You are not just learning to navigate your way at UCC-but in life in general.

Natish also echoed that her biggest challenge was the lack of support, feeling connected and making connections with people she can network at UCC. Natish added, "this can be an overwhelming experience." Natish asserted that it is easier to transition at UCC by knowing someone or going to a person at any time to seek advice. She recalls, "I made friends with some. Most of my friendships at UCC ended as soon as the class was over. It was not a lasting relationship. At the beginning, the challenge was lack of advisor, building a cluster of friends." Natish reported that she had to rely on her family as her foundation of support.

Natish concluded that most of the African American students who came to UCC did not fit because school did not fit their expectations; therefore, they dropped out. Moreover, she adds, "students left because they did not see the support system."

#### *Interactions and rapport*

Natish described her academic experiences at UCC by focusing on: (a) the teaching and learning style in the classroom; (b) her experiences with the TRIO program; and (c) rapport with her instructors.

Focusing on teaching and learning styles, Natish mentioned that having teachers who interact with students, show care and wanting to match their teaching styles to their students' learning styles relieves anxiety for students. She adds,

“having flexible teaching and learning styles will stimulate both the teachers and the students.” Natish reported, “when the teaching style is not a flexible, I get bored.” In one of her classes, she observed when there was a mismatch between the teaching style of teachers and learning styles of students, students showed poor attendance, “if somebody is going to stand up there and just talk all day, most of the time people just won’t show up.”

Natish is in the TRIO program. Commenting on her experiences with the TRIO program, Natish stated that TRIO is a means of support system beyond her family at UCC. Natish, stated, “TRIO provided me the one-on-one I needed, same foundation beyond family. TRIO is the-go-to place for me.” Reporting on rapport with instructors at UCC, Natish believed that her instructors were helpful to her. She recounted, “I feel like I was definitely accepted by the majority of my professors for who I was.”

Natish’s experiences with the non-academic conditions at UCC mainly focus on: (a) having a comfort factor; (b) a feeling of being lost; (c) interactions with the college community and relationships with her peers; (d) a feeling of being accepted; and (e) race and color relations. Natish expressed that attending UCC is a feeling of being comfortable. For Natish, a feeling of being comfortable means, “a kind of knowing what to expect. I knew what to expect as far as the building lay out, locations, and those types of things. I was comfortable with my surroundings.” However, when Natish first came to UCC, she had a feeling of being lost. Several factors contributed for Natish to develop a feeling of being lost, “by not knowing where to go, who to see, and who to get answers from at UCC, I did not know how to

get help for my anxiety attacks.” Another factor that contributed to Natish’s feeling of being lost was the fact that she did not know how the scheduling of her courses would work in comparison to high school courses. She stated, “I didn’t know who to talk to. I was just kind of trying to figure out on my own.”

Expanding on her interactions and seeking assistance from the college community at UCC, Natish reported mixed feelings. She stated, “I found some people were not nice and helpful to me. I felt like, I was getting the run around, I had to be persistent, like a bug at their side.” Relating to interaction with students at UCC, Natish adds, “family is important to me. I discuss this with people who I have relationship with. This happens to be individuals of middle class income. My interactions with this group helps my experiences at UCC.”

Beyond interactions with students from the middle class families, Natish asserted that she could not relate to African Americans because she grew up in a community predominately surrounded by the Caucasians. She summarized her experience at UCC, “because of my curly hair and light skin, others always thought that I was mixed. I was never fully accepted by African Americans because I lived much of my life with Caucasians.” Natish indicated that she does not look at the color of a person. In searching for peers, she adds, “I always look for the common interest.” Moreover, when Natish attended elementary and secondary schools, a similar pattern of not being accepted emerged. Natish recalled, “most of the African American students went to school with students like them perhaps in an inner city setting. My life in the outskirts of the city was different. I had exposure to only one African American person, my sister.” Natish noted that she was never accepted by

African American students of her own age, “when I think of acceptance, I think of who I am, how I am, and people not looking at me differently.” Natish stated that she carries with her the visages of what she experienced and what she had learned from the predominately White community where she grew up.

Relating to her experiences in interacting with traditional students at UCC, Natish perceives that there are significant differences between traditional and non-traditional students. She adds, “there is a gap in priorities for traditional students at UCC. I guess some people may not think that going to UCC is really going to college. To them, it may be like going to a high school.” Natish disclosed that her experience at UCC was different and it was college; it was an adult experience.

In her interactions with the advising personnel at UCC, Natish also expressed a feeling of not being important and invalid as a part-time student. She stated, “having a consistent advisor would have helped. I always got a staff person to help me with my advising. I needed a faculty advisor to guide me.” Natish indicated that lack of access to a faculty advisor irritated her. She cites, “it send me a message that I wasn’t as important as a full-time student and my money was not as good as the full-time students.”

Expanding on race and color relations, Natish first defined the meaning of being an African American female. She is proud to be an African American and she commented, “I stand for my race. I should do my very best to present myself so I do not misrepresent my race. I believe that any minority in the U.S. should not only represent themselves but also everyone from their race.”

Natish never experienced racism and prejudice at UCC. She asserted that if you made it known that you are at UCC, “they help you.” She reported, “I never had any hostilities, racism or prejudice expressed against me at UCC.” Natish adds, “there is confusion about racism and prejudice. I am a kind of person who goes out and asks if I do not understand it.” Natish mentioned that people who are racist have prejudices. We all may be a bit too jaded. She notes, “I am prejudiced against my own race. I see the struggle of people, what I have been through; I see the potential in people.”

Natish expanded our conversation about racism, prejudice, and general perception of Caucasians about African Americans outside UCC. She portrayed a different picture about racism and prejudice; Natish indicated, “I am alert, hesitant, and aware of being Black outside UCC. For instance, I am aware of my action when I go to a department store. I am a lot more conscious of my actions.” Natish disclosed that employing broad scale past experiences enabled her to facilitate her transition and assimilation at UCC. She adds, “at UCC, I never feel like I really had any hesitation with who I am and how I portray myself. I knew what I wanted, how to get it.” Addressing the clothing and textile, Natish added that she is conscious of the way she dresses, because appearance is everything. She adds, “people notice the way I dress. Appearance is everything.”

The essence of Natish’s non-academic experiences with the college community at UCC is multifaceted. Given Natish’s ability to use her attributes as her assets and her mode of engagement may perhaps be the reasons for developing a positive experience and having an ease of transition for Natish at UCC. Moreover,

because UCC does not provide the same level of services for part-time students such as Natish; this can be a cause for sending the message to students like Natish that they are not perceived as being important, valuable, and valid. Fortunately, Natish perceives that her experiences at UCC are positive. She adds, “my experience at UCC made me a lot independent so I do not depend on people to get me through school. It made me become a self-directed and a quick learner individual. I learned to survive.”

#### *Transformation and self-discovery*

Natish described that coming to UCC was a loving experience for her. Natish stated, “having a loving experience is when I understand that some of the stumbling blocks and experiences that I faced at UCC are a part of life and learning.” Natish elaborated that she loved her experience because she felt like coming into adulthood by coming to UCC. She was basically able to make her own decisions and really start planning something for her life and her future. Attending UCC gave Natish a good groundwork for becoming an independent adult. Natish notes, “transitioning to become an independent adult who can take care and provide for herself, having an adult experience means that I was treated like an adult.” Enrolling at UCC was a liberating experience for Natish. She reported, “it gave me a way I could do what I wanted to do. I equate this growth to a sense of self-discovery and self-actualization that I established throughout my journey at UCC. For once, it was about me.”

#### Summary of within case analysis for Natish

Natish’s holistic experiences at UCC are based on her perception that by attending UCC, she has transitioned to adulthood and managed to become an

independent individual. Striving for independence and breaking away for autonomy is perhaps a deeply rooted challenge due to Natish's relationship with her close knit and over protective family. Beyond having an adult/independent experience, Natish characterized her experiences at UCC as liberating, loving, and pleasant. By attending UCC, she was able to develop a sense of self-discovery and self-actualization.

The college community at UCC has been welcoming and provided Natish a feeling of comfort as she navigated her way at UCC. However at the same time, Natish expressed mixed feelings about her interactions with the college community. She expressed that there were times that she did not feel that she was valued at the UCC. These feelings of not being valued stem from her interactions with the professional staff and personnel at the Student Services Department; Natish partially blames these feelings of not being valued on individuals that are very busy and do not have sufficient time to devote to each student at UCC. Instead, at times, some students may get the run around.

Natish possesses a significant level of knowledge concerning race/color and racism/prejudice based on her experiences outside UCC. She relied on a wealth of personnel experiences when she spoke about racism and prejudice. At UCC and outside of UCC, Natish is constantly watchful and vigilant. Her mode of adjustment and engagement at the college as well as in the community are calculated. She is hesitant and tries very hard not to give the wrong impression and perceptions about being African American. This will minimize typecasting, prejudice, and discrimination.

Natish is light-skinned with curly hair. Her physical attributes assisted her integration in the predominately Caucasian community that she has lived in all her life. On one hand, Natish feels that having the opportunity to live in a Caucasian community and her physical attributes facilitated her transition at UCC. On the other hand, living in a Caucasian community and having the above noted physical attributes created some challenges for her; she is not accepted by the African American students at UCC.

These notions of being accepted and not accepted is a fertile milieu for Natish to develop a perception that she lives in two worlds. The constant jarring between being accepted and not accepted can be psychologically exhausting and demanding for Natish. Beyond acceptance, Natish perceives that her African American peers stigmatize and criticize her due to her stable family unit. Natish's self-determination and self-reliance guides her to stay with her intended goals at UCC and try to accomplish her goals.

Natish is also cognizant that there may be times that she is the only African American student in her classes. Being the only African American in her classes guides her verbal and non-verbal expressions including the articles of clothing that she wears. Therefore, she constantly keeps her guards up. She looks for ways to make sure that Caucasian students view her as someone who knows what she is doing or what she is talking about. Natish asserted that she is very careful not to put herself out there. This causes Natish to become vulnerable and compromised.

Influencers in Natish's life come from many sources. These are: (a) having a grandmother and the mentoring and role modeling that she played in Natish's life; (b)

having access to friends with same interest and goals at UCC; (c) stable support system from her parents who value education; (d) ability to enroll in the TRIO program which gave Natish the opportunity to make social and academic connections at UCC; (e) Natish's personal attributes and her ability to employ coping strategies by turning negative encounters into positive outcomes; and (f) having rapport with her instructors.

Collectively, the interplay among the noted sources of influencers may provide Natish a perception that UCC is place where she is accepted and comfortable, valued, and people are helpful and approachable. Therefore, she can pursue her goals and make connection with the institution. Taken together, having a feeling of being accepted and being comfortable in an environment for Natish translates into a positive experience with a sense of accomplishment. Natish's motivation for attending UCC is to better her life, explore different choices both in terms of gaining sufficient income and having different options for occupations upon graduating from UCC.

#### Mary's Profile

Mary is 36 years old. She is presently studying in the Business Management program at UCC. She has been at UCC for 3.5 years. Mary graduated from the Automotive Technology program last year. Mary's mother did not complete her education beyond fifth grade elementary education; her father graduated from high school. She has three siblings and three step siblings. Mary completed her GED prior to coming to UCC. Mary is married and has a teenager son. Mary's attire was casual when we conducted our first and follow up interviews. Mary's stature is masculine. Mary came to the interviews wearing tennis shoes, blue jeans, and a dark blue sweater.

Mary wore her hair in dreadlocks. In addition, she did not wear any make up. Mary had on a wedding band with a large diamond and her high school ring. Her appearance was neat. Mary is expressive and polite.

*Expectations and motivations*

Mary offered several reasons for attending UCC. For example, she stated that attending UCC: (a) gives her the opportunity to get an AAS degree in the Business Management program and (b) UCC provides Mary an opportunity to achieve her goals. Mary equated achieving her goals as “getting it done.” She defined the meaning of getting it done, “it feels like I accomplished something that needed to be done. I finished the degree. I was very happy.”

Mary values education. She disclosed that she and her spouse were recovering welfare recipients. She added that being on welfare was like having a disease. She adds, “I really did not want to be a welfare recipient. I just wanted to get an education, and get my business going.” Mary’s past experiences with the welfare system forces her to choose education as a means to better her self and achieve her goals. Moreover, seeking education and obtaining a degree made Mary an independent/self-sufficient individual.

Prior to coming to UCC, Mary studied Commercial Arts, Fashion and Business at another community college approximately 20 miles away from UCC in another state. Later on, she attended UCC and started her studies in the Automotive Technology program. Mary stated that she chose to study automotive technology because she wanted to learn about cars and work on her own car. Mary admitted that she lacked basic academic and the mechanical skills necessary to be successful in the

Automotive Technology program. She reported, "I was the only African American student in class. There were three female students in my classes. I did not know about cars and did not have skills necessary to run equipment and diagnostic tools. I found it challenging." Upon finishing automotive technology program, Mary held several jobs unrelated to automotive technology field. Mary returned to UCC to take business management courses because she wanted to own her own business.

### *Attributes*

Mary used descriptors such as being "a different type of learner," "being an advocate for woman and a caring person," "direct, upfront, and honest," "sort of making it," "enduring," "artist," and "cautious and calculated" to describe herself. Focusing on being a different type of learner, Mary added that she likes to work with her hands and can relate to pictures and text together.

Mary started her studies in the Automotive field because she felt that females were being perceived by their male companions (i.e. husbands, boyfriends, and significant others) as incapable of repairing their cars. Mary's interpretation of being made feel inferior is her observation of how men address women when they repair their cars. She adds, "men always worked together to repair cars. For women, there was never this option. If the female ask questions, they would feel stupid."

Therefore, one of the reasons that Mary decided to pursue automotive training was to teach other women how to maintain and repair cars. This also confirms that Mary is caring person. Additionally, Mary reported that after finishing school, she taught an automotive class for women. She adds, "the City of River Cities and the Recreation

Park sponsored this. This course was geared to help women. I taught women basic general maintenance and oil change.”

Expanding on being direct, upfront, and honest, Mary reports, “I am honest and upfront with everyone with the exception of revealing my own identity because of repercussions.” By being direct, upfront, and honest, Mary treats everyone equally. In turn she would like to be treated the same. Beyond being direct, upfront, and honest, Mary’s experience with sort of making it is not related to lack of self-confidence. However, it has to do with her self-perceptions that she is an enduring person. For example, she adds, “I think it -- it isn’t my self-confidence. It is what society has put on me, so therefore, I am doing this. I am hanging in there.”

Mary elaborated that she has to be very careful how others perceive her at UCC. She adds, “if I want to say something, it has to be meaningful. I have to be on top of things. I have to go the extra mile. I have to prove to them I am capable and smart. My approaches are calculated.” Mary also expressed that she is watchful and vigilant because of her race and appearance. She reported, “I do that because I am Black. I do not want people to think, I am passing time. I have done this all of my life. This could be very exhausting.”

This mode of operation confirms that Mary is watchful and cautious in her interactions with the college community at UCC. Moreover, she tries very hard to teach her son about this mode of behavior and conduct; to be careful, aware, and conscious of what he does. Beyond being watchful and employment cautious mode of engagement at UCC, Mary expanded on being an artist. Mary stated that she plays Dejeme drum [an African drum]. Mary described that by playing drums, she

connects with her audiences. She adds, “it is a magical experience. I am in my own little world.” Mary does not participate in college activities. She has a busy schedule.

Mary identified that being able to graduate from automotive technology program and completing her studies at UCC was a sense of accomplishment and success for her, a sense of excitement, and encouragement. Mary felt that she reached a closure by finishing school. She expressed the feeling of graduating from UCC as an unbelievable, incredible, and an exciting experience. She adds, “by going across the graduation platform, I felt an excitement. Education is an opportunity to reach my goals.” Mary recalled that she was the only woman who finished the Automotive Technology program.

During our first and the follow up interviews, it became evident beyond the attributes that she recounted; several forces influenced Mary’s transition and shaped her experiences at UCC. One source of influence could be contributed to lack of support system in Mary’s life but her willingness/desire for wanting to do better for herself and her son. For instance, she stated, “I did not have a support system. No one was pushing me. If I needed something, money, I had to do it.” Mary believes that she had the will to finish the program. She adds, “it was my nature to finish what I began. My spouse was helpful in giving me the support that I needed.”

Having a mentor in Mary’s life was also helpful for her. Mary stated that her father was her mentor. She had a close relationship with her father. Mary thinks that she mirrors her father’s traits. For instance, she adds, “I still live with my father’s memory, I treasure his memories. I sometimes, when I am at different places and I

think he would enjoy this.” Beyond Mary’s father, her son and her spouse were also her sources inspiration and motivation. She adds, “my son and spouse push me.” Other sources of influence that assisted Mary’s transition and experiences at UCC include her sister. Mary’s sister graduated from a cosmetology school. Mary’s sister owns her own business. Mary treats her sister as her “role model.” Mary draws from her sister’s strength and resiliency, “if she did it, I can do it too.” Beyond her sister, Mary’s close friends also provide her the positive encouragement that she needs in order to stay in school. These positive encouragements give Mary self-confidence.

Another source of influence that impacts Mary’s transition and her experience at UCC is her identity. Concealing her identity is a major part of Mary’s journey at UCC. Mary disclosed that she is gay, “at UCC, I conceal my identity. I am still not accepted by a lot of people because of being gay. Some of my own relatives do not talk to me. This is because of my sexual preference.” Mary reported that she is hesitant about revealing her identity. Mary emphasized that because of her appearance, the way she dresses, and the way she wears her hair, she is hesitant to disclose her gay identity when she interacts with the college community at UCC. For example, “in the college community, I may tell someone about being gay. They would say that they are ok with it. But, as soon as I say that I am gay. They will not speak to me.” For Mary, this notion of concealing her identity does not faze her academically but it influences her psychologically.

Mary has two different life styles: (a) a life style of being gay which is comforting, refreshing, and liberating for her and (b) another life style in which Mary has to conceal her identity because she is fearful of encountering retributions and

being treated unfairly. Balancing these two lifestyles certainly creates stresses and emotional burdens for Mary. She constantly finds herself catapulting between these two life styles. She stated, “at times, I feel queasy and uncomfortable. I like to think that if I disclose my identity, I would be welcome. I am not sure about this. I just do not want people to treat me differently.” The coping strategy of not revealing a true identity creates more difficulties for Mary at UCC. For instance, Mary reported that this notion of not revealing her identity makes her feel like an outsider. She adds, “I felt as an outsider. If I am in a crowd, I feel that I do not belong to a group. I do not want to disclose my identity. Therefore, I develop a voice.” This hidden voice also guides Mary’s actions and her demeanor. For example, she adds, “I calculate my moves, watch what I says, when I say it, how I say it so I do not disclose my identity. This is a feeling that I am an extended entity.” Mary admits that hiding and oppressing her identity is unhealthy; this is a personal barrier for Mary. She adds, “it makes me feel bad.” Mary reflected that there were times that she thought about revealing her identity. However, because of certain circumstances, she cited, “I chickened out.”

#### *Interactions and rapport*

Mary uses the term “dealing with un-charted territories” when she described her academic experiences in college. As Mary tried to pursue graphics design, automotive technology, and business management programs, she encountered several unknowns. Mary refers to these unknowns as dealing with uncharted territories. She reported, “I think about it and it does not intimidate me.”

Mary described two distinct experiences when she attended UCC at two different times: (a) when she took automotive technology courses and (b) when she returned to take business related courses. On one hand, taking automotive technology courses left Mary a feeling of uncertainty, being isolated, becoming confused, and being lost. These feelings also made Mary feel angry. Additionally, Mary's experiences with automotive technology courses gave her limited exposure to students in the college community because most students would have the same level of interest. For example, she reported, "I felt detached and isolated when I took automotive courses. There was a bench out there facing the campus. You went out, saw people walking around. You did not know them unless if they came to your building." On the other hand, when she took business courses, Mary was exposed to diverse students and other parts of the UCC campus. This exposure provided Mary a broader view of the college. This time, Mary's experiences are more pleasant; she adds, "I am interacting with different audiences who have different thinking capacity, life styles, and experiences. I feel engaged"

Commenting on teaching and learning style, Mary focused on the instruction at UCC when she was enrolled in automotive technology courses. She experienced a blend of hands-on and theory. She adds, "the mismatch between teaching and learning styles was frustrating for me. It was aggravating. I had an instructor that really couldn't break it down. I had to get help from home." Mary's learning style required that her instructors break things down for her. Mary defines the meaning of things to be broken down, "I needed for them to go slow, show me what it is and let

me do it. If I can do things over and over again, I can do it. The way they were teaching was a major problem for me.”

Therefore, to overcome her academic challenges, Mary stated that she asked questions from her instructors, took notes, and wrote things down the way she understood them. She adds, “I would write things down the way I understood it or possibly try to learn it that way. I received assistance from my spouse when I took my math course.”

Relating to her experiences when she took business courses, Mary offered a different experience when she commented on teaching and learning style, “I relate to things from my own experiences. I like to participate in classroom discussions.” At UCC, Mary commented on her rapport with her instructors. Mary adds, “I spoke with my teachers at the beginning. I told them that I wanted to learn. I wanted them to know that I am serious. I was upfront with my teachers. I do not like excuses.”

Taken together, Mary’s experiences with the academic conditions at UCC can be examined in two contrasting fronts: (a) academic experiences when she took automotive technology courses and (b) academic experiences when she enrolled in business management courses. This contrast in academic experiences transforms Mary from feeling isolated and detached to having a feeling of being engaged and positive about her self. The interplay between Mary’s learning style(s) and the teaching style(s) of her instructors also plays an important role in shaping her academic experiences at UCC. Mary’s experiences with having helpful and approachable instructors also confirms that she has rapport with her instructors at UCC.

In describing her experiences with the non-academic conditions at UCC, Mary stated that she is cognizant that she is the only African American student in her classes. She adds, "in my daily experiences, I experienced being the only African American individual. It did not bother me all that much." Mary stated that as she will transition from UCC to work, it would be her mission to make sure that her classmates who will become future managers do not prejudge individuals based on their skin color. Unfortunately, Mary expressed that she experienced being typecast, stereotyped, and being judged based on her appearance at UCC. For instance, Mary recalls experiences when people perceive that she is not an American. She adds, "people thought I was Jamaican, from Bahamas. People ask me about weed or smoking big blunts. They are waiting to hear my accent. At the college, people wait for me to talk first." Mary struggles with her appearance. She adds, "people think, I have to be professional and crisp. My hair is a portion of me that may change. Who I am, may not change. My heart is my heart. Do not judge me because of my hair and appearance."

Mary recounted that appearance makes the first impression. She perceives that people at UCC typically underestimate her. This perception is predominately due to Mary's appearance, hairstyle, and linguistic. This perception also causes Mary to become conscious of her self, be watchful and alert all the times. For example, Mary's experience with her appearance and the way she speaks confirms that people judge her by what they see. Although, as she put it, "this is the whole me." Mary believes that students and faculty members perceive her as someone who lacks focus, not a serious student, and just a slacker based on their past interactions and

experiences with other African American students. Mary confirmed she does not feel that she lacks self-confidence because of these presumptions. However, she works harder to prove them wrong. Mary believes that African Americans face inequalities. She commented,

I am not ignorant. I am not stupid. Just because I am Black and because of my hair is napped and it is not all straight does not make me less intelligent, and it does not make me not be able to have a good grade in this class. I am a businessperson.

This perception of being underestimated also created a feeling of being typecast for Mary. Mary refers to this typecast as a source of ignorance. She adds, “people assume that everyone with dreadlocks hairstyle smoke; once I had someone say, you had to be smoking when you did it. My appearance gives me an impact.” Mary did not experience racism or prejudice at UCC. She stated, “I see a lot of people of races and ages. Some things that happen to some people may be racist, but not to me.”

Mary’s experiences concerning racial stereotype and prejudice are mainly shaped according to her personal experiences outside UCC. She reported, “I walk in a store, and people are in my face, people are hawking me. The notion of what I am perceived because of my hair and appearance, makes me feel stigmatized, being perceived as ignorant. I get angry.” This notion of being noticed and stared by people makes Mary feel weird. She reported, “I internalize this as being perceived an inadequate person.”

Commenting on the meaning of being an African American female, Mary used descriptors such as being proud, strong, struggle, and determined when she described the meaning of being an African American female. Mary stated that every

day is a struggle for her. She adds, “they are judging me based on other African American individuals. They assume that they already know. They don’t come to a situation with an open eye.” Mary concluded that she did not experience racism and prejudice at UCC.

*Transformation and self-discovery*

Mary defined her experiences of being interviewed as an interesting and therapeutic experience. She adds,

It is very therapeutic for me. Because people don’t have time to – I mean, who talks about their -- well, some people talk about their selves, but – that is a lie. But I think that someone else asking you questions that you really don’t think about every day, it is very therapeutic and makes me think. It makes me think about a lot of different things, and sometimes I am so busy I forget to think.

Summary of within case summary for Mary

As a former welfare recipient and a non-traditional student, Mary’s intentions for attending UCC are two fold: (a) gain the knowledge and expertise to repair automobiles and (b) gain an understanding for running and operating her own business. Mary’s motivation for attending UCC is to better her self, achieve her goals, and establish a closure in her life. By completing her studies at UCC, Mary developed a sense of major accomplishment in her life span. She compares this feeling to an event that is incredible, encouraging, and an exciting experience that will put a closure to her life journey.

Mary expressed two distinct and opposing experiences when she described her academic experiences at UCC. On one hand, when Mary studied Automotive Technology program, she felt isolated, detached, confused, uncertain, and developed a feeling of being lost. Mary admitted that she developed these feelings and

perceptions because the Automotive Technology building was physically separated from other parts of the main campus at UCC. Mary also lacked the basic mechanical and academic skills needed; and, she only interfaced with a small group of students (female) students when she studied the Automotive Technology program. Mary's support group was much smaller and she developed a narrower view/perception of the college. Together, physical isolation, exposure to small group of peers, and being academically under-prepared provided Mary the perception that she was dealing with uncharted territories.

On the other hand, when Mary decided to pursue the Business Management courses, she felt integrated, accepted, and developed a sense of belonging at UCC. The feelings of being accepted and having a sense of belonging stem from Mary's ability to connect with students of diverse background and experiences at UCC. By taking Business Management courses, Mary concluded that her experiences at UCC gave her a broader view of the campus, and she felt engaged and empowered.

Mary noted that she experienced being typecast and stereotyped because of her verbal and non-verbal expressions. For instance, she spoke about her hair which is in dreadlocks. The hair style constantly provides Mary the opportunity to be noticed in the crowds; perhaps, this is another fertile milieu that provides her a mistaken identity. Mary reflected that these perceptions and the mistaken identity make her perceive that she is inadequate, ignorant, and weird. These forms of emotional degradation collectively contribute to Mary's dissatisfaction, anger, and marginalization.

Mary confirmed that perhaps her appearance may portray someone who is torn up, not crisp (neatly arranged), and a ghetto type person. However, her appearance should not give the college community at UCC the rights to underestimate her. Mary suggested that her appearance is an extension of who she is; people should respect this. Although, Mary believes that her appearance makes a profound impact everywhere she goes.

Mary is a sophisticated African American female student who brings a wealth/breadth of knowledge and experience about race/color relations, and racism/prejudice to UCC by employing her personal life experiences. She is cognizant that there may be times, when she is the only African American student at UCC. People in the college community may judge her based on her appearance; for example, her instructors and peers may assume that she is lazy because of their past experiences with other African American students. Therefore, Mary tries very hard to operate and employ a mode of adjustment and engagement that is pre-played and cautious. She is watchful of what she says, how she acts by constantly keeping her guards up. These modes of adjustment and engagement at UCC are further escalated as Mary tries to conceal her identity. Mary is engulfed in a battle to reconcile with her identity.

Mary does not disclose her identity of being gay in the college community because she is afraid of retributions by her peers, faculty, and administrators at UCC. By concealing her identity, Mary admitted that she developed a hidden voice. Having a hidden voice is a form of coping strategy that Mary uses. But, this coping strategy forces Mary to become an outsider by guiding her behavior. Mary admitted that because the conversations about being gay/lesbian and revealing one's identity is not

celebrated at UCC; therefore, she is fearful of disclosing her identity. Moreover, she suppresses her identity which is unhealthy. Mary tries very hard to pretend to be a person who is articulate, knows what she is talking about, and is not lazy. These modes of engagement and operation can be psychologically exhausting for Mary.

Having the rapport with approachable, helpful, and knowledgeable faculty members who demonstrated a caring attitude and adjusted/aligned their teaching style(s) with Mary's learning style(s) provided Mary the self-confidence and encouragement she needed to stay in school and pursue her goals. Beyond rapport with instructors, by drawing upon her personal attributes, having a caring spouse, son, familial support, and role models provided Mary reasons and the encouragement needed to be persistent and pursue her studies at UCC. Together, using means of familial support systems, role modeling, and access to positive relationships with instructors might have influenced, crystallized, and shaped Mary's experiences at UCC. In the end, Mary developed a sense of accomplishment and perceived a closure to her education journey at UCC.

#### *Integration of Cases, Cross Case Analysis*

In the previous section, each of my participant's profile(s) provided a focused description of their experiences at UCC over an extended period of time in the context of four domains. I used my participant's profiles to locate rich pockets of meaningful data for my study. In this section, I integrated within-case domains from each of my participant's profile(s) to produce a list of "master" themes that reflected the experiences of my participants for this study as a whole. I used summary tables to bring all the cases together from each of my nine participant's profile(s). The

Componential Analysis Tables discover similarities and differences for each of the participant's shared experiences at UCC (Spradley, 1979).

Tables 2 through 6 from Appendices G through K include a generated list of supporting master themes that captured the essence of the meaning of the shared experiences for my participants based on four domains that emerged: (a) expectations and motivations; (b) attributes; (c) interactions and rapport; and (d) transformation and self-discovery. These tables are also used as evidence of how the essence of my participants' shared experiences will be induced in the context of four domains noted above. These four domains will also serve the consequence; a construct emerging from my data analysis.

#### *Expectations and Motivations*

All nine participants in this study reflected on their expectations and motivations for attending UCC. The supporting master themes for the expectations and motivations domain are included in the Componential Analysis Table two from Appendix G. As my participants cross their neighborhoods and make their daily journey to UCC, their expectations and motivations for attending UCC are broad and varied. The common threads for all nine participants' expectations and motivations for attending UCC were such narratives as "I can improve my self-esteem and prove self by attending UCC," "valuing education and education as a means of bettering myself and my family," "UCC is small and I can interact with my instructors," "I attended UCC because of my friend work at UCC," "UCC is affordable, close to home, and convenient," "by attending UCC, I can access my support system (family and friends)," "I can achieve my goals, establish a closure in my life," "by attending

UCC, I can obtain different choices for occupation,” and “by attending UCC, I can achieve stability and can take control of my life.”

With the exception of Rayhab, education is viewed as a means to better self worth among all other participants. In addition, attending UCC is also perceived a bridge that crosses my participants into a situation/environment where they would perceive and feel that they can become contributing and functioning member of their communities. Therefore, developing a feeling for improving their self worth and increasing their autonomy. For the majority of my participants, education is also perceived as a means to better their self worth. Bettering one’s life and improving one’s self worth could create and promote a perception that they can become contributing and functioning members of their communities.

Collectively, each of the participants at the onset of their studies at UCC outlined their unique expectations and motivations for attending college. Their expectations and motivations for attending UCC are to become contributing and functioning members of their communities. Becoming a contributing member of a community may be a multifaceted and an ambiguous notion. For example, one may argue that qualities and gains that individuals perceive and obtain because of being educated at UCC may locate these participants in their communities so that they may view their life journey as a positive and fulfilling experience. Another example that my participants stated perhaps deals with their ability to obtain qualities such as bettering life, family, self, validating expertise, improving self worth/self-esteem, taking control of their lives, and having a desire for autonomy as their motivation for attending UCC. Nevertheless, equally important are obtaining monetary gains which

may become a reality for these participants after they leave UCC. Therefore, these participants can establish and sustain financial stability in their lives.

Taken together, for my participants, the notion of having a positive and fulfilling experience and developing a sense of financial stability may provide an outcome that they would become contributing and functioning members of their communities. However, the catalyst for these outcomes may come from an intrinsic motivation that my participants possess but may not consciously be aware of possessing. This intrinsic motivation may be derived from my participants' academic self concept and their locus of control.

In other words, as my participants start their journey at UCC, their assessment of their academic ability coupled with their belief in recognizing that their personal and internal attributes such as aptitude or skills could be responsible for an outcome. This outcome which is a combination of academic self concept and locus of control may be the encouraging motivator(s) for each of the participants to stay and continue their studies at UCC. Therefore for my participants, to become contributing and functioning members of their community, they must constantly weigh the cost benefit analysis of staying and continuing with their studies or depart from the academic scene of UCC. Ultimately in the end, the outcome for staying in school may outweigh their decisions for not staying and continuing in school. This outcome may also give my participants the hope they need in affirming that they each possess the potential to become the contributing members of their communities and promote their social stability.

### *Attributes*

The influence of personal attributes in shaping the experiences of my participants' experiences at UCC should not be ignored. Personal attributes of my participants played a significant role in their interactions and transactions with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC. Beyond personal attributes, a host of influencers also shape my participant's experiences. Analyzing the attributes domain of my participants in this study is grouped into two major sub-themes: (a) intrinsic qualities that could be accounted as enabling qualities or assets and (b) inhibiting qualities that could be accounted as liabilities or deficits. Collectively, the interplay between the intrinsic qualities of self (assets) and inhibiting qualities (deficits) in combination with influencers (positive and negative) may be the contributing factors that shape/influence my participants' experiences. The supporting master themes for the attributes domain are included in the Componential Analysis Table three from Appendix H.

#### *Intrinsic qualities self/enabling qualities (assets)*

As each of my participants spoke about their personal attributes, a wide array of personal attributes in the form of assets (skills and talents) emerged. Not only the assets that each of the participants spoke about shaped and facilitated their experiences at UCC, but also these assets gave each of the participants the tools that they needed to employ their self-motivation, adapting qualities, to take charge, and to reconcile with and transform negative transactions into positive outcomes. Taken together, by employing and drawing upon the positive attributes and assets, each of my participants were able to develop coping strategies to survive, make sense of their

experiences, and ultimately persist and work towards achieving and accomplishing their goals at UCC.

*Inhibiting qualities/deficits*

Conversely, several participants elaborated on personal qualities which could be perceived as liabilities or deficits. These deficits or inhibiting personal qualities might also stem from the interactions and transactions of my participants with the academic and non-academic environment at UCC. In the end, what my participants might take away from their interactions could potentially convince them that they might possess deficits. For instance, with the exception of Doreen, Kenneth, and Annette, the remaining six participants commented on being apprehensive in formulating relationships with the college community. One reason for being apprehensive in forging relationship might stem from my participants' readiness or willingness in building relationship or the college communities' readiness in welcoming and embracing my participants so they would feel comfortable and could build relationship. Another example is when seven of my participants with the exception of Doreen and Kenneth expressed being insecure and uncertain in their journey at UCC because of their initial encounter/transactions with the academic and non-academic terrains at UCC.

Fortunately each of my participants devised coping strategies to overcome these unproductive, psychologically demanding, and exhausting inhibiting qualities. The common thread that permeated throughout the voices of my participants as they elaborated in their profiles was "cautious engagement." Cautious engagement can be

described as the guarded manner approaches that each of the participants took in their interactions with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC.

Cautious engagement also influenced participants' approaches to choices/attitudes toward themselves. Acting in a guarded manner, being cautiously engaged, and being constantly watchful for my participants had the potential to promote a fertile milieu at UCC that might leave them vulnerable and feel compromised. Employing coping strategies such as pre-played/calculated mode of operation and engagement which my participants recounted might also be contributed to their previous relationships/interactions based on the visage of past experiences that they carry with them as each arrived to UCC. In addition, with the exception of Doreen, the remaining participants described that verbal and non-verbal expressions and appearances also influenced their interactions and transactions with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC.

For these participants, verbal and non-verbal expressions and appearance was a source of influence for being typecast and stereotyped by the college community at UCC. Together, these participants concluded that having verbal and non-verbal expressions and appearances that were in contrast with the Caucasian students, faculty, professional staff, and administrators might be a fertile milieu for being typecast and stereotyped. This notion of being typecast and stereotype could also be considered as a threat for racial stereotype; altering the college community's perception of my participants. Moreover, for each of my participants, developing or sensing the feelings of a threat for racial stereotype translated into meanings of being

inadequate, unaccepted, and inferior. These feelings could be sources of influence for being stigmatized and marginalized.

Having encouraging and caring faculty members, approachable professional staff, and helpful administrators at UCC as well as having access to stable support systems could become the contributing factors in minimizing the emotional and psychological stress/exhaustion for each of the participants; moreover, reducing the feelings of being made feel stigmatized and marginalized. Minimizing the emotional and psychological exhaustion and stress also reduces the risks for developing negative and unpleasant experiences for my participants as they navigate and negotiate their encounters and transactions with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC.

Beyond personal attributes, a multitude of forces also shaped my participants' experiences at UCC. My participants' voices revealed that some center(s) of influence may enhance opportunities to promote positive and pleasant experiences for these individuals. These centers of influence are referred to as positive centers of influence. In addition, other center(s) of influence may become deterring factor(s) in promoting positive experiences for my participants. These centers of influence are referred to as negative centers of influence.

For my participants, familial support, having access to mentoring relationships, having role models, employing power of religion/spirituality, seeing a dire need to do better for their family, validating/affirming their expertise, and having positive relationships with helpful/approachable faculty, professional staff, and administrators might serve as positive center(s) of influence which in turn shapes

their experiences at UCC. Collectively, these participants may perceive that UCC is a welcoming, pleasant, warm, and a caring learning environment. On the contrary, for my participants, negative center(s) of influence such as: (a) abusive/controlling relationships; (b) lack of support system; (c) coping with identity; (d) developing coping strategies to be accepted at the college; and (e) living in two worlds might have the potential to serve as negative influencers in their journey.

Ultimately, for my participants: (a) being self-motivated and skillful in managing difficult situations; (b) having support from family and having role models; (c) having a desire for wanting to do better for themselves and their families; (d) being mindful and having a vision for future and seeing beyond their immediate circumstances; and (e) drawing on their religion and spirituality could serve as positive influencers. In the end, the positive influencers serve as a catalyst by outweighing the negative influencers; the positive influencers also shape and crystallize the experiences of my participants as such that they may perceive that UCC is a welcoming, pleasant, warm, and a caring learning environment. Ultimately, having a welcoming, pleasant, warm, and a caring learning environment might contribute to each of my participant's persistence at UCC; perhaps fulfilling their vision of completing their studies at UCC and becoming a contributing and functioning member of their communities and achieve social stability.

In summary, a combination of devising coping strategies, coupled with intrinsic qualities (enabling qualities/assets), and capitalizing on positive influencers might enhance efficacy, self concept, and locus of control for the majority of my participants. In terms of enhanced efficacy, my participants might become convinced

that they possess the capability to organize and execute courses of action required to manage various situations which they encounter at UCC. In terms of self-concept, my participants might develop a better understanding of their self which can influence their attitudes, habits, beliefs and ideas. Together, my participants' attitude, habits, beliefs and ideas influence their self-esteem. In terms of locus of control, my participants will develop a better perception about the underlying main causes of events in their life encounters at UCC. In the end, enhanced efficacy, a better understanding of self concept, and stronger locus of control collectively outweigh the significant influence of inhibiting qualities (deficits) for these individuals. Therefore, each of my participants might perceive that their experiences are pleasant as they make their academic and non-academic journey at UCC.

#### *Interactions and Rapport*

The interactions and rapport domain is supported by two interwoven sub-domains: (a) academic conditions and (b) non-academic conditions. I will first discuss my participants' shared experiences with the academic conditions at UCC. Next, I will discuss my participants' shared experiences with the non-academic conditions at UCC followed by my participants' rapport with the college community. Collectively, the overall participants' holistic experiences at UCC in part could be related to transactions between the academic, non-academic interactions, and their rapport with the college community at UCC.

#### *Academic conditions*

As a comprehensive community college, UCC is an open access institution. This meant that each of the participants had to meet or fulfill very few requirements

in order to gain admission to UCC and start their studies. The supporting master themes for the academic conditions are included in the Componential Analysis Table four from Appendix I. These supporting themes are grouped into six major sub-themes. These sub-themes are: (a) participants' perceptions of their academic self-concept(s); (b) faculty members' perceptions of participants; (c) alignment between teaching style(s) of faculty members and learning style(s) of participants; (d) participants' rapport and relationship with faculty members; (e) the role of TRIO in each participant's journey at UCC; and (f) having access to stable support system.

*Participants' perceptions of their academic self-concept(s)*

Academic self-concept deals with how each of my participant judges their own academic abilities. All participants with the exception of Rayhab and Kevin, and Mary have a positive academic self concept about their academic abilities as they navigate and negotiate their journey at UCC. For Rayhab and Kevin, their academic self-concept is unclear. With the exception of Mary who admitted that she was not academically prepared, all other participants in this study did not discuss or express concerns with their academic skills and preparedness. Although some participants like Kevin and Annette indicated that they had been out of school for a while; however, being away from school did not impact their academic self concept nor their achievement levels at UCC.

Together, it can be concluded that for the majority of my participants with the exception of Mary, their level(s) of locus of control is moderate to strong. By moderate to strong levels of locus of control, I mean that my participants are in tune and alert about the underlying main causes of events in their life encounters at UCC.

As all participants in this study navigated and negotiated their journey at UCC, they drew on their previous skills to seek assistance when needed or make friendships with peers with the same interest levels to ensure their own victories over academic obstacles.

With the exception of Rayhab, the remaining eight participants also exhibited flexible hardiness, mental toughness to become adapt in dealing with, reconciling, and negotiating with negative academic challenges by turning their negative experiences into positive outcomes. With the exception of Mary, all participants' academic experiences also confirm that they have strong academic self-efficacy. By strong academic self-efficacy, I mean that my participants possess the ability to approach difficult tasks and assignments related to academic activities at UCC. In other words, these participants become convinced that they possess the capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage given situations they encounter at UCC.

Collectively, participants' academic self-concept(s) reveals a phenomenon that students with moderate to strong level(s) of locus of control and strong academic self-efficacy believed that they had control over the outcomes of given situations and circumstances in their academic transactions. Therefore, they were likely to be motivated to respond to a given academic transaction, and challenging situations or circumstances along their journey at UCC.

#### *Faculty members' perceptions of participants*

With the exception of Doreen all other participants eloquently commented on their instructors' perceptions. These participants used descriptors such as "being

typecast” and “stereotyped” when they tried to express their experiences from their interactions with their instructors. Moreover, with the exception of Doreen, these participants also mentioned that they were watchful in their interactions with their instructors at UCC in order to minimize negative perception of being stereotyped and typecast. Psychological discomfort, stress, and isolation can result from situations that individuals experience being typecast and stereotyped. The watchful intentions of my participants could be viewed as a means of coping strategies to minimize the negative perceptions because of verbal and non-verbal expressions and appearances.

Beyond interactions with faculty members at UCC, being typecast and stereotyped permeated in my participants’ voices as their life stories in the college community unfolded. Being typecast and stereotyped is a dangerous and fertile milieu for being stigmatized, being made feel inadequate, and marginalized. Because of being marginalized, being made feel inadequate, and stigmatized, these participants had to try very hard to become vigilant, calculate their moves and transactions, hesitant, and make cautious engagement in the interactions at UCC. Having to act in accordance with pre-played scenarios can also be psychologically and emotionally exhausting for individuals. The purposeful and watchful pre-played engagement as well as adopting coping strategies could lead some participants such as Rayhab, Robert, Kevin, Annette, Trey, Natish, and Mary into developing a feeling of being isolated and alienated.

*Alignment between teaching style(s) of faculty/learning style(s) of participants*

Faculty members’ approaches to teaching their courses can also hinder or promote students’ achievement and accomplishment. Transition to an instructional

climate perceived as a welcoming environment instilled a sense of comfort factor for the majority of participants in my study. Moreover, it promoted a feeling of being valued and validated for these participants. Aligning instructors' teaching style and students' learning style is extremely significant in shaping each of the participants' experiences at UCC. With the exception of Rayhab and Robert, all other participants commented on the importance of alignment between instructor's teaching style(s) and students' learning style(s) at UCC. For example, Doreen, Kenneth, Annette, Trey, and Mary echoed that their instructors' teaching style(s) were aligned with their learning style(s). Conversely, Kevin and Natish felt that their instructors' teaching style(s) were not aligned with their learning style(s).

Collectively, some instructors took time to learn about their students, and match their own teaching styles to their students' learning styles. The action of these instructors promoted feelings of being valued, affirmed, and celebrated for my participants. On the contrary, some instructors were not sensitive to their students' learning style; their actions did create frustration for these students, and lead to these students' dissatisfaction at UCC.

#### *Participants' rapport and relationship with faculty members*

Commenting on having rapport with their instructors, my participants' experiences confirm that student-faculty interactions promoted academic achievement and educational aspirations, and persistence. The majority of participants indicated that they had positive rapport with their instructors. Rayhab and Kevin commented some difficulties in their interactions with their instructors. With the exception of Rayhab and Kevin, the remaining seven participants firmly believe that their

instructors at UCC were helpful and approachable. Instructors who demonstrated a tendency of going the extra mile for their students if they saw that their students were trying is a common thread that emerged from my participants' narratives. The close relationship(s) and exchanges between the participants and their instructors promoted each participant's self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, and self-confidence. Having a positive self-esteem, high or strong self-efficacy, and a strong self-confidence can promote positive experiences for the participants. Moreover, it may promote the ability for the majority of my participants to take responsibility for their own actions at UCC.

*The role of TRIO in each participant's journey at UCC*

Expanding on the role of TRIO, five participants indicated that they took advantage of TRIO services. These are Rayhab, Robert, Kevin, Annette, and Natish. These five students commented that TRIO has given them the social and academic connection opportunities. On one hand, having the ability to take advantage of TRIO services for these students meant that perhaps they could easily integrate and assimilate in the social and academic spheres of the college at UCC. On the other hand, by being able to employ TRIO services, these five participants were able to make friends with their peers who had the same academic goals, access to special advising, and tutoring services at UCC. It should be noted that the remaining four students, Doreen, Kenneth, Trey, and Mary did not access TRIO services. Therefore, these four students had to fend for themselves, plot, negotiate, and navigate a path for their own academic journey at UCC. There were not significant differences in the

experiences of participants who accessed TRIO services and those who did not access TRIO.

The majority of my participants indicated that they had other life priorities such as working part-time, attending to their family needs, and expending time to study beyond normal school hours. Therefore, these life commitments prevented them from participating in college activities; although, they were recipients of TRIO services. In addition, some participants indicated that UCC offered very few activities for students. They attended UCC to simply get an education and meet their educational goals.

*Having access to stable support system*

Beyond TRIO, participants also expressed that having a stable support system in and out of the college was instrumental in reducing their anxieties, perceived academic stress, and sense of hesitancy as they were transitioning to UCC as well as encountering their life challenges. With the exception of Rayhab who did not disclose information about his support system, the remaining participants had some forms of support. Having some form(s) of support system whether the support is coming from parents and/or grandparents, extended family, or from church and friends facilitated each of the participants' life journeys at UCC. Having access to stable support system also enhanced and promoted some aspects of participants' decisions to pursue education, perceive education as a valuable and worthwhile experience and transaction; ultimately influencing their experiences at UCC. The majority of my participants' narratives also revealed that they demonstrated mental

toughness, agility, and were adaptable to adversities in making sense of their academic transactions at UCC.

In summary, in this section, the academic conditions were supported and discussed by six major sub-themes. Collectively, for my participants the interplay among: (a) their attitude(s) about their academic abilities; (b) their faculty assessment and perceptions; (c) their rapport and relationships with their faculty members; (d) the alignment between instructors' teaching style and my participants' learning styles; (e) their involvement in the TRIO program; and (f) having a stable support system may be contributing factors in shaping and crystallizing their academic experiences at UCC.

#### *Non-Academic conditions*

A number of non-academic conditions influenced participants' transactions which in turn shaped their images of UCC. The supporting master themes for non-academic conditions are included in the Componential Analysis Table five from Appendix J. These supporting themes are grouped into five major sub-themes. These sub-themes are: (a) participants' perceptions of their social self-concept(s); (b) academic and social interactions; (c) desire for wanting to become independent; (d) turning negative transactions to positive outcomes; and (e) sophistication about race/color relations.

#### *Participant's perception of their social self concept*

Social self concept refers to how each of my participants identifies their sense of belongingness and comfort factor at UCC. The relationships and interactions between all of my participants and an interested/approachable college community

could be the contributing factors in influencing their social self-concept and comfort factors. Conversely, for each of my participants, their lack of social self concept and comfort factor influences their perceptions as such that they have to exert psychological and emotional energies to cope with a sense of belongingness at UCC.

Beyond relationships with an interested and approachable college community, the perceptions of college community concerning the verbal and non-verbal expressions of my participants were also common threads that emerged from my participants' stories. Having a wrong perception by the college community concerning the verbal and non-verbal expressions of each of the participants could become a fertile milieu for the participants so these individuals have to become watchful, vigilant, and hesitant concerning their interactions. With the exception of Doreen, the pre-played modes of interactions and acting in a guarded manner were predominate themes that permeated in the profile of all participants as they elaborated on their journey at UCC.

On one hand, acting in a guarded manner and having pre-played modes of interactions also influenced and weakened participants' social self-concept, comfort factor, and locus of control. On the other hand, these participants developed and forged coping strategies to compensate for and enhance their comfort factor. Developing and forging coping strategies could also force participants to ascertain new identities for whom they do not present or stand for. Forcing new identities can be a form of conformity and conformance. For instance, for some participants such as Rayhab, Kevin, Annette, and Mary they developed these new identities or modes

of engagement and adjustment which may be consistent with the conversionist discourse.

For my participants who developed coping strategies such as acting in a guarded manner or adopted forged identities using conversionist discourse, these adjustments could have facilitated their transition at UCC. However, for these participants the notions of acting in a guarded manner or employing the conversionist mode of adjustment and engagement also provided an opportunity to internalize a sense of being typecast and being stereotyped as they reflected on their transactions with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC. Ultimately, for these participants, they would not perceive their journey and experiences as something that they have control over. Therefore, they developed feelings of becoming isolated, alienated, marginalized, and inadequate. Overcoming these feelings could also be emotionally exhausting for these participants.

#### *Academic and social interactions*

Academic and social interactions consist of each of the participant's: (a) interactions with their faculty members; (b) peers; and (c) professional staff members, and administrators at UCC. Concerning each participant's interactions with his or her faculty members, the majority of participants with the exception of Rayhab and Kevin commented that they had positive rapport with their faculty members. The common voices from each of the participants' profiles confirmed that they had excellent rapport with their faculty members. Having excellent rapport for each of the participants would mean that their faculty members cared for them; they were approachable, interested in their progress and achievements.

Concerning relationships with their peers, all participants echoed that they would connect with peers of the same interest and goals at UCC. However, forging these relationships and connections were not a life long endeavor for each of the participants. Soon after each semester would end, these friendships would end. In addition, the significant role of TRIO services and TRIO offices surfaced as a place that some of these relationship development activities would take place for some participants with the exception of Doreen, Kenneth, Trey, and Mary. Having the ability to develop relationships also promoted social connections with the college community for my participants. For Rayhab, making social connections was perhaps a significant priority. He has come to UCC shortly after graduating from high school. For all the other participants, having positive relationships with their peers would also mean that they were socially accepted in the college community.

Among all participants, Kevin, Annette, Natish, and Mary commented on the differences between traditional (high school age) and non-traditional (older) students in their classrooms experiences. These participants' concerns mainly focused that the traditional students were not as goal-oriented as the non-traditional students. In addition, traditional students would perceive that attending UCC was like going to high school. On the contrary, all of my participants indicated that being at UCC was like being in a college. Moreover, they had to study hard in order to pass their courses and obtain good grades.

The predominate themes among all participants' experiences with the professional staff and administrators at UCC confirms that my participants had to be persistent if they needed services or assistance from professional staff and

administrators. Moreover, the experiences of all participants were not negative. Taken together, the critical role of having positive relationships among each of the participants, the college community (faculty, staff, and administrators), and peers permeated in the voices of each of the participants as they shared their stories. Having positive relationships for each of the participants at the college also provided them a sense of being valued, accepted, and promoted their self-worth. Collectively, these perceptions also influenced each of the participant's locus of control and experiences at UCC.

*Desire for wanting to become independent*

Becoming independent reflected in the voices of my participants when they commented on taking control of their lives. Taking control also meant that the participants were looking for empowerment, and autonomy. With the exception of Rayhab, the remaining eight participants have worked or have had other higher education experiences prior to coming to UCC. The desire of all participants for attending UCC was to become contributing members of their communities. In addition, by attending UCC, they would like to improve their life and the lives of their family members.

To become the contributing member(s) of a community and improving their current life situations could also be equated to having a desire to become independent, having a heightened sense of accomplishment about their own abilities. For each of the participants, having a sense of accomplishment about one's ability could facilitate their development of self-confidence by going through successive victories such as

overcoming academic and social barriers at UCC. Eventually, my participants discovered their potential/abilities and made notice of their accomplishments.

Philosophically, accomplishments for all participants meant to put some form of closure to their academic journey at UCC by completing their courses and their intended program of study. For my participants, having a sense of positive accomplishment also translated into having a sense of internal motivation or accepting ownership for their actions, needs, and the consequences of their actions at UCC. Collectively, the interplays between each of the participants' actions, needs, and the consequences of their actions could be a major contributing factor in developing a sophisticated insight. Having a sophisticated insight also meant that my participants had a desire to be in charge of their destiny by being in control, and would have a desire for empowerment and autonomy.

For all participants, the sense of having control, being in charge, and having a desire for empowerment and autonomy is a critical step not only at UCC but also a beneficial and significant life lesson that they can take away as they transition to their communities beyond UCC. All participants can perhaps transfer these skills and life lessons to their personal relationships, employment, or institutions of higher education that may transfer after leaving UCC. For my participants, having a sense of control, a desire for becoming empowered, autonomous, and a perception of fulfillment because of their accomplishments could mean a positive self-esteem and self-confidence.

Each of the participants' ability to persist and become adaptive, particularly given where they started in their life journey prior to coming to UCC is a remarkable

achievement. Taking control allows my participants to forego their dependence, forge new goals and destinies resulting from their newly gained achievements, and reaching empowerment, self reliance, and self determination. Undoubtedly, these senses of accomplishment and transformation can be fulfilling for my participants.

Collectively, for the participants in this study, having a feeling of empowerment could contribute to their assumptions for developing positive experiences as they interface with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC. Ultimately, having empowering experiences can also be translated into having positive experiences for my participants. Therefore, they might perceive that they are in control as they become engaged in their interactions and interfaces with transactions at UCC.

*Turning negative transactions into positive outcomes*

The participants in this study faced obstacles due to their academic and non-academic transactions, somehow in their own way each participant turned the negative transactions into positive outcomes. Achieving these positive outcomes also ensured participants' persistence, shaped, and influenced their experiences at UCC.

Turning negative transactions into positive outcomes could also be contributed to each of my participants' abilities in identifying and employing their personal attributes in their interactions/transaction with the academic and the non-academic conditions at UCC. Throughout the first and the follow up interviews, each of the participants described and enlisted a broad array of personal attributes. All participants echoed that having these attributes were helpful/beneficial tools which facilitated their accomplishments at UCC. The personal attributes of each of the

participants can be considered as their intrinsic qualities. Possessing these qualities acted as assets that facilitated my participant's navigation and negotiation at UCC.

Sensing or witnessing positive outcomes for each of the participants also meant that they had the mental toughness and flexible hardiness/agility to take control of their navigation; each of the participants were skillful in managing academic and non-academic barriers; each of the participants were capable of managing multifaceted life circumstances; and resourceful in securing assistance to ensure that they could overcome their academic and non-academic obstacles.

For my participants, devising solutions to their struggles/barriers, ensuring success can also be translated as having positive, fulfilling, satisfying, fruitful, and pleasant experiences at UCC. Taken together, for my participants, their enabling qualities or assets outweighed their inhibiting qualities or liabilities/deficits. This also meant that each of the participants developed motivation for success and did not want to revert back to situations or circumstances that they came from prior to coming to UCC. In other words, the motivation for having a positive experience meant that each of the participants also developed a resourcefulness and knowledge base to navigate and negotiate their transactions at UCC. This meant that the majority of my participants possessed moderate to strong level(s) of locus of control. In summary, possessing moderate to strong level(s) of locus of control provided each of the participants a sense for their accomplishment by recharging their psychological and emotional exhaustion(s), affirming their self-confidence, and competence.

### *Sophistication about race and color relations*

All nine participants in this study brought outside personal experiences and knowledge concerning race and color relations to UCC. With the exception of Rayhab, the remaining participants echoed that they were aware of being the only African American student in classroom. Although, by being the only African American or minority student in the class, there may exist some potentials for these participants to become invisible entities in or out of classrooms whose voices may be silenced or presence be ignored. None of the participants echoed such experiences for being made feel invisible or silenced at UCC. In other words, my participants were sophisticated on matters related to race and color relations. They understood and had a heightened awareness about their race. The sophistication about race and color relations issues for my participants could be analyzed in four dimensions: (a) cross-cultural encounters/clashes; (b) racism and prejudice; (c) identity; and (d) cross-cultural competence.

### *Cross-cultural encounters and clashes*

Possessing a wealth of experience and knowledge concerning race and color relations enabled each of my participants to develop a meaning for what it meant to be an African American in their own communities, UCC, and society in general. By employing this meaning making process, most of my participants were able to make a seamless transition and bridge between their world as an African American individual and the Eurocentric world of Caucasians at UCC, a PWI. However, the transition for some participants was not seamless. For instance, Robert, Kevin, Natish, and Mary expressed that they lived in two worlds. These two worlds included: (a) a world of

being an African American living in their own enclaves (communities) and (b) a world of being in and interacting with Caucasians (i.e., beyond their communities, society at large, and UCC).

The navigation and negotiation beyond one's community of affiliation to a community of the majority is extremely significant. This transition could create a potential fertile milieu for border crossing. In other words, each time individuals crossed the border between home and UCC, perhaps, there may have existed a potential for cultural conflict when the values, beliefs and activities of their home culture conflicted with the values, beliefs, and activities of their UCC culture. This meant that the individuals who had difficulties adapting to, or who were forced to adapt to different school culture might be at a disadvantage due to such conflicts. As these individual might not have the right culturally appropriate tools to navigate and negotiate their way. In other words, the behaviors, values, and activities that these individuals might be comfortable with or competent in their home culture might not be valued, accepted, or ever be noticed in the school culture. Thus, students and the college community might be faced with a border crossing dilemma that must be addressed.

As each of my participants tried to negotiate and navigate their ways in the mainstream of community, society at large, and UCC using their own culturally appropriate tools; they encountered cross cultural clashes because of border crossing. These cross cultural clashes caused my participants to experience constant jarring between these two worlds. These experiences were psychologically and emotionally exhausting for these participants. To minimize these cross cultural clashes, some

participants chose to employ coping strategies to minimize the struggle with a life of living into two worlds. For example, with the exception of Doreen, Kenneth, and Trey, the remaining six participants adopted a path of least resistance by simply choosing to live in an isolated and alienated world at UCC. Moreover, for these six participants, having a sense of isolation and alienation might have presented a potential for becoming sources of distraction from their academic endeavors.

### *Racism and prejudice*

My participants confirm that racism and prejudice is a man-made ignorant word. The majority of participants developed an understanding for racism and prejudice as a form of oppression that was based on power structure within our society. The voices of my participants echoed that it is unfortunate that racism and prejudice still happens in the society. But they have developed psychological toughness or mental attitude for resisting the racist and prejudice behaviors. Having a positive mental attitude, strong efficacy and demeanor about self (strong self) is a key ingredient in neutralizing and overcoming visages of racism and prejudice for these students at UCC.

It is noteworthy to elaborate on how my participants defined the meanings of being African American. For instance, the majority of definitions that the female participants employed to define the meaning of being an African American female focused on “being powerful and strong, smart/intelligent, a person who has struggled, and a nurturer.” These were common themes that Doreen, Annette, Natish, and Mary used to define the meaning of being an African American female. However, with the exception of Doreen, the remaining three participants stated that they were cautious

and would constantly try to be watchful not to portray negative images for being an African American as they interacted with the Caucasians in and out of UCC. This sense of being vigilant and watchful is to minimize how the Caucasians perceive African Americans; “a lazy, shiftless, impolite, and aimless person,” as these participants asserted. In other words, these participants cautiously attempted to prove these perceptions wrong by being watchful and vigilant. Other forms of being watchful and vigilant echoes from comments that Annette, Natish, and Mary enlisted, “try to work hard to always give them [Caucasians] the correct answer and proved their [Caucasians’] perceptions wrong.”

Among other participants, Rayhab did not provide a definition for being an African American male. For Robert, Kenneth, Kevin, and Trey, the common themes in defining the meaning of being an African American male widely varied. Altogether, these male participants concluded that African American male is “a survivor, warrior, strong, and self-sufficient; the African American male is equal to the next man.”

With the exception of Doreen, all other participants confirmed that the perception of college community for African American students based on their verbal and non-verbal expressions and appearances could become potential sources of being typecast and stereotyped. Being typecast and stereotyped could become a fertile milieu for racism and prejudice, and racial stereotypes.

### *Identity*

Participants through various experiences in their lives and specifically at UCC, a PWI, have come to try to examine and make positive meaning of what it

means to be a Black person from their transactions/interactions at their present academic and non-academic milieu. Among all participants in this study, with the exception of Rayhab, my participants were in tune and conscious with their identity development with some exceptions. For instance, some participants such as Rayhab, Kevin, and Annette employed the conversionist discourse in their interactions/transactions with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC. However, this could be considered a mode of alignment or coping strategies for these individuals. Moreover, for Rayhab and Natish being light-skinned African American students might serve as a double edge sword. As both participants echoed, they would not easily be accepted by the African American students; however, they could easily transition and assimilate in the Caucasian community at UCC. For Mary, she concealed her identity for being a gay; however, in combination with her identity of being an African American female, revealing her identity as being gay could become burdensome and perhaps would result into negative consequences for her. These consequences could include being discriminated, being typecast, and stereotyped. Together, Rayhab, Natish, and Mary adopted coping strategies that examined and minimized the burdens of identity crisis. These coping strategies coupled with the process of constant examination and assessment of one's identity in turn could provide my participants the ability to weaken their emotional and psychological stress associated with their racial identity encounters and challenges at UCC, a PWI.

### *Cross-cultural competence*

Collectively, all participants described ways in which they sought out experiences that would move them along in their development and expanded their understanding of themselves, and other race and cultures. For example, for Rayhab, Robert, Kevin, Annette, and Natish, TRIO services and social experiences from their own personal lives/transactions beyond UCC served a fertile ground for acquiring cross-cultural competence. For other participants such as Doreen, Kenneth, Trey, and Mary, having exposure to social experiences from their own personal lives/transactions beyond UCC provided the opportunities for acquiring cross cultural competence.

Each of the participants also demonstrated that they would be open to cultures from other worldviews and frameworks beyond their own African American race. In some cases, this relationship surfaces in cross cultural friendships; however, these cross-cultural relationships were not everlasting beyond the classroom or the academic term. But, these feelings and demeanors for being open to other cultural framework would provide opportunities to become a contributing member of a multicultural based community at UCC.

Taken together, each of the participants' experiences with these four dimensions: (a) cross-cultural crashes/border crossing; (b) racism and prejudice; (c) identity; and (d) cross-cultural competence influenced their understanding of race and color relations/issues as well as intricacies that contribute in developing the sophistication about race and color at UCC.

In summary, in this section, the non-academic conditions were supported and discussed by five major sub-themes: (a) participants' perceptions of their social self-concept; (b) academic and social interactions; (c) desire for wanting to become independent; (d) turning negative transactions into positive outcomes; (e) and sophistication about race and color. Collectively, the dynamic interplay among these sub-themes may be the contributing factor in shaping and crystallizing my participants' experiences at UCC.

#### *Transformation and self-discovery*

As each of the participants left their own communities and came to UCC to pursue their educational goals, through participation in the interviews or their journey at UCC, they might have experienced some form(s) of transformation and self-discovery. The supporting master themes for transformation and self-discovery domain are included in the Componential Analysis Table six from Appendix K.

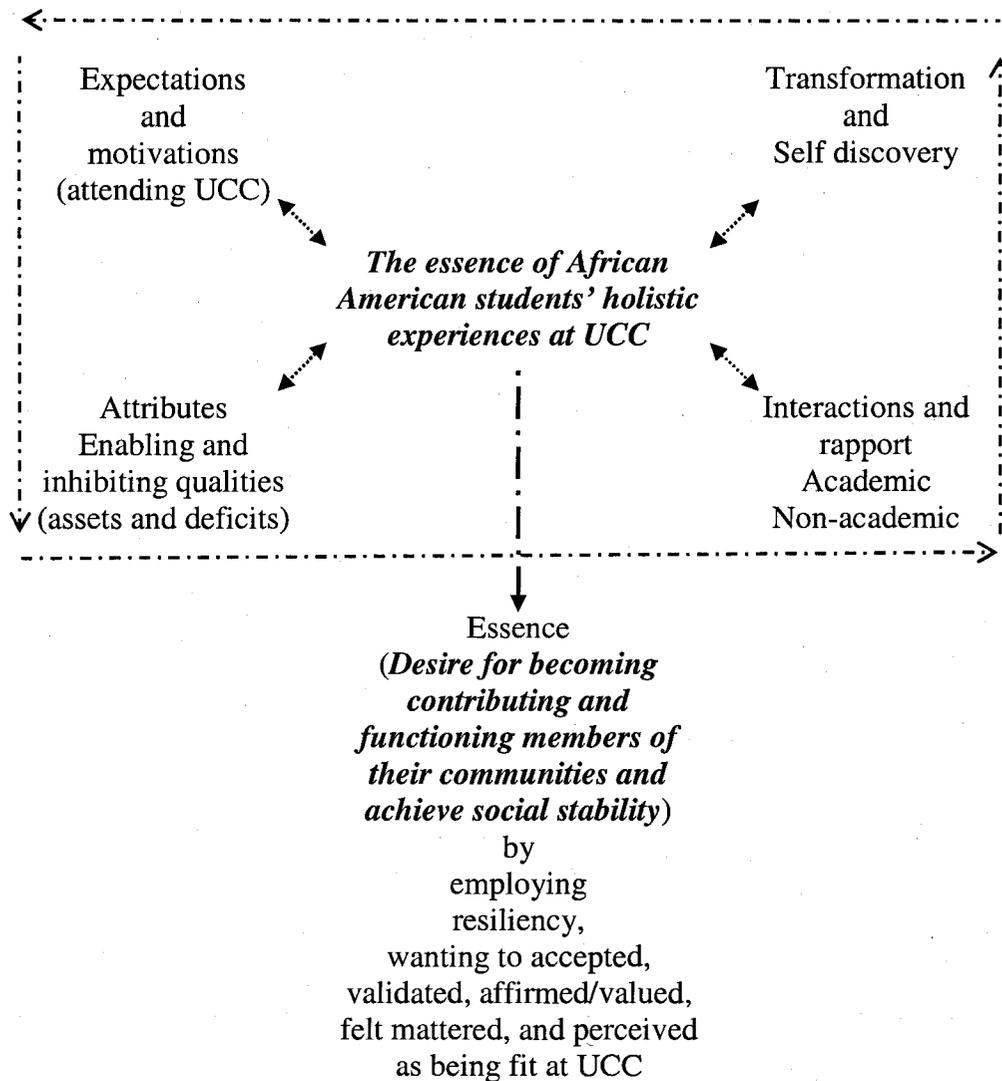
All participants emphasized that they had an end goal in mind upon their arrival at UCC. Their goals focused on the completion of their educational journey. Additionally, a process for making meaning(s) for self-discovery emerged from participants' lived experiences at UCC. These experiences were created through encounters/transactions with the academic and non-academic conditions at the college community including: (a) faculty, staff, administrator, and peers; (b) TRIO; (c) student services; (d) student support services; and (e) possible involvement in student organizations. It is noteworthy to mention that none of the participants in this study participated in the student organizations at UCC. As a matter of fact, the majority of participants were too busy with family commitments, and outside employment. They

did not have time to participate in student organizations at UCC. However, with the exception of Doreen, Rayhab, and Kenneth, as the remaining participants' reflected upon their experiences with this domain, it is safe to say that the participants in this study developed a heightened sense of awareness and appreciation of viewpoints or perceptions that they might have not known about, or possessed, or identified, or recognized prior to coming to UCC.

In summary, for my participants, experiencing transformation and self-discovery also contributed to their discovery of reflecting on self, self actualization, and perhaps developing skills to becoming future minded. Experiencing transformation and self-discovery for my participants might also enhance their capacity to solidify short-term wins and successes at UCC into long-term goals. Therefore, each participant may be able to forge a possible path and direction for their future lives beyond UCC.

*The essence of African American students' holistic experiences at UCC*

The essence of my participants' holistic experiences at UCC will provide a deeper understanding of what my participants encounter as they negotiate and navigate their academic and non-academic transactions at UCC. I will rely on diagram one which consists of four interwoven loosely coupled domains to explain the essence of my participants' experiences at UCC. These emergent domains are: (a) expectations and motivations; (b) attributes; (c) interactions and rapport; and (d) transformation and self discovery. Ultimately, the dynamic interplay and the transactions among these loosely coupled four domains influenced, shaped, and crystallized the holistic experiences of participant in my study.



*Diagram 1. Understanding of a Phenomenon*

### *Interpretation of the Essence*

In this section, I will first provide a summary for each of the four domains. Secondly, I will discuss the dynamics among these domains from diagram one. It is this analysis and interpretative work which will give meaning to my study outside the UCC. Moreover, the analysis and interpretative work may help me understand the holistic experiences of my participants which can extend my study into realm of social science.

### *Expectations and motivations*

In order to understand African American students' holistic experiences at UCC, it is imperative to recognize the background and experiences that have brought these students to UCC. Each participant brings a mix of pre-college characteristics to UCC. In addition, each of the participants has their own expectations and motivations for attending college. For the majority of the participants becoming a contributing and a functional member of society, validating expertise, achieving autonomy and independence, and improving their own lives and life for their families were their main reasons for coming to UCC.

Equally significant is to examine and expand the expectations and motivations of my participants for attending UCC beyond the physical boundaries of UCC. The significance of this analysis is noteworthy because my study solely focused on a glimpse of my participants' journey at UCC. I gave each of my participants the opportunities to freely speak about their lives prior to coming to UCC. As each of the participants spoke about their pre-college characteristics and identified their desires for attending school. On the surface, my participants expressed that by attending

UCC, they may become a contributing and functional member of their communities or they may achieve autonomy or improve their own lives and the life of their families.

Unfortunately, for my participants, after obtaining their education from UCC, I am uncertain whether these dreams may materialize. However, each of the participants is willing to take the risk, overcome the challenges they faced along their journey, stay their charted courses, and perhaps conclude that they may be becoming contributing and functioning members of their communities or they may achieve autonomy or improve their own lives and the life of their families. But, life outside UCC can be different from what each of my participants experienced at UCC.

My participants' journeys at UCC can be equated to a well rehearsed dance which each of my participants has mastered their roles and positions. In this fictive dance and on the dance floor (UCC), my participants' preschool characteristics, their motivations for attending and pursuing their goals provided each of the participants with a role and position. What is uncertain and unclear, how my participants will fair beyond UCC where the dance floor is a much larger unknown territory and the nature/types of their dances may be unpredictable? Looking at this domain from an abstract lens, I offer four questions: (a) "does each of my participants feel prepared for their life journey upon their graduation as they depart UCC?" (b) UCC has become a known territory for each of my participants. However, "can my participants really become contributing and functioning members of their communities by attending UCC?" (c) "is this simply a perception and utopian that

they have immersed themselves?” and (d) “why are my participants inspired to stay in school and perceive that school can be a value-added transaction in their journey?”

The answer to these questions could come from my participants’ aspirations for attending UCC. Their aspirations may be controlled by their academic ability and their belief that their behaviors at UCC are guided by their personal decision(s), intentions, and efforts. Together, their academic ability and their belief that their behavior(s) are guided by their personal decision(s), intention(s), and efforts may be the encouraging motivators for each of the participants to stay and continue their studies at UCC. In turn, my participants would constantly weigh the cost of staying in school against leaving school. Ultimately, the outcome for staying in school outweighs their decision for not staying in school. This outcome could be the catalyst that instills in my participants the hope that they may need to affirm their potential to become a contributing and functioning member of their communities and achieve social stability.

#### *Attributes*

My participants possess broad arrays of personal attributes that may be considered as: (a) enabling qualities (assets) and (b) inhibiting qualities (deficits). Each of the participants drew from their own assets in their negotiations and navigations with the academic and non-academic conditions of the college. In addition, each of the participants devised coping strategies to minimize the influences of inhibiting qualities (deficits) in their interactions and transactions with the academic and non-academic environment of the college. For each of the participants, their mental toughness/agility, ability to turn negative transactions into positive

outcomes, and being able to cope with challenges such as identity and identity development influenced and shaped their experiences. Moreover, for each of the participants' their ability to employ their assets in their negotiations and navigations outweighed their deficits and inhibiting qualities. Employing enabling qualities (assets) may also promote and strengthen my participants' self-confidence, and their locus of control.

Beyond personal attributes, a variety of forces such as having stable in and out of college support system(s), spirituality, and familial relationships/role modeling also contributed in shaping my participants' experiences at UCC. Moreover, my participants were able to devise coping strategies which enabled them to minimize the influence of verbal and non-verbal expressions and appearance that could influence their interactions/transactions with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC. In the end, by capitalizing on assets and devising coping strategies each of the participants were able to make meaning(s) of their transactions with the college community at UCC and develop a perception for themselves that they had positive and welcoming experiences at UCC.

Understanding the influence of personal attributes on my participants' experiences should also go beyond the walls of UCC. For example, my participants' voices resonated that by employing their enabling qualities, they were able to make meanings of their journey that their experiences at UCC were pleasant, positive, and welcoming. Having these experiences could be a by-product of a much larger sacrifice that perhaps my participants will be making; that is the coping strategies that they may have to employ in order to fit in at UCC. Again, for my participants, life in

larger scope will need to expand beyond UCC. For me the unknowns are: (a) “will my participants have to act in a guarded manner or watch their verbal and non-verbal expressions and appearance in order to secure the opportunity to obtain positive experiences in their journey beyond UCC?” (b) “what is the cost or the trade off for having positive experiences for my participants?”

My participants also expanded that they frequently rely on the lessons that they gained from their personal experiences outside UCC and employ these lessons inside UCC in order to navigate and negotiate in their journey. However, at UCC dealing with situations, conditions, transactions that are familiar or events that take place in familiar territories may be significantly different from events that may take place outside UCC. The common theme from my participants’ voices confirmed that they are used to employing coping strategies such as acting in a guarded manner, being mindful, vigilant, observant, utilize careful mode of engagement, and watchful in their interactions. However, dealing and interacting with situations and conditions in this manner may be psychologically and emotionally exhausting and influence my participants to become isolated and alienated. For my participants, being isolated and alienated may resemble a survival of “living in a cocoon, a place where no one goes, and no way out but just through it.”

On one hand, living in a cocoon can be something that my participants must endure as a trade off to perceive that they can become contributing and functioning members of their communities as they continue with their journey at UCC. My participants may endure the isolation and alienation of this fictive cocoon by drawing on their enabling qualities (assets). These participants are also resilient warriors who

have the capacity to rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversities surrounded their cocoons, and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress from outside UCC or simply to the stress that is inherent in their journey at UCC.

On the other hand my participants' desire and perception for becoming the contributing members of their communities, their enabling qualities, and their interactions in a milieu that is perceived caring and welcoming may give a false sense of hope, security, and comfort for them beyond their journey at UCC. This false sense of hope and security may convince my participants that they are valued, accepted. Expanding these transactions beyond UCC may not be all that true and leave my participants short changed. In the end, for my participants, their resilience may be a key survival ingredient in their journey at UCC.

#### *Interactions and rapport*

UCC is a social organization and my participants' interactions at UCC can be examined as two interwoven transactions: (a) academic and (b) non-academic conditions. As my participants transitioned to UCC, they faced a wide variety of academic and non-academic conditions. Participants' in and out of the classroom interactions with the college community including their peers could partially be accounted for influencing and shaping their experiences at UCC.

For example, on one hand, the academic conditions can influence, shape, and crystallize each of the participants' experiences at UCC by creating a dynamic interaction among: (a) each participant's attitude and assessment of his or her academic ability; (b) faculty assessment and perception of each of the participants; (c)

interactions and rapport between each of the participants and their faculty members; (d) the alignment between each faculty member's teaching style(s) and each of the participants' learning style(s); (e) involvement in the TRIO program for some participants; and (f) having stable support systems.

On the other hand, non-academic conditions also influence, shape, and crystallize each of the participants' experiences at UCC by creating a dynamic interaction among: (a) my participants' perception of their social self-concept; (b) assessment of their own academic and social interactions; (c) voicing their desires for wanting to become independent; (d) being able to turn negative transactions into positive outcomes; and (e) sophistication about race and color.

In the end, the interaction between academic and non-academic conditions at UCC may anchor and cement my participants' experiences at UCC at some cost or sacrifice. This sacrifice may be related to the overall interaction(s) between my participants and the academic/non-academic conditions at UCC. For example, with the exception of one participant, all other participants' voices confirmed that they must act in a guarded manner as they interact and interface with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC, a PWI. I used a metaphor to describe their interactions,

They must act like guests or visitors in someone else's home while they are enrolled at UCC.

Being a guest in someone else's home requires my participants to become constantly vigilant how they act, what they say, and how they are perceived by the college community at UCC. Given a scenario of being watchful and vigilant may be psychologically and emotionally burdensome for my participants. The psychological

and emotional burden for my participants may also stem from how the UCC college community perceives these individuals. In many ways, my participants' voices expressed that they perceived as being typecast and stereotyped at UCC. This notion of being stereotyped and typecast is a fertile milieu for racial stereotype threat.

Being a valued member of college community is extremely important for my participants. Every day, my participants cross the boundaries of their communities/ culture and travel distances across a Caucasian landscape to arrive to UCC. My participants' voices echoed that they go the extra mile and exert a lot of energies to provide a perception that they are serious and capable students at UCC. Along with the stresses present at UCC for every student, the African American participants in my study also face additional pressures of being perceived as not serious and less capable than their Caucasian peers due to being typecast and stereotyped. This notion of being typecast and stereotyped is another fertile milieu of racial stereotype threat for my participants. To overcome this racial stereotype threat, my participants employ coping strategies, by drawing upon the strengths of their academic self concept, social self-concept, and locus of control in their journey. Together, by drawing upon these attributes my participants reveal that they are resilient individuals who could endure their journey and transactions with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC. In the end, my participants may be able to make meanings of their journey at UCC by drawing upon their expressions that UCC may be a warm, caring, pleasant, and welcoming place. However, my participants' lives beyond UCC may be unpredictable.

### *Transformation and self discovery*

My participants' voices echoed that attending UCC challenged them to question their perceptions how the college community viewed them. Attending UCC also provided opportunities for my participants to obtain new perspective, growth, and self-actualization about their journey as they interacted and interfaced with the college community. These newly gained attributes could serve as a catalyst for my participants in their journey to become independent by breaking away from their past; nurturing and promoting the resilience needed for coping and overcoming the challenges that they may face in the academic and non-academic environment at UCC.

Having a sense for transformation and self-discovery was also significant for my participants. Perhaps, for these individuals, experiencing transformation and self-discovery also contributed to developing skills to become future minded. Experiencing transformation and self-discovery for my participants could potentially enhance their capacity to solidify short-term wins and successes as a result of their transaction and engagement at UCC. For my participants, having a potential to transform the short-term experiences gained from their transactions and engagement at UCC into long-term goals might serve as a beacon that could guide them in a path for their future lives beyond UCC.

In summary, there is a continuous interaction/interplay between the four loosely coupled domains from diagram one. Ultimately, the dynamic interactions and interplay among these domains could be a determining factor in shaping, crystallizing, and explaining the shared experiences of my participants at UCC.

Moreover, not a single domain among the four domains offered is expected to have a greater impact and influence participants' shared experiences at UCC. In stead, equally significant is the dynamic combination of interactions among these domains which crystallized shared experiences of my participants at UCC.

The dynamics of diagram one is that participants have identified coping strategies that shields them from the deficits that could inhibit their progress or influence their experiences at UCC. My participants personify students who perhaps have mastered the survival techniques at UCC by employing their outside experiences. In reality, they have assimilated into the social and academic organization of the college. Although, each of my participants has a unique story and profile; they follow a similar charted paths at UCC to achieve and accomplish their goals. My participants also possess an inordinate amount of perseverance and adaptation skills. These participants are undeniably strong and determined warriors. They share a humble and diverse educational and socio-economic background. Their characters, ambitions, resiliency facilitated their persistence and experiences at UCC at a level of having an experience of exacerbation, accomplishment, and achievement. This sense of accomplishment can be summed as a group of enduring and resilient individuals who perceived that by attending UCC they can become contributing and functioning members of their communities and achieve social stability.

#### *The Essence*

As I worked with my participants and reviewed their stories, their voices continuously reminded me of a poem, "caged bird," by a contemporary poet, Maya Angelou. Therefore, I would like to close this chapter using this poem.

### *Caged Bird*

A free bird leaps on the back of the wind and floats downstream till the current ends and dips his wing in the orange sun's rays and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks down his narrow cage can seldom see through his bars of rage his wings are clipped and his feet are tied so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings with a fearful trill of things unknown but longed for still and his tune is heard on the distant hill for the caged bird sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream his wings are clipped and his feet are tied so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings with a fearful trill of things unknown but longed for still and his tune is heard on the distant hill for the caged bird sings of freedom.

(Maya Angelou, 1981, pp. 183-184)

In the end, the essence of my participants' shared experiences is controlled by four loosely coupled interwoven domains. The essence of my participants' shared experiences is their desire for becoming contributing and functioning members of their communities and to achieve social stability. The guiding source for my participants' desire may come from an innate quality or motivation that each of my participants possesses. Undoubtedly, my participants are individuals who are willing to make sacrifices at all costs to be accepted, validated, affirmed/valued, and perceived as being fit and feeling mattered at UCC.

### *Conclusion*

Chapter four provided the findings for my study. In order to understand African American students' holistic experiences at UCC, it is imperative to recognize the background and experiences that have brought these students to UCC. Each participant brings a mix of pre-college characteristics to UCC. In addition, each of

the participants has their own expectations and motivations for attending college. As they transition to UCC, they face a broad array of academic and non-academic conditions. My participants' in and out of the classroom interactions with the college community as well as their interactions with their peers could partially be accounted for influencing and shaping their experiences at UCC.

Each of the participants also possesses personal attributes which they can use as their assets or liabilities. Beyond personal attributes, variety of influencing elements such as having stable in and out of college support system(s), spirituality, and familial relationships/role modeling also contribute in shaping their experiences at UCC. Ultimately, not a single domain is expected to have a greater impact and influence participants' experiences at UCC. In stead, a dynamic combination of interactions among these loosely coupled domains equally shapes/crystallizes the shared experiences of my participant's at UCC.

In examining the dynamic interactions among the four domains from diagram one, I discovered that my participants have identified coping strategies that shielded them from the deficits that could inhibit their progress or influence their experiences at UCC. My participants personify students who perhaps have mastered the survival techniques at UCC by employing their outside experiences. In reality, they have assimilated into the social and academic organization of the college. Although, each of my participants has a unique story and profile; they follow a similar charted paths at UCC to achieve and accomplish their goals. My participants also possess an inordinate amount of perseverance and advanced adaptation skills. These participants are undeniably strong and determined individuals. They share a humble and diverse

educational and socio-economic background. Their characters, ambitions, resiliency facilitated their persistence and experiences at UCC at a level of having an experience of exacerbation, accomplishment, and achievement. This sense of accomplishment can be summed as a group of enduring and resilient individuals who perceived that by attending UCC they can become contributing and functioning members of their communities and achieve social stability.

The essence of my participants' shared experiences is their desire for becoming contributing and functioning members of their communities and to achieve social stability. The guiding source for my participants' desire may come from an innate quality or motivation that each of my participants possesses. Undoubtedly, my participants are individuals who are willing to make sacrifices at all costs to be accepted, validated, affirmed/valued, and perceived as being fit and feeling mattered at UCC.

For my participants, being resilient, having internal strength, having the skills for adaptability, having strong locus of control, self esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy are drivers in shaping and crystallizing their experiences. Moreover, possessing these multifaceted skills will provide my participants a sense for making meaning of their journey at UCC. Together, having the multifaceted skills and the ability to make meaning of their journey may facilitate each of the participants' journeys in their lives beyond UCC. Chapter five will provide the recommendations and summary for my study.

*"I am an invisible man. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids ...and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible; understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like bodiless head you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass (Ralph Ellison, 1952, p.3)."*

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

### **Introduction**

Chapter five will provide a summary of the entire study particularly the findings, interpretation of the data, conclusions drawn from the information, implications and recommendations for practice/application. This chapter will conclude with questions for future research in this area of study. Before expanding on chapter five, I will provide a summary of chapters one, two, three, and four.

In this study I examined the holistic experiences of African American students at a two year comprehensive PWI community college in the Midwest region of the U.S. I employed an inductive data analysis method that is similar to but not the same as Moustakas's (1994) method of phenomenological reduction to develop the essence of African American students' experiences at UCC (Willig, 2001). Chapter one provided an overview and introduction to my research proposal. It also provided the justification for my study. Chapter one also provided a summary of relevant literature concerning African American student enrollment in higher education and their experiences in community college, significance of my study, information about the site for my study, statement of problem(s), research questions, and my researcher's stance.

In Chapter two, I reviewed research articles and studies that provided the context for my study. I elaborated on seven themes from these publications. These

themes were: (a) institution type; (b) campus climate; (c) racism and prejudice; (d) role modeling and mentoring; (e) parental and family support; (f) student-faculty interactions; and (g) aligning teaching and learning styles of students. I also discussed, reported findings, summarized, synthesized, and critiqued the academic research literature related to each of the seven themes.

Chapter three described the research design and the methodology for my study. It also offered a rationale to support qualitative research design and the plan of inquiry. This chapter described information about methodology and implementation, the site, the participants, data collection methods, and inductive data analysis methods. I employed the phenomenological approach for my study because it allowed me to discover the meaning of African American students' holistic experiences at UCC. Phenomenology provided me with a method to develop and understand the essence of a shared experience(s) of my participants. Ethics and reciprocity, ensuring the goodness of the methodology (trustworthiness), alignment of theoretical and epistemological perspective and methodology, and researcher's perspective reflections concluded chapter three.

Chapter four provided my findings responding to one major research question, ***“how do African American students describe their experiences at the UCC?”*** Four sub-questions were posed:

1. How do African American students identify, and explain their experiences in the context of existing academic and student development procedures and programs at UCC?
2. What is the essence of this experience?
3. How do African American students identify, describe, and explain their success or lack of success at UCC?

4. What is the essence of the successful or unsuccessful experience reported by African American students at UCC?

I interviewed each of my nine participants twice. In my interviews, I employed ten interview questions that provided a starting point for my study. These questions are included in Appendix C. These questions related to the research question: *“how do African American students describe their experiences at the UCC?”*

I organized the information I gathered from my interviews in a narrative summary format. These narrative summaries provided a profile for each of my participants. The analytical process that I utilized in this study followed the traditional steps of doing a participant within case analysis followed by a cross-case analysis using my participants' profiles. From these two steps the essences of the participants' lived experiences were made salient by four major domains that emerged: (a) expectations and motivations; (b) attributes; (c) interactions and rapport; and (d) transformation and self-discovery.

Chapter Four also expanded on each of my participants' experiences with a focus on how they support the four domains noted above. The cross case analysis included all emergent themes in order to find patterns, similarities, and differences which answer the basic question, “how was the phenomenon experienced?” (Moustakas, 1994).

Ultimately, the dynamic interplay among these domains crystallized the essence of my participants' shared experiences at UCC. No single domain has a greater impact on the emergence of my participant's essence of experience. The four

noted domains also demonstrated commonalities of my participants' experiences. Yet, each of my participants shared their own unique perspectives about their journey. Together, from my participants' stories, I was able to unveil the essence of my participants' experiences. The essence of my participants' shared experiences is their desire for becoming contributing and functioning members of their communities and achieving social stability.

The guiding source for my participants' desire may come from an innate quality or motivation that each of my participants possess. Undoubtedly, my participants are willing to make sacrifices to be accepted, validated, affirmed/valued, and perceived as being fit and feeling mattered at UCC. Moreover, my participants have also identified coping strategies that shielded them from the influencers that could inhibit their progress or influence their experiences at UCC. My participants personify students who perhaps have mastered the survival techniques at UCC by employing their outside experiences. In reality, they have assimilated into the social and academic organization of the college. Although, each of my participants has a unique story and profile; they follow similar charted paths at UCC to achieve and accomplish their goals. Beyond possessing strong locus of control and strong self-efficacy, my participants also possess an inordinate amount of perseverance and advanced adaptation skills. By strong locus of control, I mean my participants possess strong perception about the underlying main causes of events in their encounters with the UCC college community; by strong self-efficacy, I mean my participants have the capacity to approach difficult tasks and activities that they encounter at the UCC college community. These participants are undeniably strong,

resilient, and determined. Moreover, being strong, resilient, and determined kept my participants on their charted course of study to fulfill their educational dreams and goals at UCC; therefore, they were able to make meaning of their journey at UCC.

In summary, the preceding chapters served a significant role for my study. Chapter one introduced my study. Chapter two presented my literature research. Chapter three described the research design and the methodology for my study. Chapter four provided the findings and my data analysis method following Moustakas (1994) procedures of phenomenological research method. Chapter five will conclude with questions for further research in this area of study. In the section that follows, I will first present a brief description of the presented literature themes.

#### *Connection to the Literature*

The literature review for this study was comprised of seven themes: (a) institution type; (b) campus climate; (c) racism and prejudice; (d) role modeling and mentoring; (e) parental and family support; (f) student-faculty interactions; and (g) aligning teaching and learning styles of students. A summary of these themes follows next in order to guide my readers before connecting the literature to four salient domains.

The literature reviewed in the *institution type* theme showed that HBCUs are generally student-centered and nurturing institutions. These institutions may be better prepared in providing African American students an environment that is supportive, nurturing, and caring. The literature reviewed in the *campus climate* theme signified the importance of campus climate and perceptions of African American students in their educational journey. Campus climate is influenced by and exerts influence on

the people who comprise them. The literature reviewed in the *racism and prejudice* theme discussed that African American students may develop a feeling of being undervalued, inferior, and inadequate as they encounter racism, prejudice, and being typecast in the college settings. In turn, these students have to exert psychological energies to cope with stressful conditions. Moreover, experiences with being typecast and stereotyped may influence students' academic and social self concepts. The literature reviewed in the *role modeling and mentoring* theme indicates that role modeling and mentoring could serve as useful tools for students' success, academic achievement, and integration in the social fabric of the institution. The literature reviewed in the *parental and familial support* theme demonstrated that beyond mentoring, having a supportive parental and familial system can enhance students' academic achievement, intellectual development, and promote their academic and social competence. Parental and family support also enabled students to survive in hostile environments. The literature reviewed in the *student-faculty interactions* theme indicated the significant role of interaction between students and faculty in the academic and social integration of students and shaping their college experiences. The literature reviewed in the *teaching style(s) and the learning style(s)* theme confirmed that the alignment between teaching style of faculty members and the learning styles of African American students coupled with the use of culturally appropriate tools in the classroom settings can enhance these students' academic achievement, satisfaction, and ultimately shape their experiences in college.

In summary, all seven themes from the preceding literature provided the context and the foundation for my study. These themes focused on factors affecting

the enrollment and retention of minority students. At best, these themes may tell us something about African American students in higher education. However, collectively, the seven noted themes do not reveal African American students' experiences in a two year comprehensive PWI community college and why I embarked on this research study.

In the section that follows, my goal is to relate the seven literature themes within the framework of each of the four emergent domains discussed in chapter four. As I mentioned earlier, my findings from chapter four revealed that the essence of participants' lived experiences were made salient by four major domains: (a) expectations and motivations; (b) attributes; (c) interactions and rapport; and (d) transformation and self-discovery. It should be noted that the four salient domains cannot be viewed as the equivalent to my participants' experiences. These four domains are merely the consequence, a construct emerging from my analysis of data in chapter four.

#### *Expectations and motivations*

UCC is a comprehensive open access community college. In order to understand African American students' holistic experiences at UCC, it is imperative to recognize the background and experiences that have brought these students to UCC. Each participant brings a mix of pre-college characteristics to UCC. In addition, each of the participants has his or her own expectations and motivations for attending college. As I reviewed the interview narratives of my participants, I discovered that for the majority of them, the main reasons for attending UCC were becoming a contributing and functioning member of society, validating expertise,

achieving autonomy and independence, and improving their own lives and life for their families.

The common threads from my participants' narratives also confirmed that my participants' aspirations might be promoted and encouraged by their academic ability and their belief that their behaviors at UCC could be guided by their personal decision(s), intentions, and efforts. Collectively for each of my participants, possessing academic ability and having belief that their behavior(s) were guided by their personal decision(s), intention(s) and efforts might be the encouraging motivators to stay and continue their studies at UCC. In turn, my participants would constantly weigh the cost of staying in school against leaving school. Ultimately, the outcome for staying in school outweighs my participants' decision for not staying in school. For my participants, staying in school could also be the source of instilling the hope that they need to affirm their potential to become contributing and functioning members of their communities and achieving social stability.

It could be that my participants may perceive UCC as a welcoming place. In turn, my participants register for their courses, perhaps stay in school, and complete their studies. Yet, it is unclear that as an institution, UCC may be cognizant to individualistic needs of students like my participants or provide them a forum where they can let the institution know about their intentions. Beyond the information solicited on the application for admission to UCC, my participants' motivations and expectations for attending UCC may only be known to the administrators, faculty, and staff through informal conversations and exchanges between my participants and these individuals.

In summary, in this section, the findings of my study revealed that for the majority of my participants, their main reason(s) for attending UCC were to become contributing and functioning members of the society, validating expertise, achieving autonomy and independence and improving their own lives and life of their families. However, there is a need for further research because the expectations and motivations of African American students were not discussed or addressed by any of the seven themes included in the research literature. Future studies of African American students and their expectations and motivations for attending a two year comprehensive PWI community college are warranted. Such studies could promote and expand an understanding and knowledge of African American students' expectations and motivations for attending a two year comprehensive PWI community college and enhance their satisfaction with their college experiences.

#### *Attributes*

Personal attributes of my participants played a significant role in their interactions and transactions with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC as noted in chapter four. Beyond personal attributes, a host of positive or negative influencers also shaped my participants' experiences. On one hand, my participants' narratives confirmed they capitalized on their enabling qualities and positive influencers as they interacted with the academic and non-academic communities at UCC. On the other hand, the majority of my participants also indicated that they devised coping strategies as they negotiated and interfaced with the academic and non-academic communities at UCC. Collectively for each of my participants, their ability to capitalize on their enabling qualities and positive influencers and their

ability to devise coping strategies, could enhance their attributes such as self-concept, locus of control and enhance their efficacy. Having these attributes might collectively outweigh the inhibiting qualities (deficits) for these individuals. Therefore, each of my participants might perceive that their experiences are pleasant as they make their academic and non-academic journey at UCC.

Connecting the salient themes from the literature review to the intrinsic qualities of self (assets) and inhibiting qualities (deficits) sub-domains demonstrated that there is gap in the themes I developed in my literature review. However, not a single study presented in the literature established a relationship between the intrinsic qualities as well as the inhibiting qualities of each individual and the affect of these assets or deficits in influencing the experiences of my participants. Instead, a broad combination of themes reviewed in the literature might be consistent with the findings for the attribute domain. Therefore, with the exception of one theme, aligning teaching and learning theme, I discovered that the attributes domain was loosely consistent with the findings of the remaining six themes reviewed in the literature: (a) institution type; (b) campus climate; (c) racism and prejudice; (d) role modeling and mentoring; (e) parental and family support; and (f) student-faculty interactions. In other words, the relationship between the findings of my participants' experiences and the reported literature themes were not tightly correlated. For example, when my participants spoke about their enabling qualities, they used descriptors such as "being powerful," "problem solver," "outgoing and social," and "direct, upfront, honest, and caring." In addition, my participants also expressed about their inhibiting qualities

using descriptors such as “weak academic and social concept” and “cautious engagement.”

On one hand, the common thread from the six literature themes confirmed that African American students’ experiences at PWI institutions are influenced by: (a) interactions between students and their academic and non-academic environments; (b) students’ perceptions of warm, caring, and supportive environment; (c) stereotype and typecasting; (d) academic and social integration; (e) academic and social self-concept; (f) support and mentoring; and (g) relationship with the college community.

On the other hand, the attributes domain indicated that my participants’ experiences were influenced by their assets, deficits, and influencers. For example, the interview excerpts revealed participant satisfaction with UCC was enhanced by (a) a school environment that is warm, welcoming, and supportive; (b) a college community which is approachable; and (c) support from family members, college personnel, and peers. Taken together, the common threads from these literature themes are consistent with the common threads from my participants’ interview excerpts which supported the attributes domain.

Therefore, as I compared the six themes in the literature reviewed with my findings from the attributes domain. I concluded that these six themes noted earlier in this section could not be tightly connected and related with the findings reported in the attributes domain. By this I mean, not a single study presented in the literature themes that I developed exclusively addressed the construct of attribute domain that I developed in my data analysis form chapter four. Moreover, I also discovered that the attributes and the interactions and rapport domains draw from a similar body of

literature themes. Therefore, to avoid duplications and repetition, I chose to address the connection to literature for the attribute domain with the interactions and rapport domain in the section that will follow next.

### *Interactions and rapport*

As I mentioned earlier, the literature review was comprised of seven themes: (a) institution type; (b) campus climate; (c) racism and prejudice; (d) role modeling; (e) parental and family support; (f) student-faculty interactions; and (g) aligning teaching and learning styles of students. All seven themes from the literature review are related to the interactions and rapport domain. In the section that follows next, I will relate my findings from the attributes domain and the interactions and rapport domain with the themes from the literature.

### *Institution type*

UCC is a PWI comprehensive community college. With the exception of one participant who desired to attend a HBCU, the remaining participants did not express a preference for attending a HBCU or a PWI. The majority of my participants chose UCC because they live near the college.

A number of my participants also asserted that they had to exert extra energies (i.e., psychological and emotional) in order to fit in at UCC. These extra energies manifested themselves in a calculated mode of engagement and adjustment, being watchful, and being vigilant. This is consistent with the findings reported by King-Saulsberry (2002), Ludman (1998), and Chavous (2000). By this I mean, the works of these authors reported that often times, African American students must invest and exert extra energies in order to fit in the milieu of PWI. The reported findings of

these authors also support the inhibiting qualities (deficit attributes) that my participants described. My participants described these inhibiting qualities as calculated mode of engagement and adjustment, being watchful, and being vigilant about their interactions at UCC.

The African American students in my study also acknowledged that at UCC they were able to interact with a college community that was approachable, helpful, and willing to guide their efforts. This created a perception that UCC may be a nurturing, a student-centered and a welcoming environment for my participants. This finding is consistent with the findings noted in the literature review concerning the institutional type. Of significance are the findings reported by Fleming (1984), Garibaldi (1991), Nettles et al. (1999), Flowers (2002), Alexander (1998), Snowden (1997), King-Saulsberry (2002), Ludman (1998), and Chavous (2000). The works of these authors indicated that HBCUs are generally student-centered and nurturing institutions. The findings from the attributes and the interactions and rapport domains are consistent with the institution type literature theme. These findings established a link that institutions that could provide African American students with an environment that is supportive, nurturing, and caring could enhance and contribute to their satisfaction (Garibaldi, 1991; Chavous, 2000).

#### *Campus climate*

Relating the campus climate theme from the literature to the attributes and the interactions and rapport domains, my participants demonstrated that some in and out of classroom interactions with the college community did provide them with a perception that UCC is a warm, welcoming, and supportive institution. My

participants also described that having these interactions did contribute to positive experiences for them as they developed a sense of satisfaction with UCC. Ultimately, my participants concluded that UCC was an engaging and inclusive institution. This is consistent with the findings that Gilliard (1996), Schwitzer et al. (1999), and Turner (2003) reported. The works of these authors stated that a campus climate that is perceived as warm and welcoming could contribute to African American students' satisfaction with the institution. The findings from the attributes and the interactions and rapport domains are consistent with the campus climate literature theme with the exception of Brown's (2005) study. My participants did not report that they experienced hostilities inside or outside the classroom at UCC. The findings reported in Brown's (2005) study could not be extended to cover my participants' experiences; at least as they related these to me. One significant theme from Brown's (2005) study associated higher graduation rates, higher institutional commitment, and academic preparedness with lower perception of racism and discrimination for African American students.

#### *Racism and prejudice*

My participants' narratives revealed that they experienced being typecast and stereotyped at UCC. However, my participants also stated that they experienced racism and prejudice outside UCC and they also learned some lessons from their encounters with the racism and prejudice. My participants used the knowledge they gained from their encounters with racism and prejudice outside UCC to navigate and negotiate their journey in and out of classrooms at UCC. Moreover, my participants used the knowledge and experiences to guide their behaviors and actions at UCC.

For example, my participants noted that they were alert and mindful about their interactions with the college community at UCC. For some participants this meant that they had to be watchful and vigilant about how they conducted themselves at the college. At times, these modes of behavior left my participants vulnerable, isolated, and alienated.

Another example of being vulnerable, isolated, and alienated is the common thread that permeated from my participants' narratives that they were perceived being stereotyped and typecast at UCC by their peers, staff, faculty, and administrators. Together these examples, agree with the findings reported by Getz (2000), Marcus (2003), and Green et al. (undated). The works of these authors stipulated that when African American students face racism and prejudice, and are typecast in the college settings, they develop a feeling of being undervalued, inferior, and inadequate.

The experiences that my participants recounted in the above noted examples have the potential to contribute to their emotional and psychological stress and dissatisfaction at UCC. Emotional and psychological stress also weakens individuals' academic and social self-concept. As I reflected on my participants' narratives, I discovered that their academic and social self-concepts were also influenced by TRIO services and stereotype threat.

#### *TRIO services*

Over one-half of my participants stated that they used TRIO services as a means of making social and academic connections at UCC. Having access to TRIO services boosted these participants' social and academic self-concepts. Tinto (1993) in his book, *Leaving College* also reported that in order for students to achieve

academically, they must socially be integrated into the college environment. Tinto (1993) also suggested that several factors can contribute to students' integration in colleges and universities. Of significance among factors offered was the role of student organization and inclusive classroom communities. For my participants, TRIO services served as a catalyst in guiding their integration both socially and academically at UCC. My participants' narratives confirmed the significant role that TRIO services played in promoting the social and academic integration. Therefore, the findings in the literature theme support my participants' claim(s) that TRIO services provided them the opportunity for social and academic integration.

However, my participants did not participate in college sponsored activities or in the Student Organizations at UCC. This may be distinguished from the findings reported by Guiffrida's (2003) study. This author's work indicated that African American Student Organizations did facilitate social integration at PWIs. My participants' narratives also indicated that juggling several priorities such as attending school, addressing family needs and attending to family commitments, and maintaining employment outside the college were major priorities for my participants. In addition, some of my participants indicated that beyond TRIO services, they were not aware that UCC offered other student activities through Student Organizations.

Moreover, the findings from Guiffrida's (2003) study supported the dilemma that one of my participants reported. Natish reported that she grew up in a predominately White community and she had difficulties being accepted by her African American peers at UCC. Guiffrida (2003) reported that students who were in

the same situation as Natish were more comfortable with the norms of the White majority; they felt alienated from other African Americans who saw them as turning their backs on their own. For these students, interacting with other African Americans for the first time was one of the most difficult aspects of their transition to college.

My participants' narratives also indicated that faculty attitude and perception of their students, students' academic and social interactions in and out of the class, and having classrooms that are perceived as inclusive and accepting of minority students did create a level of satisfaction for these individuals and influence their experiences. This finding is consistent with the findings reported in the literature by Sanchez (2000) and Herndon and Moore (2002). The works of Sanchez (2000) and Herndon and Moore (2002) indicated that classroom environment can be instrumental in shaping African American students' experiences and affect their level of satisfaction.

#### *Stereotype threat*

With the exception of one participant, another common thread was that African American students must act in a guarded manner as they interact and interface with the college community at UCC. For my participants, this meant they had to become constantly vigilant about how they act, what they say, and how they are perceived by the college community at UCC. Being watchful and being vigilant is psychologically and emotionally burdensome for these students. Interviews of my participants confirmed that they were typecast and stereotyped at UCC. Being

stereotyped and typecast is racial stereotype threat. This racial stereotype threat inhibited their ability at UCC.

Being a valued member of college community is extremely important for my participants as they noted in their narratives. Every day, my participants cross the boundaries of their communities/culture and travel distances across a Caucasian landscape to arrive to UCC. My participants' voices echoed that they go the extra mile and exert a lot of energy to show they are serious and capable students at UCC.

My findings developed in the attributes domain and the interactions and rapport emergent domain concerning the racial stereotype and being typecast are consistent with the findings from the literature by Steele (1992, 1997). This author asserted that preconceived beliefs about abilities and aptitude introduce a threat for stereotype for those particular groups. This stereotype threat could influence students' self esteem, and their academic self-concept, and therefore stigmatize certain minority groups (Steele, 1997).

To overcome this racial stereotype threat, my participants employed coping strategies, by drawing upon the strengths of their academic self concept, social self-concept, and locus of control in their journey. Together, by capitalizing upon these attributes these students demonstrated they were resilient and endured their journey and transactions with the academic and non-academic communities at UCC. Collectively, the academic literature concerning racism and prejudice indicates that for African American students, the perceptions of being undervalued and being perceived as incompetent, coping and adjustment to college environment is a difficult and challenging process. Similar perceptions and coping strategies served as negative

influencers for my participants. My findings will add to the literature concerning students' perception that racism and prejudice could contribute to students' dissatisfaction and underachievement.

*Role modeling and mentoring*

My findings, however, are not consistent with the literature theme concerning the significant role that mentoring and role modeling plays in students' academic journeys. According to Astin (1984) and Tinto (1993), mentoring could be a useful tool that promotes the connections between the students and the institution; it also enhances their integration into the social fabric of the institution. The works of Astin (1984), James (1991), Tinto (1993), Frierson et al. (1994), Le Vant et al. (1997), and Pope (2002) confirm that students who interact and become involved in mentoring relationships find greater satisfaction in their collegiate experiences than those who do not have this experience. My participants' narratives also revealed that they needed mentoring at UCC. However, UCC does not have formal mentoring and role modeling opportunities for students. Instead, my participants had to rely on informal mentoring and role modeling that they received from their family members, church, and peers outside the college. These informal mentoring and role modeling provided my participants the opportunity to promote their educational aspirations and encouragement needed to stay in school. My participants also used these informal mentoring and role modeling opportunities as a means to establish a stable support system that positively influenced their experiences at UCC.

### *Parental and family support*

My participants commented on the significance of having some forms of social support system as they embarked on their journey at UCC. On one hand, over one-half of my participants indicated that they used TRIO services at UCC. Trio services provided these individuals the social support system they needed at UCC. On the other hand, the remaining participants also indicated that their social support system came from their parents or grandparents or extended family or from church and friends. Collectively, cementing stable social support systems also promoted my participants' decisions to persist and continue with their education, enhanced their social capital and comfort level, and perception that education is a valuable experience.

My findings are consistent with the findings of Hrabowski et al. (1998), Gloria (1999), and Barnett (2004). Their findings established a link between parent and family support and the African American students' success in college. In addition, these studies also indicated that having supportive parental and familial system can promote African American students' academic achievement, intellectual development, and promote their social and academic competence.

Moreover, Gloria's (1999) study also revealed that when African American students enjoyed mentoring relationships with faculty and staff they benefited from guidance (academic and non-academic) as well as facilitation in their transition to college. This finding is also supported by Tinto's (1982, 1988, 1993) and Guiffrida's (2003) studies which reported that rapport between faculty and students which can promote students' academic achievements. The majority of my participants indicated

that they had positive rapport with the college community (staff, faculty, and administrators). Together mentoring, the support of family and friends, and having close relationship with the college community could enhance the social support that African American students desperately need at PWIs (Barnett 2004; Hrabowski et al., 1998). The findings of Barnett (2004) and Hrabowski et al. (1998) support the findings of my study in relation to the attributes domain and the interactions and rapport domain.

#### *Student-faculty interactions*

My participants reported that the close relationship and exchanges between the participants and their instructors promoted each participant's self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, and self-confidence. Having a positive self-esteem, high or strong self-efficacy, and strong self-confidence can promote positive experiences for the participants. Additionally, it promoted the ability of the majority of my participants to take responsibility for their own actions at UCC. These findings are consistent with the findings reported in the literature of Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), Allen and Haniff (1991), and Smith and Allen (1984). The works of these authors attested that student-faculty relationships not only influences students' achievement related outcomes, but also could be one of the factors that influence students' perception of the campus climate.

In addition, studies by Bilal (1996), Lewis et al. (2004), and Simms et al. (1993) also reported that the interaction between students and their faculty is of great importance in order for the students to perceive that they are integrated in the social milieu of the college. For students, the primary link to the academic life of a campus

often begins with interactions with faculty both inside and outside of the classroom. The reported literature on this point found that the role of faculty, particularly inside and outside the classroom is equally important in retaining students. Moreover, the student and faculty interactions influence student's social involvement and ultimately increase his or her academic achievement. An increase in academic involvement for many students may also mean an enhanced degree of satisfaction with college experience (Bilal, 1996; Lewis et al., 2004; Simms et al., 1993). Collectively, these findings also support the attributes domain and the interactions and rapport domain findings from my study.

However, my participants offered mixed messages as they reported and recounted their interactions with the UCC college community. On one hand, my participants reported positive experiences and rapport with the college community. On the other hand, my participants also reported negative experiences such as stereotyping in their interactions with certain segments of the college community at UCC. These students had to do more to establish their worth at UCC. In my opinion, the experiences of some of my participants at UCC can be compared to a "high wire walk circus act where the performers do not see a protective net below and also hope that a strong wind will not cause a disastrous fall." Could it be that my participants are simply pretending that their journey is pleasant at UCC so they can accomplish their goals and complete their education at UCC? Are they pensive and repressing themselves, a deeming quality of forced politeness that they must endure to achieve their goals at UCC? Expanding research studies that emphasize the effect and

influence of attributes and interactions and rapport in shaping African American students experiences in PWI community colleges are certainly warranted.

*Aligning teaching and learning styles of students*

My findings also indicated that aligning instructors' teaching style and students' learning style is significant in shaping each of the participants' experiences at UCC. With the exception of one participant, all other participants commented on the importance of alignment between instructor's teaching style(s) and students' learning style(s) at UCC. Some participants stated that their instructors' teaching style(s) were aligned with their learning style(s). Conversely, other participants indicated that their instructors' teaching style(s) were not aligned with their learning style(s). For example, some instructors took the time to learn about their students' learning styles, and match their own teaching styles to their students' learning styles. The actions of these instructors promoted feelings of being valued, affirmed, and celebrated for my participants. On the contrary, some instructors were not sensitive to their students' learning style. The action of these instructors did create frustration for my participants, and lead to my participants' dissatisfaction at UCC.

The above noted findings are consistent with the findings reported from the works of Sanchez (2000), Zamani (2000), Harbour et al. (2003), and Dayton (2004) which support the notion that it is important for instructors to acknowledge their minority students, use culturally specific instructional tools and methodologies in their classroom setting. Using these tools and instructional methodologies validates minority students' learning style preferences and value the cultural landscape these students come from (Sanchez, 2000; Zamani, 2000). Additionally, my participants

indicated that when teaching strategies of their instructors were aligned with their learning styles, they sensed a positive learning outcome. This finding is in line with the findings from the literature by the above noted authors.

In summary, in this section, I attempted to relate the salient themes from my literature review to the attributes domain and the interactions and rapport domain. The findings of seven reported literature themes did not address all issues and subjects organized in the attribute and the interactions and rapport domains from chapter four. For example, my participants stated that their verbal and non-verbal expressions at the UCC influenced their experiences. My participants also offered another example which indicated that they had the ability to turn negative transactions into positive outcomes in their interactions with the UCC college community. The above noted examples are only two of several issues and subjects organized in the attributes and in the interactions and rapport domains which the findings of seven literature themes did not address. Therefore, there are still several gaps in the literature which remain unaddressed. Expanding research on the issues and subjects organized in the attributes domain and in the interactions and rapport domain are fruitful areas of inquiry in order to develop an understanding for the holistic experiences of African American students in a two year comprehensive PWI community college.

#### *Transformation and self-discovery*

Matching up the themes from the literature to the transformation and self-discovery domain reveals a gap that invites further inquiry. Not a single study presented in the literature review section addressed issues such as my participants'

self confidence, my participants' yearning for autonomy, self-reflections, and self-actualization. These are simply four examples of issues and subjects organized the transformation and self-discovery domain. However, my participants' narratives revealed some common threads. For example, my participants emphasized that they had an end goal in mind upon their arrival at UCC. Their goals focused on the completion of their educational journey. As my participants progressed through this journey at UCC, they developed a process for making meaning(s) and self-discovery. These experiences were created through encounters/transactions with the academic and non-academic conditions at the UCC college community. Therefore, it is possible that my participants in this study developed a heightened sense of awareness and appreciation of viewpoints or perceptions that they might have not known about, or identified, or recognized prior to coming to UCC. For example, as one participant put it, "by attending UCC, I realized that I should not underestimate myself." Another participant stated, "by attending UCC, I gained my autonomy and improved my self-esteem and self-confidence."

In the end, as my participants interface and interact with the UCC college community, they sense a transformation and self-discovery over their time span of stay at UCC. The emergence of transformation and self-discovery will also promote my participants self-esteem, self-worth, confidence, and transformation and self-discovery. Experiencing transformation and self-discovery for my participants will also enhance their capacity to solidify short-term wins and successes at UCC into long-term goals. Therefore, each participant will be able to forge a possible path and direction for their future lives beyond UCC as they become future minded.

### *Summary*

In this section, the reported findings from my study were presented in the context of four emergent domains. The findings for my study confirm that there are gaps in the literature relating to two domains: (a) expectations and motivations and (b) transformation and self-discovery. More specifically, not a single study presented in the literature review section addressed the expectations and motivation of African American students for attending a two year comprehensive PWI community college. In addition, not a single study presented in the literature review section addressed issues such as African American students' self confidence, their yearning for autonomy, their self-reflections, and self-actualization as they interacted with a two year comprehensive PWI college community. Future studies both qualitative and or quantitative expanding on exploring the relationship between the two noted domains and African American students' experiences in a two year comprehensive PWI community college is warranted. These studies may provide an insight for African American students' satisfaction and experiences at a two year comprehensive PWI community college.

The findings for my study also confirm that the seven literature themes presented were partially consistent with the findings reported for the remaining two domains: (a) attributes and (b) interactions and rapport. For example, my participants stated that their verbal and non-verbal expressions at the UCC influenced their experiences. My participants also offered another example which indicated that they had the ability to turn negative transactions into positive outcomes in their interactions with the UCC college community. The above noted examples are only

two of several issues and subjects organized in the attributes and in the interactions and rapport domains which the findings of seven literature themes did not address. Therefore, there are still several gaps in the literature section presented. Expanding research on the issues and subjects organized in the attributes domain and in the interactions and rapport domain are fruitful areas of inquiry in order to develop an understanding for the holistic experiences of African American students in a two year comprehensive PWI community college.

### *Interpretations of My Findings*

In chapter four of my study, I identified four domains as the key ingredients which shaped, crystallized, and explained the experiences of my participants. These domains were constructs that I developed based on my analysis of data. As I analyzed this data and looked across cases of my participants' narratives, it deepened my understanding of my participants' experiences. I had to look carefully at the complex configuration of process within each case to understand local dynamics before I could begin to see patterning of salient themes that transcends particular case (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this section, I will use my interpretations as a foundation to develop a more focused meaning about my participants' experiences in the context of four salient domains that emerged in chapter four.

My goal is to "listen to my data," to fully immerse my critical eye in the lived experiences of my participants (Van Manen, 2000). In short, while my analysis identifies themes, my interpretation determines how these themes may be understood in a holistic manner. I will develop and use a composite participant to help present my interpretation. My composite participant is a fictional character who is based on

the critical experiences of my participants. I have created and will use a poem, “*riding the fictional carrousel at UCC*” to narrate my composite participant’s story. Riding the fictional carrousel at UCC poem will help my readers to better understand what my composite participant felt during her life span at UCC.

The poem also reflects the interplay of the four noted domains; it would also reflect the shared essence that emerged from chapter four. I am also cognizant that I may not be able to provide remarkable findings because the dynamics among the four salient domains may not be completely visible. However, I will make some assumption about how this composite participant might transition through UCC as this transition is reflected in the four salient domains. I will then provide a description at the conclusion of the fictional carousel ride poem.

I will refer to my composite participant as “Jasmine.” Jasmine is thirty four years old African American woman. She is a single mother of two teenage boys. She has been attending UCC for approximately two years and intends to transfer to a four year college to complete her four year degree in business administration. Jasmine has two jobs. She is also a first generation student. Jasmine is a religious and spiritual person. Her main support system is comprised of her grandparents. Jasmine’s grandparents always encouraged her to attend school and pursue her education. Jasmine would now tell that, “college education is the key ingredient for a better life for me and my family.” Three years ago, Jasmine divorced her husband because he was controlling and abusive. Shortly after obtaining her GED, Jasmine decided to attend UCC.

*Riding the Fictional Carousel at UCC*

My grandparents used to take me to carousel rides when I was younger  
I used to get cotton candy, ice cream with all the fixins  
It was a sweet experience  
It was a sweet memory  
Happy colors, yellow, pink, orange, red, bright green, and gold  
Shimmering lights above and around me, like blinking stars  
Elephants, lions, tigers, and birds of many feathers  
Round and round, up and down, isn't this fun?

Now my carousel ride at UCC is different from the ones from my childhood  
The scenery is all too familiar to everyone except me  
Happy horses around me, leaping horses  
Elephants, lions, tigers, and birds of many feathers, and exotic surroundings  
Up above, flying eagles, majestic birds, freedom  
Below me, nice shiny board walk, sturdy, firm, and solid  
Mirrors at the center, up and above, multiple images of riders and on lookers

I feel like an odd woman taking this ride  
The riders are different at each ride but I see no riders like me  
Often, it is only me, just me among others unlike me with happy faces  
No riders along side of me  
But, riders behind me and riders ahead  
This carousel ride is like being in a cocoon, dark inside  
No way out but through it  
The crowds' faces are beaming with happiness smiling at each others except me  
I think the crowd is wondering about me, what is she doing here?  
A brown skinned rider amongst a bunch of ordinary looking folks  
Do they wonder if I could survive the rigors of ups and downs and round and round?  
Why other riders frown when they see me on my old fatigued pony? I wonder why?  
Thus, some rider's frown is my halo

I smile a lot; I am not loud, but watchful and vigilant  
I am getting the groove  
I do not want to give others any reason to think I am nervous  
I do not want to give others any reason to think that I do not belong or deserve the ride  
I pretend I know what I am doing  
I want to measure up to other riders  
Yes, I am a pretender  
Yes, I am a solo rider  
The old gray color pony that I am riding needs a fresh coat of paint and new varnish  
He seemed fatigued but steady and determined  
All other riders are riding fresh horses except me  
Does my pony wonder what I doing here?

He seems to be cooperative with me, old and torn but willing to give me a chance  
The bell rings and the clown smiles  
But, riders behind me and riders ahead  
No riders along side of me  
I hold on tight, sit straight, and pretend that I know what I am doing  
I want to measure up to other riders  
Yes, I am a pretender  
Yes, I am a solo rider  
All other riders know each other except me, smiling at each other, but frowning at me!  
Their frown is my halo  
I do not want to draw a lot of attention towards me  
I do not want to be the center of attention here  
I am here for now and holding on tight, so I do not fall off  
Round and round, up and down, up and down, it is not fun any more

This ride is a lonely experience, it is a struggle  
It is cold and I feel the chills of being a lone rider here  
No riders along my side  
But, riders behind me and riders ahead  
I often look over my shoulder, who is behind me?  
Look ahead, who is ahead?  
I am acting to blend in with the crowd  
I want to measure up to other riders  
My hair is fixed straight and I wear some light make up  
I gave up on my baggy clothes and wear what others wear  
Up above, round and round, shimmering lights, blinking happiness, and warmth  
I am acting as if I know what I am doing or I belong here  
It gets tiresome, I am tired, and I feel drained  
I cannot pretend any longer, my ride is a struggle, but, I cannot and will not give up  
I wonder cold wind of reality, will you blow on my face when this ride stops  
Ignorant bliss, return me to reality  
I try to make small conversations with the riders around me  
Catching a glimpse of hope for reaffirmation  
It is superficial and their politeness unreal like plastic flamingos that I just saw go by?  
They wonder what I am doing here, I am thinking the same, but cannot give up!  
I want to measure up to other riders  
The bell rings again  
As the rides stop and start again, I am the only one of my color taking this ride  
No riders along my side  
But, riders behind me and riders ahead  
Here we go again, try to be nice, proper, trim, and polite but it is a struggle  
Make short conversations, catching a glimpse of hope for reaffirmation  
From the corner of my eyes, I see the center mirrors of carousel, distort my images  
What do other riders and on lookers think of these images?  
I must pretend to be someone different from these images!

I want to measure up to other riders  
Yes, I am not just someone else  
I could be your next door neighbor  
Round and round, up and down, it is not fun anymore

I think everyone around me knows the ups and downs routine except me  
I am holding on tight, sit straight, and act proper  
The conductor is a clown who knows everyone's name expect mine  
He calls me by the number on my pony, "hey number 35, will you stay?"  
I shook my head timidly because I do not want to be noticed  
I am getting the groove  
I wonder do I matter to anyone  
I am not your ghetto bound, torn, single mother of two teenage boys  
I am not a welfare recipient with nappy hair and torn appearance  
I am not the tax payer's burden that you perceive  
I am not your gang-banger who speaks ghetto like, do not prejudge me  
So what, I may not come across as crisp as everyone else  
But, I am a being, possessing emotions, flesh, blood, values, and a mind of my own  
Do not discount me!  
Do not discard me like a candy wrapper!

I feel invisible, someone with transparent skin, a ghostly figure!  
No riders along my side  
But, riders behind me and riders ahead  
Wondering what their stories are like  
Sit straight, tall, pull back, act strong, prim, and proper  
This is why I am watchful  
I want to pretend that I belong here  
I act watchful, vigilant, and cautious  
I am tired of this ride  
But, I want to learn how to ride this carousel  
My grandparents told me being on a carousel is like dealing with life challenges  
Ups and downs; round and round  
My grandparents told me if you make it at UCC, you can make it anywhere  
I am hoping that I can ride the carousel of life after UCC

The music is a happy music from a pipe organ  
The music is a blur to my ears, it makes me sad  
These colors are fresh to my eyes  
I am watchful so I do not fall  
This scenery is different from where I grew up  
I must adjust to my new landscape  
I do not want to be labeled as white-washed when my ride is done  
I gave up my dread locks, gave up my extensions, gave up the baggy clothes, and  
gave up my large hooped ear rings; now my hair is straight and pulled back  
Other riders stare at me as I feel their eyes on me all the time

No riders along my side  
But, riders behind me and riders ahead  
I nervously smile, pretend that I belong here  
I feel invisible, someone with transparent skin, a ghostly figure!  
I am not a gang-banger  
I am not your ghetto bound, torn, single mother of two teenage boys  
I am not a welfare recipient with nappy hair and torn appearance  
I am not the tax payer's burden that you perceive  
So what, I may not come across as crisp as everyone else, do not judge me!  
But, I am a being, possessing emotions, flesh, blood, values, and a mind of my own  
Do not discount me!  
Do not discard me like a candy wrapper!

Crawling out of my cocoon  
Round and round, up and down, the mirrors at the center distort my image  
This is why I am watchful, what I say, how I act, and what have you  
I want to finish this ride  
I am as smart as other riders  
Mastering and surviving this ride gives me a glimpse of hope  
Today's struggle brings me hope for tomorrow  
A hope for the bigger rides of my life after UCC  
Just like feeling the warmth of the shimmering lights on my skin  
Tomorrow may be better, filled with accomplishments and achievement  
Therefore, I must endure for tomorrow's fortune!

As I reflected on Jasmine's poem, I discovered that the common thread permeating through her experiences at UCC was her resiliency. For Jasmine, her time span on the fictional carousel ride at UCC tells two different stories about the dynamic interactions among the four salient domains from chapter four. On one hand, the first story is that there is a chronological relationship among these four domains. That is, Jasmine's journey started out with her expectations and motivations for attending UCC. These expectations and motivations would lead Jasmine to navigate and negotiate her way through the mazes of academic and non-academic interactions and transactions at UCC using her attributes. Ultimately, Jasmine's experiences over time would provide her a sense of transformation and self-discovery at UCC. Perhaps, the chronological relationship is maintained and shared by the majority of the college

community members about Jasmine's experiences at UCC as they encounter and interact with her.

On the other hand, there is a recursive relationship among the four salient domains that Jasmine goes through every semester. First, she must establish interactions and rapport with the college community by employing her skills and talents (enabling qualities). Once the interactions and rapport have been anchored, Jasmine uses her attributes (skills, talents, and enabling qualities) to maintain these relationships. As these relationships are being maintained, Jasmine mediates her sense of meaning making for her expectations and motivations for attending UCC. Ultimately, Jasmine hopes that she can sense self-discovery, and transformation. This relationship among the four salient domains is recursive and repetitive time and time again throughout an academic semester.

Jasmine's meaning making of her journey at UCC constantly toggles between the chronological and recursive relationships. The chronological relationship refers to a sequenced transition among the four salient domains over a time span of Jasmine's stay at UCC. The chronological relationship can be understood as the macro-view. This macro-view creates a perception for Jasmine that she will be going through these four salient domains in a sequenced ordered mode. For example, throughout Jasmine's journey at UCC, she originally begins to think that her expectations and motivations are her main reasons for attending UCC. She uses her attributes to establish relationships with the academic and non-academic communities at UCC. Upon establishing the interactions and rapport, ultimately Jasmine will perceive a sense of accomplishment, transformation, and self-discovery. Jasmine's

journey over time at the macro-view level, however, will allow the essence of her experiences to emerge at UCC. The chronological relationship emerges over a longer time span (i.e. perhaps over her time span of two years at UCC)

The recursive relationship among the four salient domains can be understood as a micro-view. This micro-view occurs every day Jasmine enters UCC to pursue her educational journey. The sequence of Jasmine's transition among the four salient domains is not necessarily in a sequenced mode as the chronological relationship. However, she has to meld the two in order to make sense and meaning out of her journey. For the purposes of expanding my discussion of interpretation of Jasmine's journey, I only elaborated on the recursive relationship because my interviews only focused on my composite participant's journey at one point of time span of her stay at UCC.

Jasmine's poem also indicated that as she assesses the environment and negotiates her journey, she may in turn have to be cautious, vigilant, and watchful. Perhaps, Jasmine's guarded engagement can be attributed to her assumptions that she has limited possibilities for initiating independence at UCC. In the end, her assumptions and perceptions from her interactions with the college community provides her with the ability to sense a feeling of transformation and self-discovery. This feeling of transformation and self-discovery may facilitate her journey beyond UCC as well as fulfilling her sense of accomplishment and goal attainment at UCC. From Jasmine's poem, it is apparent that she anticipates encountering favorable outcomes in the future; although, her involvement with the college community at UCC with the exception of TRIO services is limited.

Jasmine transitions through these four salient domains as she enters UCC throughout her time span at UCC. However, the order and sequence of her transition may not be predictable. Moreover, the relationships between each of the domains may only become developed when she actually has established a solid interaction and rapport with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC. The academic and non-academic conditions substantially influence the academic and social integration for my composite participant.

Collectively, the academic and social integration for Jasmine can be compared to a “ritual of passage” among these four salient domains that is recursive throughout each semester. It is repetitive, unpredictable, and continuous. For Jasmine, she constantly has to rely on her assets (talent and skills) and positive influencers in order to establish a rapport with the college community. In a sense when a level of rapport is established, she feels confident that she can sense a positive outcome from her interactions with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC. This positive outcome is the catalyst and the driver that affirms her motivations and expectations at UCC. Moreover, it will confirm that the journey for her is a worthwhile experience and something that can be endured. At the end, she may hope for an experience of transformation and self-discovery.

For Jasmine, the ritual of passage that she has to endure is bumpy. For example, she has to cross her cultural landscapes when she comes to UCC. She asserted, “I do not want to be perceived as being White-washed when I leave UCC.” The notion of being White-washed has to do with the conversionist discourse and racial concealment that Jasmine takes on to blend in the college community at UCC.

However, Jasmine believes she is a culturally competent individual. She crosses the race and color lines seamlessly. Jasmine has a distinct awareness, knowledge base, and skills for understanding the values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions towards students who are culturally diverse at UCC.

Jasmine's work schedule outside the college, her family, and her studies keep her very busy. Her relationship with the students at UCC is short lived. She does not develop lasting relationships. Jasmine's poem shows that her thinking and experience with race and color has evolved from a racially polarized thinking of her youth years to the practice of inclusion as she matured by drawing on her experiences outside UCC. She applies these experiences and lessons in her transactions with the UCC college community. Jasmine believes she is sophisticated. Her poem also indicated that race and color issues are social phenomenon and are deeply rooted in the social and economic inequalities present within our society. In her poem, Jasmine also believes that being Black stands for being strong, beautiful and resilient. She asserted that I feel like people need to give me time, to get to know me, and make their decisions about who I am and who I am not.

Jasmine's ritual of passage at UCC is as such that upon entry to a PWI, she is cautious of her surroundings. She has to watch her verbal and non-verbal expressions. Jasmine asserted, "I could feel their eyes on me." Based on what I concluded from her poem, I am convinced that she can only affirm her expectations and motivations when she feels comfortable in the social and academic milieu of UCC. For Jasmine, this means that interactions and rapport is perhaps the most influential salient domain and perhaps is the major driver in shaping her experiences

at UCC. Moreover, her attributes are the tools that Jasmine uses as her assets (talent and skills) to ensure that interactions and rapport can provide her with positive outcomes. Having these positive outcomes confirms a positive meaning for her journey at UCC. However, the fact that Jasmine may survive the rigor of academic and social systems at UCC and perhaps go on to a rewarding career does not lessen the harm she experienced during her time span at UCC. As Jasmine added, “at times, I just feel isolated and vulnerable at UCC.”

The interaction and rapport domain along with the other three salient domains are needed in order for the essence of Jasmine’s experience to emerge. In addition, the sequence of rite of passage that Jasmine faces may vary depending upon her level of sophistication and knowledge base. As I reflect back on Jasmine’s poem, I discovered she was motivated and had some level of intrinsic motivations for attending UCC. Perhaps, Jasmine possessed positive assets (talent/skills) and could capitalize on these talents/skills and positive influencers. Moreover, she is sophisticated about race and color relation. She is sure of her own identity because she believes that being Black means being smart, beautiful, resilient, and strong.

In the end, Jasmine was able to bridge the academic and social spheres at UCC in order to validate, affirm, and sense value. Being academically and socially integrated also enhanced her self-reliance, academic self concept and social self concept, strengthen locus of control and self-confidence and ultimately increase the level of responsibility and commitment for her success at UCC. For Jasmine, her ritual of passage through the four salient domains occurs with a varying degree, depending upon her previous experiences, aspiration, expectations, familiarity, and

previous levels of experience and sophistication about race and color that she brings to UCC.

Nevertheless, as I watched Jasmine, I sensed certain emptiness in her beautiful shiny brown eyes. I wonder, “what is Jasmine not telling me about her experiences at UCC?” From what I gathered from Jasmine’s poem, I think her college experience could be the savior of crushed dreams and generator of high hopes for her. However, how would I know this? The interpretation of my findings leaves some questions unanswered. Of significance, I will offer four questions: (a) what is silencing Jasmine and what is preventing her from talking out about the fictive notion that she concocted about this inclusive college, UCC? (b) is Jasmine opting to racial concealment in order to achieve her goals at UCC; (c) should we assume that all individual students who come to UCC are like Jasmine and share the same essence of shared experiences? (d) how would unsuccessful African American students describe the essence of their shared experiences at UCC?

In summary, from the narratives of Jasmine’s poem, obviously, Jasmine’s rite of passage experience aligns with my analysis explained as the four salient domains from diagram one throughout her time span at UCC. It should be noted that the four salient domains cannot be viewed as the equivalent to my participants’ experiences. These four salient domains are merely the consequence, a construct emerging from my analysis of data in chapter four. These domains helped me explain, organize, and understand my participants’ experiences at UCC. All four salient domains are interrelated and are critical for the emergence of her essence of shared experience.

Future qualitative and quantitative research studies should be conducted with students who did not complete their studies at UCC. This body of research can also expand our understanding about the experiences of African American students who were not successful and departed from the education scene at UCC. Moreover, an assumption that all students who enter UCC possess the same attributes as Jasmine may impair the institution's ability in understanding and addressing the needs of diverse students who attend UCC in pursuit of their educational goal attainment. In the end, Jasmine possessed remarkable agility, flexible hardiness, self-confidence, and coping strategies to navigate and negotiate her journey and the transactions that she encountered at UCC. Jasmine personifies a resilient individual. Her resiliency controls her expectations and motivations for attending UCC. By attending UCC, Jasmine believes that she can become a contributing and functioning member of society and achieve stability in her life.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

This study yielded insight into the holistic experiences of nine African American students who attended a comprehensive community college in the Midwest region of the U.S. However, unanswered questions remain and offer opportunities for further study. I now propose the following recommendations for future research:

My research did not include the essence of shared experiences of African American students who departed (unsuccessful students) from UCC. Community college leaders, faculty, and staff from UCC will gain beneficial insight by examining why departure occurs for some African American students. Gaining this insight will

promote and establish programs that can curb the dissatisfaction and departure experiences for African American students at UCC.

As I tried to integrate my finding with the reported literature themes, I discovered that there were several gaps in the reported literature themes on expectations and motivations and transformation and self-discovery domains. Expanding future studies to understand the African American students' expectations and motivations for attending two year comprehensive PWI community colleges may establish policies and programs at these institutions. These policies and programs will address the unmet needs of these students and perhaps increase their level of satisfaction. In addition, conducting future studies related to the emergence of transformation and self-discovery as African American students encounter with the academic and non-academic conditions in a two year comprehensive PWI community college are warranted. As such, a significant number of academic research studies from the works of student development theorists may be able to address this gap in the literature.

There were also some gaps in the reported literature themes that supported the attributes domain and the interactions and rapport domain. For example, there appears a gap in the literature between the experiences of African American students and their verbal and non-verbal expressions (linguistics and appearance). Future research should explore and address these gaps from the literature and my findings independent of each other. These new research findings can expand our knowledge of African American students' experiences at a two year comprehensive PWI

community colleges. These findings may also initiate and form policies that influence programming and initiatives at these institutions.

Future research is needed to assess the effect of campus climate and experiences of African American students in a two year comprehensive PWI community college. This research may add to the literature concerning students' needs for a sense of belonging in order to overcome the feelings of isolation and vulnerability as well as persistence. Future research is also needed to assess the effect of role modeling and mentoring on the experiences of African American students at two year PWI community colleges. This research may reveal how role modeling and mentoring of African American students can encourage these students' persistence and aspirations to fulfill their educational goals at two year PWI community colleges. Future studies should also investigate the influence of African American students' clubs and or organizations on African American students' experiences at two year comprehensive PWI community colleges.

#### *Conclusion*

The findings for my study should not be generalized for the entire population of African American students enrolled in a two year comprehensive PWI community college. The primary purpose of my study was to describe the holistic experiences of African American students at a two year comprehensive PWI community college in the Midwest region of the U.S. I used the phenomenological research method to present the key findings of my research study. I employed an inductive data analysis method that is similar to but not the same as Moustakas's (1994) method of

phenomenological reduction to develop the essence of African American students' experiences at UCC (Willig, 2001).

The key findings of my research study were presented using four domains which merely served the consequence, a construct emerging from my analysis of data in chapter four. These domains helped me organize, and understand my participants' experiences at UCC. The *expectations and motivations* domain described reason(s) that participants identified for attending UCC. The *attributes* domain explained talents/skills (assets) or enabling qualities or positive influencers and deficits or negative influencers that participants identified as they interfaced with the UCC college community. The *interactions and rapport* domain described participants' interactions and transactions with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC. The term *rapport* defined participants' relationship(s) with the academic and non-academic conditions at UCC. The *transformation and self-discovery* domain explained how attending UCC or participating in this study changed the participants' lives and the new perspective(s) that they may have gained. The dynamic interplay among four salient domains revealed the essence of participants' shared experiences. The essence of participants' shared experience(s) is their desire for becoming contributing and functioning members of their communities and achieving social stability. The common thread permeating through my participants' experiences at UCC is their resiliency. My participants proved that they were willing to make sacrifices at all cost to be accepted, validated, affirmed, valued, and perceived as being fit and feeling mattered at UCC.

The findings were analyzed, interpreted, and presented in relationship to seven literature themes. These themes provided the context and foundation for my study. Moreover, these themes revealed factors affecting the enrollment and retention of minority students. The seven noted themes also indicated something about African American students in higher education. However, together, these themes did not reveal African American students' experiences in a two year comprehensive PWI community college.

I hope my participants' experiences and their stories will serve as a beacon for the future African American students enrolling in a two year comprehensive PWI community college. I hope that my participants' experiences will not only add to research literature, but my participants' experiences can also provide a two year comprehensive PWI community college learning opportunities about cultural competence and to devise policies, programs, and initiatives that can promote positive experiences for other African American students as well as other minority students as these students pursue their educational journey at these institutions.

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## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

### INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

#### **Participant Letter**

My name is Rassoul Dastmozd. I am a doctoral student in the Community College Leadership Program at Colorado State University in Fort Collins. I am currently writing my dissertation on African American students' experiences at the Urban Community College (UCC). You are one of 8-10 students who have been selected to participate in this study and if you decide to participate, I would like to interview you for 90 minutes on a date and a time that is mutually agreeable to both of us. Each participant will also be asked to participate in a second interview in order to clarify points made in the initial interview. This second interview would be approximately 45 minutes in length.

The questions asked will focus on your experiences while you have been a student at the UCC. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to during the interview session. Your name will not be used in my dissertation and any information that is obtained related to this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and disclosed only with your permission. Your decision to participate will not affect your future relationship with UCC. Rather, it is with great hope that your participation in this study will assist community college leaders with gaining a greater knowledge and understanding of the African American students' experiences at UCC.

If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at anytime. If after reading this letter, you decide to participate in my study, please fill out the attached participant demographic information sheet. Also, please indicate your agreement to participate by contacting me directly by email at [rdastmozd@eicc.edu](mailto:rdastmozd@eicc.edu) or at (563) 441-4201 or by signing this letter below and dropping it by my office (Applied Technologies Division Office).

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the above e-mail or telephone number.

Thank you for your assistance on this project.

Rassoul Dastmozd

Yes, I would like to participate in this study \_\_\_\_\_

No, I will not participate in this study \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B  
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_

2. Gender

Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

3. Are you currently a student at UCC?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

4. Educational Status

Finished One Semester \_\_\_\_\_ Second Year (completed two semesters) \_\_\_\_\_

Third Year \_\_\_\_\_ Beyond Third Year \_\_\_\_\_

5. Degree Sought/Transfer Coursework

Associate of Applied Sciences \_\_\_\_\_ Liberal Arts \_\_\_\_\_ Transfer \_\_\_\_\_

6. Degree Major \_\_\_\_\_

Briefly explain why you chose this major: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Enrollment Status

Part-Time \_\_\_\_\_ Full-Time \_\_\_\_\_

8. Have you ever left UCC for a period of time and then returned to complete your course of study since you first enrolled at the college?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, for how long? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Highest grade-level obtained by your mother \_\_\_\_\_ and by your father \_\_\_\_\_.

10. Number of siblings \_\_\_\_\_ Please list ages of siblings \_\_\_\_\_.

11. Number of step-siblings \_\_\_\_\_ Please list ages of step-siblings \_\_\_\_\_.

***“Thank you for completing the participant’s demographic information sheet”***

APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW/PROTOCOL GUIDE

1. What is your primary purpose for attending Urban Community College?
2. Please describe your experiences at UCC.
3. Please describe your experiences in the classroom at UCC.
4. Please describe your experiences outside the classroom at UCC.
5. What has been your experience with your own peers (same race, other minority students, and non-minority students)?
6. What has been your experiences with the professional staff (advising, students services, business office, financial aid, and library, ...) and administrators at UCC?
7. What kinds of activities you are involved in when you are not in classes?
8. What does it mean to you to be African American (Male or female)? What is your understanding of racism/prejudice? Have you had any experiences at UCC that you would attribute to racism/prejudice?
9. What have been your greatest barriers and challenges? How have you overcome those barriers and challenges?
10. What have been your greatest successes at UCC?

APPENDIX D  
RECRUITMENT FLIER

**You are invited to participate in a research study of African American students' experiences at this community college**

**What is the purpose of this study?**

- To gain a better understanding of African American students' experiences at this community college.

**Who can participate in this study?**

- Participants must be of African American heritage.
- Participants must be a native of this community and reside in the community or surrounding area.
- Students from both liberal arts and vocational and career technical education divisions are invited to participate in this study.
- Participants must be currently enrolled at this community college and be at least in the second semester of their studies at this community college.
- Participants must be active in the college community.

**If you are interested, I invite you to attend two interviews:**

- First interview will be approximately 90 minutes in length
- Second interview will be approximately 45 minutes in length

I will ask you to complete a brief demographic survey about your age, gender, educational background, and family status. ***Your individual demographic information will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone else.***

During our interviews, I will ask you questions about your experiences at this community college. Your participation is voluntary and will remain confidential. If this research study is published your name will be disguised.

Please contact the following individuals if you are interested and/or have questions?

- Please call <***Faculty Member***> at (XXX) YYY-ABCD or [facultymember@UCC.edu](mailto:facultymember@UCC.edu)

or

- Please call <***Academic Advisor***> at (XXX) YYY-EFGH or [academicadvisor@UCC.edu](mailto:academicadvisor@UCC.edu)

**Refreshments will be served.**

**APPENDIX E  
CONSENT FORM**

*Consent to Participate in a Research Study  
Colorado State University*

**TITLE OF STUDY: African American Students' Experiences at "Urban Community College"**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** *Clifford P. Harbour, J.D., Ed.D., Associate Professor, School of Education, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO, 80523  
Tel: 970.491.5425 E-Mail: [cliff.harbour@colostate.edu](mailto:cliff.harbour@colostate.edu)*

**CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** *Rassoul Dastmozd, 4190 Mallard CT. #12, Bettendorf, IA 52722 Tel: 563.332.3747 E-Mail: [rdastmozd@eicc.edu](mailto:rdastmozd@eicc.edu)*

**WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?** *We are asking you to participate in this study because we are interested in investigating the experiences of African American students at this community college. If you agree to participate in the study, we will ask you about your perspective in two private, confidential interviews. You will be asked a series of open-ended and focused questions about your experiences at this community college.*

**WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?** *I, the co-principal investigator will be conducting this study.*

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?** *The purpose of this study is to investigate the holistic experiences of African American students at "Urban Community College."*

**WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?** *The study will take place at a setting in the community college, a private place away from the researcher's office. The study is scheduled to run from November 1, 2005 to December 31, 2006.*

**WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?** *This study will collect data through an analysis of: (a) a brief survey concerning background information and (b) two private, confidential interviews. If you agree to participate in the study I will interview you in private at a date, time, and location. The first interview will last approximately 90 minutes. You will also be asked to participate in a follow-up interview to clarify information given in the initial interview. The second interview will last about 45 minutes in length. Your identity and the identity will remain confidential.*

**ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?** *There are no known reasons why you should not take place in this study.*

Page 1 of 4 Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?** *There are no known risks or discomforts to you if you participate in this study. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.*

**WILL I BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?** *There are no known benefits to you if you decide to participate in this study. The researcher hopes that the research findings may be of use to student community by describing African American students' holistic experiences at UCC other students understand African American students' journey at this institution. The anticipated benefit of the research is that through presentation or publication of research results, community colleges, community college practitioners, and their constituencies may learn about the holistic experiences of African American students in their higher education journey.*

**DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?** *Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.*

**WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE?** *The only cost to you for participating in the study will be the time needed to conduct your two interviews.*

**WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?** *We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law. Your information will be combined with information from other students taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep you name and other identifying information private.*

*In order to maintain confidentiality we will use a randomized, gender-neutral code using common last names to identify you and all other participants. So, for example, one participant may be identified as Jones and another might be identified as Smith. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key. You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court if our research records were subpoenaed in civil or criminal litigation.*

**CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?** *We are unaware of any reason why your participation in the study would be ended once your interview begins.*

Page 2 of 4 Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? *No, you will not receive any compensation for taking part in this study.*

WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH? *The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.*

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS? *Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the principal investigator, at 970-491-5425. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Meldrum, Human Subjects Administrator at 970-491-1553. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.*

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? *Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing three pages.*

---

*Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study*

---

*Date*

---

*Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study*

---

*Name of person providing information to participant*

---

*Date*

---

*Signature of Research Staff*

Page 3 of 4 Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*PARENTAL SIGNATURE FOR MINOR*

*As parent or guardian I authorize \_\_\_\_\_ (print name) to become a participant for the described research. The nature and general purpose of the project have been satisfactorily explained to me by \_\_\_\_\_ and I am satisfied that proper precautions will be observed.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Minor's date of birth*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Parent/Guardian name (printed)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Parent/Guardian signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

Page 4 of 4 Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX F  
LETTER OF AGREEMENT FROM THE STUDY SITE

September 27, 2005

Rassoul Dastmozd  
4190 Mallard Court #12  
Bettendorf, Iowa 52722

Dear Rassoul:

This letter follows my meeting with you on September 27, 2005.

I understand that you have proposed to complete a study of African American students' holistic experiences at Urban Community College (UCC). Data for your qualitative study will be collected through interviews of 8-10 African American students from UCC, perhaps some observations, and document analysis.

You informed me that an African American full-time faculty member and an African American Academic Advisor will assist you with the selection of your participants for your study. The African American full-time faculty member and the African American Academic Advisor will pass the information about your study to student(s) who then will contact you indicating his/her interest for participating. As a back up plan and if you do not identify an adequate number of participants, you will use a flyer introducing your study. You will post flyers in the designated area(s) of the college announcing the study and requesting participation. Potential participant(s) will be invited to contact the African American faculty member or the African American Academic Advisor for information about your study. These individuals will request potential participants to contact you.

After considering the research proposal you outlined, I am convinced that I am familiar with the scope of the project and that persons you will interview will be adequately protected as human research subjects. I understand that the participation by any participants will be completely voluntary. Your interviews will take place on campus at a location away from your office. UCC will share its public documents relevant to your study, and we will provide you with private locations to interview participants.

Please accept this correspondence as a letter of cooperation for your Human Subjects review process.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Robert Smith  
UCC President  
[rsmith@ucc.edu](mailto:rsmith@ucc.edu)  
C: Dr. Cliff Harbour

**APPENDIX G**

**COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS TABLE 2**

TABLE 2

## COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS TABLE (Spradley, 1979)

Participants → Supporting Master Themes ↓ Domain: expectations and motivation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
* Valuing education	Y	US	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Bettering life for self and family	Y	US	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Proving self	Y	US	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Improving self-esteem	Y	US	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Taking control of life/a desire for autonomy	Y	US	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
* Achieving stability and goal(s)	Y	US	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Secure stable employment	Y	US	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Needed a support system	N	US	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Motivation (Intrinsic quality)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Locus of control	S	M	S	S	M	S	S	S	W
* Strong academic self concept	Y	Y	Y	Y	US	Y	Y	Y	US

**NOTE.**

Participants: 1=Doreen; 2=Rayhab; 3=Robert; 4=Kenneth; 5=Kevin; 6=Annette; 7=Trey; 8=Natish; and 9= Mary; M=Moderate; N=No; NM=No Mention; S=Strong; US= Unsure; W=Weak; and Y=Yes

**APPENDIX H**

**COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS TABLE 3**

TABLE 3

## COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS TABLE (Spradley, 1979)

Participants → Supporting Master Themes ↓ <b>Domain: Attributes</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
* Powerful/ambitious/intelligent	Y	NC	NC	NC	NC	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Problem solver	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Outgoing/social/approachable	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Being conscious of self	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Direct/upfront/honest/caring	Y	NC	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Confident/takes charge determined/self reliant	Y	NC	Y	Y	MI	Y	Y	Y	N
* Unsure and lacks confidence	BU	Y	Y	NC	Y	N	N	N	Y
* Completing education major accomplishment/getting a job	Y	US	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Increasing self worth	Y	US	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Identity/acceptance/light skinned	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
* Pleasant/cordial	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Loner/watcher/being singled out/closed off person/guarded	N	Y	Y	W A	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
* Can-do-attitude/self-directed	Y	US	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Steady/perceived as a leader, purposeful	Y	NC	NC	Y	Y	Y	Y	NC	NC
* Perceives being a source of inspirations for peers/role model	Y	NC	NC	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	US
* Apprehensive in building relationships	NC	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
* Focus on (+) fight off (-) Reconcile (-) to achieve (+)	Y	US	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Sophisticated, in tune w/ identity (self)	Y	NC	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Independent/autonomous	Y	NC	Y	Y	US	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Using assets to overcome deficits to navigate	Y	NC	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Accepted and has relationship	Y	NC	Y	Y	US	Y	Y	MI	MI
* Self-motivation and adaptive	Y	NC	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Employs conversionist	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
* Locus of control, efficacy, self concept	S	M	S	S	M	S	S	S	W
* Living in two worlds	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
* Resilient/resiliency	Y	US	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Cautious Engagement	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

**NOTE.**

Participants: 1=Doreen; 2=Rayhab; 3=Robert; 4=Kenneth; 5=Kevin; 6=Annette; 7=Trey; 8=Natish; and 9= Mary; BU=Before UCC; M=Moderate; MI=Mixed; N=No; NC=No Comment; S=Strong; US=Unsure; W=Weak; and Y=Yes

**APPENDIX I**

**COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS TABLE 4**

TABLE 4

## COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS TABLE (Spradley, 1979)

Participants → Supporting Master Themes ↓ <b>Domain:</b> <b>Interactions and rapport (academic)</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
* College community is pleasant, welcoming, and approachable	Y	US	Y	Y	US	Y	Y	US	Y
* Positive rapport	Y	US	Y	Y	MI	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Typecast & stereotype	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
* Watchful, hesitant, and cautious	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Takes responsibility for own action	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	M	M							
* Does not feel valued in classroom (faculty do not celebrate empower students)	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
	M	M	M	M					M
* Misalignment of teaching/learning	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
	M	M	M						
* Alignment of teaching/learning	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y
		M	M						
* Classroom/ UCC is safe and a safe haven	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
	M	M	M	M	M	M		M	M
* Academic experiences validate individual	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
		M							
* Dealing w/uncharted territories, feeling lost	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	M	M	M	M					
* Toughness and agility	Y	US	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Academic self concept	Y	UC	Y	Y	UC	Y	Y	Y	N
Self esteem/Self efficacy	(+)		(+)	(+)		(+)	(+)	(+)	(-)
Self confidence									
* Watchful Verbal and nonverbal expressions	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	M								
* Employs coping strategies	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	M								
* Isolation/alienation	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	M			M					
* Locus of control	S	M	S	S	M	S	S	S	W
* Involvement w/TRIO	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N

**NOTE.**

Participants: 1=Doreen; 2=Rayhab; 3=Robert; 4=Kenneth; 5=Kevin; 6=Annette; 7=Trey; 8=Natish; and 9= Mary; BU=Before UCC; M=Moderate; MI=Mixed; N=No; NM=No Mention; N(-)= No Negative; S=Strong; UC= Unclear; US= Unsure; W=Weak; Y=Yes; and Y(+)=Yes Positive

**APPENDIX J**

**COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS TABLE 5**

TABLE 5

## COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS TABLE (Spradley, 1979)

Participants → Supporting Master Themes ↓ <b>Domain:</b> <b>Interactions and rapport</b> <b>(non-academic)</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
* Encountered racism or prejudice	NU	Y	NU						
* Seen racism/prejudice	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Encounters due to verbal and non-verbal expressions	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Cautious of verbal and non-verbal expressions	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Aware of being a minority	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Pre-played/careful mode of engagement	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Perceives comfort factor	Y	US	Y	Y	US	Y	Y	MB	Y
* Perceives that UCC does not provide support	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	US
* Typecast and stereotype	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Feels not being valued	N	US	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
* Relationship and rapport	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	MB	Y
* Impact of skin color on relationships w/peers	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
* Perceived as a person who is not smart	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
* Outgoing/Social	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	MB	MB
* Social self concept	P	NE	P	P	NE	P	P	P	P
* Understands racism and prejudice	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Cross cultural framework	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Isolation/alienation	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y
* Challenges w/identity	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y
* Cautious engagement	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Takes responsibility for own action/taking control	Y	NM	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Employs conversionist mode of adjustment	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y
* Involvement w/TRIO	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N
* Employs coping strategies	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Locus of control	S	M	S	S	M	S	S	S	W
* Skillful in managing situations; turning (-) situations to (+) outcomes	Y	US	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

**NOTE.**

Participants: 1=Doreen; 2=Rayhab; 3=Robert; 4=Kenneth; 5=Kevin; 6=Annette; 7=Trey; 8=Natish; and 9= Mary BU=Before UCC; M=Moderate; MB=Maybe; MI=Mixed; N=No; NE=Negative; NM=No Mention; NU=Not at UCC; P=Positive; S=Strong; UC= Unclear; US= Unsure; W=Weak; and Y=Yes

**APPENDIX K**  
**COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS TABLE 6**

TABLE 6

## COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS TABLE (Spradley, 1979)

Participants → Supporting Master Theme ↓ <b>Domain:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<b>Transformation and self-discovery</b>									
* Assessing life transactions using someone else's experiences, values, beliefs, standards, and perceptions	NC	NC	Y	NC	NC	NC	NC	Y	NC
* Developing a sense of not underestimating self	NC	NC	NC	NC	NC	Y	NC	NC	NC
* Believing in self, improving self-confidence/ self-esteem, being able to make it at UCC	Y	NC	NC	NC	Y	Y	NC	NC	NC
* Interview process as therapeutic and a discovery experience	NC	NC	Yes	NC	Y	NC	NC	NC	Y
* Had an end goal in mind	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Breaking away from past	NC	NC	Y	NC	NC	NC	Y	Y	NC
* Yearning for autonomy	NC	NC	Y	NC	NC	NC	NC	Y	NC
* Serving or would like to serve in leadership capacity	PLB O	Y	Y	PLB O	Y	NC	Y	NC	NC
* Reflecting on self	Y	US	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Self actualization	Y	US	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
* Future minded w/a vision	NC	NC	NC	NC	Y	NC	Y	Y	NC

**NOTE.**

Participants: 1=Doreen; 2=Rayhab; 3=Robert; 4=Kenneth; 5=Kevin; 6=Annette; 7=Trey; 8=Natish; and 9= Mary; NC=No comment; PLBO=Perceived a Leader by Others; US=Unsure; and Y=Yes