MISSION MATTERS: PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF
HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the mission of historically black colleges and universities from the perspectives of four-year presidents. Historically black colleges and universities (also known as HBCUs) identify institutions of higher education founded prior to 1964 for the purpose of educating African American students. Mission refers to the institutions’ explicit role, purpose, and function within the larger system of American higher education. The purpose of the study is to examine how presidents define and implement mission coupled with the task of identifying challenges that hinder mission implementation. The study, embedded in qualitative research methods, employs elite interviewing as the means of gathering data. Higher education’s core area of organization of governance serves as the foundation of the conceptual framework. A total of fifteen presidents participated in the study. The results show that although black colleges possess special qualities that help students succeed, their mission is not unique. The mission of historically black colleges and universities mirrors the larger system of American higher education. The difference is that black colleges primarily serve African American students, and as a result, these institutions focus on addressing the needs of this minority population of college students.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The present system of American higher education reflects a history of change, growth, and development. Colleges and universities have expanded since the founding of Harvard College in 1636 to include an array of institutions (Geiger, 1999; Rudolph, 1962; Thelin, 2004; Veysey, 1965). As a result, the early purpose of solely educating wealthy, white males for the ministry evolved into increased access and educational opportunity for all people in an effort to meet the changing needs of society. This transformation and expansion, however, remains the subject of much debate and criticism among educational researchers, policymakers, and the public at large. While numerous challenges arise, one of the most fundamental, critical, and recurring issues facing higher education is defining its mission (Birnbaum, 1988; Cohen, 1998; Hartley, 2002; Stark & Lattuca, 1997; Zemsky, Wegner, & Massy, 2005).

The topic of mission is further complicated when the focus shifts to more specialized institutions of higher education. Historically black colleges and universities (commonly referred to as HBCUs), community colleges, gender specific institutions, and tribal colleges are different types of institutions guided by different missions intended to accommodate the needs of different student populations. The challenge, however, is that while these institutions are publicly recognized for carving their niche within the larger higher education system and serving an important function, they are often viewed with a certain level of skepticism. Perhaps the reasoning behind this skepticism lies in the public perception that traditional or mainstream higher education is the best path to guaranteed success, thereby questioning the need for these special mission institutions. Despite the
scrutiny that this cohort of institutions may collectively receive, each of them has attained varying levels of success in convincing higher education stakeholders and the public at-large of their value. The reality, however, is historically black colleges and universities, more so than the other special mission institutions, disproportionately carry the burden of consistently having to justify their role in academe (Brown & Freeman, 2002; Garibaldi, 1984; Brown, Ricard, & Donahoo, 2004; Fleming, 1984). Although these institutions are recognized for their historic mission of educating a group of people previously denied the opportunity to engage in formal schooling, the current relevance of black colleges remains an issue of contention.

The discussion concerning the need for black colleges is particularly pressing due to the recent devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Although the hurricane damaged all colleges and universities in the state of Louisiana, only the futures of historically black schools are called into question. What is the purpose of black colleges? Why do black colleges continue to exist? Are black colleges necessary? Hurricane Katrina created a safe space to allow such questions to be asked. These questions are not new as they have plagued black colleges and universities since their inception (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Drewry & Doermann, 2001). The challenge is that now it is imperative to answer.

According to Willie (1981b), before questions concerning the future of black colleges can be answered, their current function must be addressed. This study examines the mission of four-year historically black colleges and universities from the perspective of the campus president in order to begin the process of understanding the relevance of historically black higher education institutions. Presidents serve as the highest ranking administrator within the higher education system. They maintain an all-encompassing
authority and responsibility over their respective institutions which validate their perspectives on answering questions about mission.

**Statement of the Problem**

Historically black colleges and universities are in jeopardy (Thompson, 1998; Willie, 1994). In the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the leading periodical on current trends and challenges affecting higher education, June (2003) identifies black colleges as endangered institutions. The term endangered, by definition, suggests that black colleges are on the verge of extinction. The article details the condition of Morris Brown College, a small, liberal arts historically black college located in Atlanta, Georgia that recently garnered national headlines due to troubles concerning fiscal mismanagement. The institution later lost accreditation and the status of Morris Brown College as a viable higher education institution remains uncertain. The plight of Morris Brown College, in particular, is not an isolated incident as other black colleges have struggled to remain open due to varying reasons. The challenge, however, is that when problems plague one black institution, serious implications emerge for all historically black colleges and universities (June, 2003).

The recent events at Morris Brown College and the devastation of Hurricane Katrina have sparked an increased interest in black colleges across the nation. These institutions are now heavily scrutinized and their place in the larger higher education system seems unclear. The implicit question lingers, “What purposes do historically black colleges and universities serve?” This critical question is not a new one as the root of this inquiry lies in the complex history surrounding the birth and development of these schools. Black institutions of higher education faced blatant opposition since their
inception (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Brown & Freeman, 2004; Browning & Williams, 1978; Cohen, 1998; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). The idea of schooling former enslaved men, women, and their progeny was feared by many persons in the majority population as this process would serve as a means to change the marginalized condition of African American people. Black colleges and universities were created as second or third tier institutions to traditional higher education as evidenced in the acquisition of deficient learning facilities, limited course offerings, less qualified faculty, and an overall poor supply of financial resources. A stigma of inferiority continues to shadow black colleges despite the documented progress and accomplishments that these schools have made over the years. The history of black colleges shapes their current identity and the stigma contributes to the way in which many perceive these institutions.

Morris Brown College now represents all historically black colleges and universities to both critics who condemn them and the portion of the public at-large who remain unfamiliar with them. The critics view Morris Brown College as tangible evidence supporting speculation surrounding the inadequacies of black institutions. This speculation, in turn, fuels the ongoing discussion concerning the overall necessity for black colleges given their financial struggles coupled with academic opportunities available at majority white institutions.

Benjamin E. Mays, former president of Morehouse college writes:

No one has ever said that Catholic colleges should be abolished because they are Catholic. Nobody says that Brandeis and Albert Einstein must die because they are Jewish. Nobody says that Lutheran and Episcopalian schools should go because they are Lutheran or Episcopalian. Why should Howard University be abolished because it is known as a black university? Why pick out Negro colleges and say they must die (Mays, 1978, p. 27)?
This quote best captures the precarious condition of black colleges and supports June’s (2003) assertion that historically black colleges and universities are endangered institutions. Disproportionately, black colleges face the task of having to justify their relevance within the larger higher education system. Black colleges are incessantly misunderstood and the benefits of attending them often go unnoticed by the general public (Willie, 1994).

Fleming (1984) suggests that the lack of adequate resources in comparison to predominantly white institutions do not solely contribute to the ongoing debate concerning the need for historically black colleges and universities. Perhaps more significant is her argument that black colleges represent a reminder of our nation’s segregated past. The existence of black colleges challenges the American struggle toward integration and the idea of separate schooling appears to be archaic and no longer useful or necessary given this current day and time.

The concept of race and understanding its implications is complex. This complexity is particularly evident in higher education where recent court decisions and changes in state and federal policies have fueled an increase in controversy surrounding the meaning and influence of race. According to Altbach (1991), “Race is one of the most volatile, and divisive, issues in American higher education” (p. 3). Consequently, identifying a college or university as historically black connotes an immediate racial assumption. The assumption is usually guided by the imagery of campus environments with an all black student population being taught by an all black faculty. While this is a false assumption, the immediate focus of black colleges and universities is clearly on race and this is what separates them from other special population institutions. Black colleges,
unlike community colleges, women’s colleges, men’s colleges, and Hispanic-serving colleges are racially identifiable institutions. This characteristic alone accounts for much of the disproportionate burden that black colleges receive in regard to having to substantiate their specific mission in higher education.

The general consensus about the early mission of black colleges is that they were founded for the distinct purpose of educating African American students. While this consensus describes the broad mission of these institutions, it provides little insight into the specific functions and objectives of various black colleges and universities. Debates between W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington heavily influenced the issue of establishing a more concrete mission of black colleges (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand, 2001; Jones, 1971; Kannerstein, 1978; Willie, 1994). Washington advocated the need for vocational training and suggested that the role of black colleges and universities is to train individuals to fill the manual labor market. DuBois, on the other hand, argued that black colleges should work toward building an elite group known as the talented tenth. He believed that the students should be trained to uplift the black community by becoming professional doctors and teachers, rather than being limited to menial trades such as farming and masonry. Despite their opposing views, the debate between Washington and DuBois established the possibilities of black colleges. The controversy is significant because it forced colleges to think about their responsibilities as higher education institutions.

The underlying assumption is that all historically black colleges and universities are the same. The assumption is problematic because it does not take into account the institutional differences that exist among them. Black college and university campuses
vary significantly in regard to size (2 year or 4 year), control (public or private), religious affiliation, gender composition, available resources, and a host of other characteristics. Brown (2003) contends that no universal mission applies to all black institutions. Contrary to popular opinion, historically black colleges and universities are a diverse cohort of institutions. The existing diversity among historically black institutions suggests that it is unreasonable to assume that they operate in exactly the same manner. Although these institutions are united in the historic mission of educating African Americans, each black college or university has its own identity and set of educational objectives.

Studying college presidents is not a new phenomenon as the fascination surrounding these conspicuous figures is well-documented in the academic literature (Birnbaum, 1992; Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Cohen & March, 1986; Fisher, 1984). Studying presidents of black colleges, however, has received limited attention from researchers as presidents of these particular types of institutions are often included at the periphery of studies on college presidents at-large. Although some of the responsibilities of the college presidency may be universal, studying black college presidents requires deliberate consideration of the type of campus environments in which they reside.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to examine how presidents of four-year historically black colleges and universities view the mission of their institution. The general historic mission of black colleges and universities is well documented in the academic literature as it reveals that these institutions were created for the mission of educating African Americans. Now, it is imperative to look beyond this celebrated mission in order to
obtain a current and clear status of these institutions. For the purposes of the study, mission is not confined to the official mission statements cited in college and university websites, catalogs and recruitment brochures. Although these statements are significant, the goal of this study is to discover specific polices and practices that are implemented at black colleges in order to fulfill their respective mission(s). The following research questions guide the study:

1. How do presidents of four-year historically black colleges and universities define the mission of their institutions?

2. How do presidents of four-year historically black colleges and universities implement the mission of their institutions?

3. What do presidents of four-year historically black colleges and universities identify as significant challenges to mission implementation?

Extensive research targeting the presidency at two-year colleges suggests that the presidents of these particular institutions serve a unique function and that the issues facing two-year and four-year colleges and universities are significantly different (Kubala, 1999; McFarlin, Crittenden & Ebbers, 1999; Phelps, Taber, & Smith, 1996; Vaughan & Weisman, 1997). The focus of this study is on four-year institutions because they represent the majority of the total number of historically black colleges and universities.

**Significance of the Study**

Historically black colleges and universities are among the most commented about institutions in the academic literature, yet they remain among the least empirically examined (Brown & Freeman, 2004). A bulk of the research is heavily colloquial and
anecdotal, thus leaving a void in the academic literature. Brown and Freeman (2004) suggest that because this absence exists, black colleges continue to be inaccurately described and assessed. The available information on historically black institutions traditionally falls under the guise of complimentary or controversial assertions. The complimentary research depicts black colleges as nurturing and supportive environments and as unique institutions critical to the achievement of African American students (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand, 2001; Brown, Ricard, & Donahoo, 2004; Browning & Williams, 1978; Davis, 1998; Fleming, 1984; Freeman, 1998; Garibaldi, 1984, Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002). The controversial assertions refer to black colleges as academic wastelands and suggest that they are cheap and inferior institutions in comparison to traditional or mainstream higher education (Jencks & Riesman, 1967; Wenglinsky, 1996). Despite a growing volume of research on black colleges, there remain different conceptions of what they are and what they do.

Black college research focuses primarily on two key constituents, students and faculty (Allen, 1992; Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Billingsley, 1982; Fleming, 1984, 2004; Foster, 2001; Foster & Guyden, 2004; Foster, Guyden, & Miller, 1999; Freeman, 1998; Fries-Britt, 2004; Johnson, 2001, 2004; Nettles, 1988; Slater, 1993; Thompson, 1978). The study attempts to extend the literature on historically black colleges and universities by investigating the presidents of these institutions. The president is important because she or he occupies the key position within institutions and has the power to make substantive change, particularly as it relates to mission. The president regulates the institutional climate and influences the culture of the campus environment. The challenge, however, is that published research on presidents of black colleges are
virtually nonexistent. The dearth of information available on presidents of historically black colleges and universities is often masked within research studies examining African American college presidents, African American administrators, or minority administrators in general (Holmes, 2004; Hoskins; 1978, Lewis, 1988). The more conventional area of research focuses on the experiences of African American administrators in predominantly white colleges and universities (Harvey, 1999; Rolle, Davies, Banning, 2000; Jackson, 2001). This study is significant because it brings absolute attention to black college campuses and the leaders of these particular types of institutions.

**Definition and Clarification of Terms**

The amended Higher Education Act of 1965 defines historically black colleges and universities as any accredited institution of higher education founded prior to 1964 whose primary mission was, and continues to be, the education of black Americans (Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand, 2001; Garibaldi, 1984; Roebuck & Murty, 1993; Williams, 1988). The year 1964 is significant because it marked the passage of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin regarding federally assisted programs and activities (Hendrickson, 1991; Williams, 1988). This study does not include predominantly black colleges and universities, which refer to institutions of higher education with an enrollment of more than 50% African American student population (Garibaldi, 1984). The terms historically black college or university, black college(s), HBCU, and black institution(s) will be used interchangeably for the purpose of this study.
The term president refers to the chief executive officer of a single college campus or the chancellor of a multi-campus system (Buchanan, 1988). The president is the appointed leader of the college or university and holds the highest ranking administrative level position. Although some academic institutions refer to their leader as chancellor, this study will use the term president as an inclusive term and it is representative of all chief executive officers of higher education.

The use of the term mission identifies the explicit role, purpose, and function of higher education institutions. A mission statement is the concise phrase which sums up the college or university’s values, priorities, and/or vision.

The term African American refers to persons who are of African ancestry that reside in the United States. African American and black will be used interchangeably for the purpose of this study.

**Organization of the Study**

The study, *Mission Matters: Presidential Perspectives on the Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the Higher Education System*, is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 1 provided the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, and definition and clarification of terms. Chapter 2 presents a literature review of related topics. Chapter 3 details the qualitative research method utilized through the explanation of the conceptual framework, population and sample, data collection, data analysis, and limitations of the study. Chapter 4 consists of the results of the investigation and presents the presidents’ perspectives on the mission of their institutions. Chapter 5 concludes the study and provides recommendations for future research, policy, and practice.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of literature provides a summary and synthesis of relevant academic research that plays a major role in the perceptions and perceived value attached to the nature, structure, and impact of historically black colleges and universities. Although the topic of mission remains a relatively underdeveloped area of higher education research, the available literature on black colleges includes a wide-range of topics. The inclusion of multiple issues in this review of literature helps to create a holistic depiction and understanding of black colleges and their contributions to American higher education.

Evolution of Mission in Higher Education

The Early Years

In The Ten Generations of American Higher Education, Geiger (1999) documents the history of American institutions from the early seventeenth century to the present era. He identifies the time period of 1636 to 1740 as the Reformation Beginnings. This period is critically important because the earliest North American colleges including Harvard (1636), William and Mary (1693), and Yale (1701) developed during this era. Following the pattern set forth by Emmanuel College (1584), now part of the University of Cambridge, church officials were intricately involved with the operation of these institutions (Rudolph, 1962). This religious presence, therefore, heavily influenced the mission of the early colleges (Cohen, 1998, Veysey, 1965). Along with college matriculation, the aim of these colleges was to train young men for the ministry (Cohen, 1998; Geiger, 1999). Duryea (1981) posits that because religious leaders during this
period held dual positions in the church and the government, the early institutions were responding to the public need for an educated clergy.

Although these institutions did serve a public good, the Reformation era did not provide universal access to education. Rather, education during this period was located in the Northeastern states and reserved for the upper class members of society and designed to maintain the established social class system (Jencks & Riesman, 1967, Veysey, 1965). According to Geiger (1999), the students received a liberal education, focusing primarily on Aristotle’s philosophies of ethics, natural science and metaphysics. Concomitantly, the Reformation colleges valued the classical languages of Latin and Greek. Rudolph (1962) contends that Latin was the fundamental discipline because it was the language of the law and the church. Due to the oral culture that prevailed, institutions expected students to master this language in order to communicate and grow in the knowledge of the world.

As time progressed, the birth of various colleges sparked an increase in student enrollment and a change in curricular content. The founding of the College of New Jersey in 1746 was significant because it broke the mold of the Reformation (Geiger, 1999). This institution was a provincial college and served a significant Presbyterian population (Rudolph, 1962). Notwithstanding, the proliferation of colonial colleges (King’s College, College of Philadelphia, College of Rhode Island, Queen’s College, and Dartmouth) increased enrollment by accepting students belonging to other religious denominations. Gradually, however, a more secular approach to education emerged as a result of the development of separation of church and state during the American Revolution and establishment of the United States of America. Cohen (1998) states that, “Although they were connected with the churches, the colleges were not as much religious as educative,
founded to produce a learned people” (p. 18). Colleges also began to welcome students from less prominent families, particularly the sons of farmers. While the mission of preparing clergy remained, and the sons of the elite were now given the opportunity to pursue law and public service (Geiger, 1999).

**Challenging the Classics**

The early nineteenth century began with criticism of the classical college and its focus on Latin and religion. Geiger (1999) states, “Now colleges were attacked for their obsession with dead languages, for neglecting practical subjects and science, and for the continued unruliness of apparently disgruntled students” (p. 48). This dissatisfaction with the education system reflects the growing interest of students and institutional types. The goal of pursuing higher education for the sake of training for life was no longer the law of the land. During this period, the world began to change as students rebelled and social reform efforts gained momentum. More institutions developed as professional schools, such as law, theology, and medicine came to fruition. Students began desiring a more vocational/specialized educational curriculum. As priorities of the population shifted, the need for liberal education came into question.

While some demanded that higher education systems move beyond the classical liberal education, others greatly opposed this suggested change. The Yale Report of 1828 is evidence of such opposition. Issued by Jeremiah Day and James Kingsley, the Yale Report served as the first unified statement of educational philosophy that focused specifically on the nature of liberal education (Conrad & Wyer, 1980). The document was a defense of the classical curriculum against the rising interest in more practical courses. According to the Yale Report, the purpose of an undergraduate curriculum is to
lay the foundation of a superior education (Conrad & Wyer, 1980; Geiger, 1999). In order to accomplish this goal, institutions were to furnish the mind with knowledge and create mental discipline for thinking. The curriculum, therefore, was to be limited to the classic texts, philosophy, and mathematics. The Yale Report rejected the idea that students should specialize in particular areas of study because supporters of this philosophy believed that it crippled students’ ability to reason, think critically, and analyze information. This report recognized and appreciated the framework outlined by the Reformation and Colonial colleges. It suggested that educational institutions return to the mission as espoused early on by these institutions and revitalize liberal education (Conrad & Wyer, 1980). Most essentially during this era, the purpose of higher education was to indoctrinate students to value the process of learning and teach them to succeed in life, rather than train them for the labor market.

Despite the objections of the Yale Report, higher education did become more specialized and market influenced. Many institutions expanded their curricular offerings to include various courses not previously included in the trivium and quadrivium (the classic liberal course preferred by the Yale Report). One the strongest forces behind this curricular change was the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 [Morrill Act]. The Morrill Act was arguably the most important event in the maturation of the curriculum shift from the general/liberal model to the utilitarian/vocational educational model (Conrad & Wyer, 1980). The Morrill Act provided for the establishment of public institutions in every state with the support of the federal government. States did not have the resources needed to subsidize higher education and government subsidies and land donations presented the best way to ensure that every state entered the realm of higher education. These
institutions centered on providing training in industrial education, agriculture, and the mechanical arts (Geiger, 1999; Veysey, 1965). The Morrill Act is significant with regard to the mission of higher education because it broadened the scope of educational opportunity. With these new objectives, students gained more choices that enabled them to move beyond the classical curriculum offered at most institutions. During this time, students sought specialization. They were no longer satisfied with the liberal arts education because students warranted that education be made relevant (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). Liberal education did not equip students from outside the upper class with the tools necessary to gain employment. The increasing interest in specialized education grew out of the desire for students receive training in a particular profession in order to acquire a specific skill (Conrad & Wyer, 1980). In this era, practical education attained a greater influence over the mission operating in higher education.

**Broadening Access**

While the curriculum changed, higher education remained primarily the province of white males until after the Civil War (Cohen, 1998; Thelin, 2004). Following the war, the demise of slavery promoted other social revisions and reforms including attacks on educational exclusion, which permeated the nation. Women and minorities used this time to fight for educational access and equal rights. Responding to these new demands, higher education took action. Although the process of equalization of educational opportunity occurred gradually, colleges and universities began to open admissions to both women and minorities during the mid 19th century.

Even as education expanded to make place for women and minorities, these efforts generally resulted from a need to protect the social, political, and economic
dominance of white men. The desire to ensure that the nation’s (white) sons received a good foundation and upbringing sparked interest in the educational opportunities available to white women outside of the home. In 1837, Oberlin College became the first institution to admit women (Cohen, 1998; Rudolph, 1962; Thelin, 2004). However, between 1861 and 1875, Matthew Vassar, Henry Wells, Sophia Smith, and Henry Durant created colleges exclusively for women (Geiger, 1999). These institutions allowed women to fully participate in higher education at institutions where they were the focus of both the curriculum and the administration. While the mission of these colleges catered to the needs of women, the purpose was to educate them to succeed at the tasks assigned to them in an industrializing society, especially rearing educated children to continue the progress of the nation (Geiger, 1999).

Similar to the inclusion of women, people of color gained greater access to higher education during the 19th century to prepare them to take their designated place in the social order. In addition to the omission of women, the American system of higher education initially failed to address the educational needs of minorities, particularly African Americans (Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand, 2001; Davis, 1998; Fleming, 1984; Thompson, 1998). With few exceptions, slavery precluded the widespread interest in the education of people of African decent (Brown, 1999; Brown & Hendrickson, 1997; Lindsay, 1998). Indeed, plantation owners’ strong resistance to even the suggestion that slavery might end made it illegal to teach bondsmen and bondswomen how to read or write. As a result, most freedmen and freedwomen left slavery lacking the most basic literacy skills (Foner, 1988; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Indeed, slavery by itself did not prevent African Americans from accessing schools since few black people gained access
to formal educational opportunities prior to the Civil War regardless of their legal status (Brown & Hendrickson, 1997).

Social reforms such as expanding higher education access to women and minorities also led to additional changes in the curriculum offered in various institutions. Geiger (1999) designates the period from 1850 to 1890 as the New Departures generation. During this time, American higher education absorbed the Germanic ideals of lehrfreiheit (freedom to teach) and lernfreiheit (freedom to learn) with the opening of Johns Hopkins in 1876 (Conrad & Wyer, 1980). This system of education focused primarily on research and science and it gave birth to what Geiger (2000) calls the multipurpose college. Unlike the institutional structures before it, the multipurpose college promoted many missions simultaneously. Rather than concentrate on either classical courses or vocational training, the multipurpose college simply chose to offer both affording students with the opportunity to explore various types of academic areas.

Around the same time the multipurpose college developed, another type of higher education institution also arose. The implementation of two-year or community colleges increased enrollment in and accessibility of higher education (Geiger, 2000). Formerly known as junior colleges, these institutions developed prior to 1910, but grew rapidly after 1940 (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). Geiger (1999) declares that these colleges had a profound impact on higher education by expanding the market of a college education to attract people who may want to learn new things, but were not necessarily able or interested in completing a four-year degree. Community colleges developed to provide vocational instruction and initially served as a stepping stone to four-year institutions. These colleges served a valuable purpose for local communities and increased higher
education access because they enrolled a significant number of poor, working class, and minority students. The overall mission of these colleges was and often continues to be to train individuals for the workforce. The community college enables people from less privileged backgrounds to participate in higher education without traveling far from home, enduring economic hardships, or committing to an academic program that will take years to complete.

Similar to the multipurpose college, the curriculum at the community colleges has been and remains quite diverse. Although often focused on providing vocational training, the local nature of community colleges also allows these institutions to offer enrichment courses directed at members of the community at-large. In doing so, the community college further enlarged higher education by encouraging people of all ages, cultures, and social backgrounds to become lifelong learners. The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly referred to as the GI Bill of Rights, also played a significant role in expanding the higher education landscape (Cohen, 1998). President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the bill that provided returning World War II veterans with the opportunity to acquire a college education through the aid and assistance of the federal government.

The Curriculum

While much more diverse than the classical education championed by the Yale Report, curriculum remains a hotly contested area in higher education. Higher education in the nineteenth century showcased a battle between classical and vocational training spurred on by the Yale Report. Although the Morrill Act supported and perpetuated practical training, the twentieth century witnessed the pendulum swinging back towards
the model of general education as evidenced in Harvard’s distribution of “General Education in a Free Society” (also known as the Harvard Redbook) in 1945 (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). Although this document supported the preservation of general education, it also acknowledged that specializing in a particular field of study was also valuable due to the changing nature of the world.

The contention expressed by the Harvard Redbook remains to this day, diverse and often contradictory views about the mission of higher education remain an important matter of discussion. One of the most popular debates during the twentieth century concerning the mission of higher education occurred between John Dewey and Robert Maynard Hutchins. Commonly referred to as the debate of general versus specialized education, the conflict between Dewey and Hutchins extended the controversy started by the Yale Report years earlier. Ehrlich (1997) details the contents of this argument; however, the key issue here was the nature and purpose of a liberal education.

In determining the nature of a liberal education, Hutchins promoted the view that each individual should control her or his own learning. Arguing in favor of a more natural and classical view of education, Hutchins proposed a moratorium approach to learning and thinking. He believed that students should be detached from the consequences of the real world and spared the practicality of life during their time in school. In his view, liberal education should provide students with absolute truths and ideals found only in the great books of Western civilization. The goal, therefore, was intellectual inquiry, gaining knowledge for the sake of higher learning. Hutchins argues that the problem with higher education was that it had attached a service-station concept to the university. The idea suggested that because society makes demands on colleges and universities, systems of
higher education should respond and deliver as directed. For Hutchins, this pressure on institutions to become more specialized was problematic because it lessened the value of attending college and interfered with supplying students with a true liberal arts education (Ehrlich, 1997).

On the other side of this debate, Dewey suggested that the goal of education was to make democracy work. In his opinion, education should move beyond the purpose of satisfying the personal gratification of students and the task of preparing them for specific professions. Contrary to Hutchins’ perspective, Dewey rejected the notion of indoctrinating fixed truths into the minds of students because he believed that it crippled a student’s ability to formulate ideas and think critically. Dewey believed that students learn best by working together and experiencing the world. Dewey warned the system of higher education against dividing intellect and experience. In his opinion, the key to a successful liberal education was in the merging of the two (Ehrlich, 1997).

**Birth and Development of Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

Similar to other long-standing issues in higher education, the nature and purpose of black colleges receive regular reconsideration. Research indicates that in order to understand and appreciate the complexity surrounding black colleges, it is imperative to acknowledge their historic roots and evolution (Brown, 1999; Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand, 2001; Browning & Williams, 1978; Davis, 1998; Drewry & Doermann, 2001; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). As previously indicated, the United States system of higher education did not provide universal collegiate access upon its inception. In fact, early institutions such as Harvard and Yale tended to deny access to individuals who were not identified as wealthy, Protestant, male, and white (Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand, 2001).
Prior to the American Civil War, the combination of slavery and segregation restricted educational access and opportunity for black Americans. While there were a few exceptions, black students were summarily denied entry to institutions of higher learning. During this time, most African Americans lived in the South where laws prohibited enslaved men, women, and children from being taught the fundamentals of reading and writing. As an attempt to make education more accessible, the American Missionary Association (AMA) began the movement to develop systems of schooling that would indoctrinate and educate former enslaved individuals and their progeny (Browning & Williams, 1978). This system of schooling began as primary and secondary schools and later evolved into collegiate-level education, thus giving birth to historically black colleges and universities.

Following the lead of the AMA, historically black colleges were funded and established by black churches, the Freedman’s Bureau, local communities, and private philanthropists (Brown, 1999). The growth of these institutions persisted during a tumultuous time in American history. Roebuck & Murty (1993) assert the following:

They were founded and developed in an environment unlike that surrounding other colleges—that is, in a hostile environment marked by legal segregation and isolation from mainstream United States higher education. Historically they have served a population that has lived under severe legal, educational, economic, political, and social restrictions (p. 3).

Roebuck and Murty (1993) clearly indicate that the historical context in which these institutions developed is critical to understanding their function in the larger higher education landscape, particularly as it relates to the African American people.

Since black colleges formed outside of the traditional system of learning and catered to a population of people who were perpetually denied access to education, the
early objectives of these institutions centered on uplifting the condition of the black community (Davis, 1998). According to Walters (1991), the goals of black colleges include: (a) the maintenance of black historical and cultural tradition; (b) the provision of key leadership in the black community; (c) the development of economic stability in the black community; (d) the presentation of black role models who are able to interpret the way in which political, social, or economic dynamics impact the black community; (e) the production of college graduates equipped with the competence to deal with problems arising between minority and majority populations; and (f) the ability to produce black agents for specialized research, training, and information dissemination (as cited in Roebuck & Murty, 1993). The goals identify the expectations of historically black institutions of higher education. The expectations, in turn, mandate responsibilities that black colleges assume.

Similarly, Jones (1971) contends that historically black colleges and universities have an inherent responsibility to uplift the overall condition of black people and strengthen the communities in which they are located. Black colleges must open their doors and teach and help those who may not be fortunate enough to be registered students. Jones (1971), however, identifies white oppression as the major obstacle that prevents black colleges and universities from successfully carrying out their duties. Racist ideologies interfere with the prosperity of historically black colleges and universities due to the desire to preserve these schools as subordinate pieces to the larger higher education puzzle.
The Debate: Booker T. Washington versus W.E.B. DuBois

Since their inception, historically black colleges have assumed a dual responsibility with regards to positioning and preparing their students for future success. Black colleges must meet the same curriculum standards as predominantly white institutions while simultaneously offering African Americans an education that is culturally relevant. Benjamin E. Mays (1978) advised, “They must be as much concerned with Shakespeare, Tennyson, and Marlowe as the white colleges. But the Negro institutions must give equal emphasis to the writings of Paul Dunbar, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes” (p. 28). This challenge imposed on black colleges contributed to the discourse concerning the curriculum plan of these institutions.

The most popular debate occurred between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand, 2001; Fleming, 1983; Jones, 1971; Kannerstein, 1978; Willie, 1994). Washington and DuBois held opposing views with respect to the nature of black education. Although viewed as adversaries, the two men publicly debated as a political strategy to bring attention to historically black colleges and universities. Washington advocated the need for vocational training and suggested that the role of black colleges and universities was to train individuals to fill the manual labor market. DuBois, on the other hand, argued that black colleges should work toward building an elite group known as the talented tenth. He believed that the students should be trained to uplift the black community by becoming professional doctors and teachers, rather than being limited to trades such as farming and masonry. The controversy helped black colleges find value in including both perspectives by
creating learning environments that offered students both industrial and liberal arts courses.

The Issue of Desegregation

The educational haven provided by black colleges does not preclude the fact that these institutions began as instruments of racial segregation. Due to the long history of racial inequalities, “…states created dual collegiate structures of public education, most of which operated exclusively for whites in one system and African Americans in the other” (Brown & Hendrickson, 1997, p. 96). According to Patterson (1994), the current racial identifiability of the dual system in the South reflects the historical creation and existence of the institutions as segregated entities. The dual system, nonetheless, continues to exist despite the desegregation decisions rendered by the Supreme Court.

There has been a lack of consensus on the policy, legislation, and judicial remedy necessary to overcome the continuing effects of historical segregation in higher education institutions. There is a lack of clarity regarding the definition of desegregation and the criteria for compliance. Higher education is still without a prevailing legal standard that clearly articulates what it means for postsecondary education to be desegregated or to have dismantled dual educational structures (Brown, 1999, p. xviii).

As a result of this confusion, the issue of desegregation remains a concern for public black colleges and universities as they are often the primary targets for desegregation initiatives.

Through a series of important court cases, African Americans have consistently challenged racial policies and pursued the full implementation of equal status. In 1896 the United States Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* that segregation of races was constitutional so long as the facilities and conditions for blacks were equal in quality to those provided for whites (Johnson, 1993). This principle became known as
separate but equal. Revised state constitutions and state laws prohibited black and white students from attending the same schools (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Consequently, many years later in 1954 Brown v. Board of Education ruled that separating students solely based of race was unconstitutional, therefore separate educational facilities were essentially unequal (Cohen, 1998). Johnson (1993) contends, “The decision was in response to the deplorable conditions in which African Americans were educated and forced to live- conditions which were the result of legally sanctioned segregation” (p.140). Brown v. Board of Education focused on desegregation in primary and secondary public education, and the thrust to dismantle dual systems of education was not extended to higher education until the passage of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Brown, 1999a). With the passage of Title VI, states supporting dual systems of higher education were required by law to dismantle them (Thompson, 1998).

Despite the federal law’s commission to eliminate all systems of segregation, 19 states (notably in the South) continued to operate dual systems: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia (Brown, 1999). This system only affirmed inequality and enforced the practice of discrimination. The problem, however, was that “…the law did not identify what was meant by discrimination based on race or national origin-- it just outlawed it. The meaning of discrimination, desegregation, and compliance were not even explored in the legislative evolution of Title VI” (Brown, 1999, p. 8). Therefore, states were given autonomy to interpret the law to meet the needs of their particular state. This inevitably allowed states to uphold the segregated system of higher education.
United States v. Fordice. The highly publicized case of United States v. Fordice found that the state of Mississippi was operating segregated schools. In 1975 Jake Ayers, a private plaintiff, along with the United States filed a lawsuit against the state of Mississippi contending that de jure (by law) segregation still existed in higher education. The complaint alleged that the historically black colleges remained separate and inferior to the white institutions due to discriminatory practices in student admissions, employment of faculty and staff, mission designations and funding (Patterson, 1994).

The trial court (1987) and the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals (1990) ruled in the favor of Mississippi, finding that the state had fulfilled its duty to dismantle its prior system by adopting and implementing racially neutral policies and procedures for all students to attend the institution of their choice. The plaintiff appealed to the Supreme Court.

On June 26, 1992, the Supreme Court reversed and remanded the ruling of the Court of Appeals, declaring that Mississippi had not desegregated its dual system of higher education. The Court also stated that the legal standard applied in the lower level was incorrect, that is, although the state university system appeared unbiased, noticeable factors governed an individual’s choice of institution, particularly if that individual were an African American. The Court went on to say that Mississippi’s eight public institutions remained racially identifiable. Therefore, the principle requirement of the state was to eradicate all remnants and vestiges of de jure segregation which were not ‘educationally justifiable’ and could be ‘practically eliminated’ (Brown & Hendrickson, 1997).

According to Brown (1995), United States v. Fordice “...outlined the financial implications for public historically black colleges and universities in American higher
education systems” (p. 35). The case exposed the funding discrepancies and showed just how separate and unequal historically black colleges and universities remained.

Rather than integrating the campuses or increasing funds for the predominantly black universities, the state of Mississippi proposes closing some of the black schools and merging them with stronger and better funded institutions which are almost exclusively white. Many believe that the _Fordice_ litigation could ring the death knell of public black colleges in the South (Cross & Slater, 1995, p. 79).

Brown (1999) argues that the success of collegiate desegregation is contingent upon the willingness of higher education to “(a) re-designate the missions and institutional statements of those institutions designed to deliver inferior service, (b) redefine the financial formula whereby institutions are funded, (c) reassess the standards of institutional admission, and (d) reinterpret the possibility of incongruent collegiate populations” (p. 11). The problem, however, is that when desegregation plans are initiated, the black colleges and universities are targeted. Just as in the case of _Fordice_, the desegregation decision threatened the closure and merger of black institutions, not the predominantly white colleges and universities. Yet unfinished, collegiate desegregation remains a critically important issue with regards to black college research.

**The Mission of Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

Similar to desegregation, issues of mission also continue to affect the perception of historically black colleges and universities. Indeed, the topic of mission remains a relatively unexplored area of current black college research. In 1978, Kannerstein conducted a research study focusing specifically on the topic of mission entitled, _Black Colleges: Self Concept_. He investigated the purpose, aims, and overall objectives of historically black colleges and universities by analyzing newsletters, catalogs, and other official publications from a select sample of schools. The goal was to understand how
black colleges perceive themselves based on the information they provide to others. He argued that this information represents their identity and role within the larger system of higher education and ultimately communicates the self-concept of these schools.

Although Kannerstein (1978) neglects to describe the details of the research method, he does reveal that most of the information was taken from Harvard University’s Center for Urban Studies’ collection of various school publications. He examined numerous publications from different historically black colleges and universities in addition to some predominantly white colleges and university publications for comparative purposes. The information revealed provides insights with regard to the topic of mission of historically black institutions of higher education and initiates a discussion on why black colleges are important.

In studying the topic of mission, Kannerstein (1978) identified the following eight themes that black colleges deem critical to fulfill their mission: (1) community service, (2) open enrollment, (3) democracy, citizenship, and leadership, (4) social change, (5) concern about health, (6) ethics and values, (7) educational emphases, and (8) Black studies. These findings represent the select sample of schools and may not be indicative of all historically black colleges and universities because the researcher does not provide an exact account of how many schools he investigated.

*Community service.* Based on Kannerstein’s (1978) study, black colleges stress the importance of community service and it is not viewed in the periphery of teaching and research responsibilities. Civic engagement, commitment to the community, and public service are an invaluable component of black college life and it is ingrained into the mission of these institutions as evidenced in the curriculum, research initiatives, and
teaching instruction (Kannerstein, 1978). Defining community service is complex, however, for the purpose of this study it includes ideals such as promoting racial understanding, providing financial aid to students in need, developing educational programs for adults, and acknowledging and responding to the needs of the black community and the world at-large. Kannerstein (1978) highlights a few examples of how black colleges incorporate community service into the fabric of their schools and this tangible evidence helps readers gain a clearer understanding of various institutions’ priorities. Kentucky State University, for example, encourages students to contribute the cultural and economic growth of the community. Miles College incorporates special programs such as Upward Bound and Headstart. Langston University proposes that students help in solving problems that plague the state of Oklahoma. Spelman College promotes the importance of social involvement and political activism. Howard University focuses on improving the District of Columbia and eliminating the conditions that negatively impact African American people. Kannerstein (1978) proffers that the dedication that historically black colleges and universities have toward inculcating community service into their institutional missions is perhaps their greatest contribution to the American higher education system and other colleges and universities should embrace and emulate their commitment to service.

*Open enrollment.* Despite their commitment to community service, black colleges still suffer from the impression that these institutions are race exclusive. One of the biggest challenges facing historically black colleges and universities is the misconception that they are reserved only for African Americans. Kannerstein (1978) calls attention to the fact black institutions of higher education have an open enrollment that suggests that
these institutions embrace all individuals irrespective of race, gender, national origin, and other identifiable attributes. Xavier University of Louisiana, for example, is the only historically black Catholic institution in the country and many of its students are non-Catholic and white. Lincoln University (Pennsylvania), Dillard University, Fisk University, and Paine College promote the importance of having diverse campus environments by clearly articulating this philosophy throughout their official school publications. The idea of diversification at black colleges is not limited to the student body, but also faculty, staff, and administration (Foster & Guyden, 2004). The misconception is that black colleges only benefit African Americans. The open enrollment philosophy is not new to black colleges nor was this notion imposed upon them by legal authority. Historically black colleges and universities were founded on the premise that everyone deserves an opportunity to pursue higher education. According to Kannerstein (1978), “...the concern of black colleges is not with who gets in but what happens to them afterward” (p. 37). The focus is on helping students irrespective of their background and disadvantaged circumstances to become productive and successful citizens of the world.

Democracy, citizenship, and leadership. Historically black colleges and universities stress the importance of equipping their graduates with the tools necessary to succeed upon the completion of their studies. The objective is to prepare students to make meaningful contributions to world. Kannerstein (1978) found throughout nearly every publication he examined an emphasis on viewing education as a democracy. He learned that black colleges encouraged students to engage in civic participation and promoted the value of leadership. The mission statement for Southern University, for example,
specifically proclaims that their goal is to instill students with a sense of responsibility to carry out duties of citizenship. A primary objective for Spelman College is to prepare African American women for leadership positions. Livingstone College promotes students to be conscious and aware and condemns acts of snobbery and distinctions based on class or socioeconomic status.

*Social change.* In addition to preparing their students for leadership in a democratic society, the need for change is also a common priority among black colleges and universities. The mission is for students to recognize the condition of the world, particularly that of the African American community, and strive to make positive steps toward improvement and growth. According to Kannerstein (1978) the catalogs of black colleges and predominantly white colleges differ in terms of how they depict the view of the world. Historically black colleges and universities highlight the constant struggles and inequalities that plague society, whereas predominantly white schools portray a picture of peace and equal opportunity. Students enrolled at black colleges, therefore, receive added inspiration to make changes because they realize their position in a world that often times discriminates toward them just because of the color of their skin. The responsibility of black colleges is to provide students with the vocational tools to prepare them to meet the demands of today’s changing society. Tougaloo College emphasizes the need for students to be familiar with new age technology and advancement. Clark College (now Clark Atlanta University) proposes that students be professionally prepared to address the challenges posed by the present and ready to address the problems of the future.

*Concern about health.* For historically black colleges and universities, professionalism and community uplift also included attention to physical health and
wellness. Health is a general concern for all people, particularly college students. African American students, however, are at a considerable disadvantage because some of them are often not exposed to health education nor have the financial access to ensure proper medical care prior to attending college. Kannerstein (1978) suggests that in order to remedy the situation, black colleges have assumed the role of *in loco parentis* (in place of the parent) and broadened their mission to include health matters. The publications analyzed for the study show that the concept of health extends beyond the mere act of physical activity. Grambling College (now Grambling State University), University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, and Oakwood College emphasize the importance of balancing a combination of physical, mental, and spiritual health. Black colleges tend to focus on students in their totality.

*Ethics and values.* As part of their attention to educating students in mind, body, and spirit, historically black colleges and universities play a key role in influencing student development and growth outside of the confinements of the classroom. The apparent mission of these colleges and universities extends beyond academic preparation and includes the responsibility of producing graduates who possess character and good judgment. Kannerstein (1978) declares that black colleges display greater emphasis on ethics and values when compared to predominantly white institutions based on the information found in the official school publications. Barber-Scotia College encourages students to take responsibility of their actions, acquire integrity, and respect individual differences. Tougaloo College concentrates on equipping students with a sense of generosity, tolerance, and acceptance. Due to the fact that many private historically black colleges and universities are affiliated with churches, an overwhelming amount of the
mission statements mention the need for maintaining a healthy spiritual connection. Rust College advances that Christian values are an integral part of their institution’s fabric and is critical to student development.

Educational emphases. Even with their efforts to develop the whole student, black colleges have never neglected or ignored the academic portion of their mission. Early on, W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington debated on the purpose of education for African American people. DuBois believed that the focus should be on the liberal arts, while Washington advocated for more vocational preparation. The findings of Kannerstein’s (1978) research study suggests that historically black colleges have successfully combined the two perspectives by recognizing that both educational objectives are necessary for college students. Historically black institutions of higher education value liberal arts education and vocational training and promote this idea throughout their catalogs and bulletin announcements. LeMoyne-Owen College, Fisk University, and Lincoln University (Pennsylvania) offer students the opportunity to pursue the humanities, social sciences, and fine arts of the liberal education programs, while also preparing them for their careers in more vocational fields such as engineering, business, and architecture.

Black studies. In addition to the liberal and vocational educational programs offered at black colleges, these institutions also performed the added service of creating a curriculum in American history and cultural studies that includes the accomplishments of African Americans. The promotion of black studies at historically black colleges and universities reflects the recognition that the African American experience is an integral part of American history. The idea of black studies is not limited to a few course
offerings that students take as elective requirements. Black colleges assume the responsibility of creating learning environments in which the history and culture of African American people is appreciated and celebrated and they unapologetically advertise this in their official school publications (Kannerstein, 1978). Xavier University of Louisiana boasts that although the institution serves the community at-large, priority lies on issues related to African American people. Morehouse College attempts to prepare graduates to perform well in their professional careers while also maintaining a commitment to the black community. Stillman College proffers that “knowledge and understanding of the history and culture of black and other peoples and how they have interrelated through the years are essential to the promulgation of truth” (Kannerstein, 1978, p. 48).

The eight aforementioned themes discovered by Kannerstein (1978) provide a glimpse into what historically black colleges and universities value as necessary tools to fulfill their mission. The study is helpful because it initiates discussion on the topic of mission of black schools; a topic that educational researchers often overlook. As a result, the study serves as a starting point for future research. The school catalogs, bulletins, alumni newsletters, and other publications are formal documentation that all institutions of higher education are required to produce. Who is responsible for communicating this information and where does the information come from? The next logical step in terms of research is to attempt to make a connection between what is written on paper and what actually happens on black college campuses. The means to attain this information lies in seeking out individuals directly involved with these campuses in order to get a more in-depth perspective on the mission of black colleges and universities.
Students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Although research on black colleges remains limited, much of the information available focuses on students who attend these institutions. Research studies on students at historically black colleges and universities include an array of topics ranging from issues pertaining to college choice to comparisons between the learning environments at black colleges and predominantly white institutions. Educators are concerned with the overall experience that students have while attending these institutions. The researchers recognize that the college or university that a student attends is an important determinant of educational satisfaction, professional development, and future success. Black colleges serve a specific purpose and the investigation of the students provides an opportunity to learn about the impact of these institutions including both their contributions and challenges within the higher education landscape.

College Choice

Given their ability to enroll in any institution type, many question why some students continue to choose to attend black colleges and universities. McDonough, Antonio, and Trent (1997) examined factors that affect the college choice decision-making processes of African American students. More specifically, they wanted to find out if students who choose predominantly white institutions have different college choice processes than those who select historically black colleges and universities. The researchers used data collected as part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program’s 1993 freshman survey. The survey contained questions regarding students’ background and demographics, experiences in high school, reasons for going to college, reasons for choosing their particular institution, and expectations about college.
The study revealed the following black college predictors: (a) religious affiliation of college; (b) good social reputation; (c) desire to become more cultured; (d) relatives’ wishes; (e) a friend’s suggestion; (f) parents’ wishes; and (g) ability of graduates to secure employment. Students provided the following reasons for attending predominantly white institutions for the following reasons: (a) recruitment by athletic department; (b) desire to live near home; (c) good academic reputation; (d) availability of financial aid; (e) advice of high school counselor; and (f) particular educational programs. In analyzing the differences, the researchers found that students at black colleges demonstrated higher rates in attaining a bachelor’s degree, greater gains in academic achievement, better social integration, and higher occupational aspirations.

Likewise, Freeman (1999) conducted a qualitative longitudinal study focused on understanding the characteristics of students in regard to the college choice process. The sample consisted of 21 students identified as high achieving. All of the students attended predominantly black high schools and reared in predominantly black neighborhoods. The findings showed that the characteristics of the students were similar irrespective of their choice to attend a historically black school or a predominantly white institution. All of the students cited financial aid as a major consideration in their decision making. While the lack of financial aid is particularly problematic for historically black colleges and universities, these findings demonstrate that black colleges are improving in their ability to attract high achieving students.

*College Impact*

The decision to attend a historically black institution or a predominantly white school is a subjective one and numerous factors contribute to the choice that students
make as evidenced in the studies conducted by McDonough, Antonio, and Trent (1997) and Freeman (1997/1999). Those researchers explored the reasoning behind students’ choices, the *why* factor. The next logical step is understanding the *how* factor; how does the choice of attending a historically black or a predominantly white college or university impact the college experience of African American students? Fleming (1984) explores this topic in a study revered as a major contribution to the field of higher education. The heavily cited book, *Blacks in College: A Comparative Study of Students’ Success in Black and in White Institutions*, focuses on the contributions that these schools make to African Americans. Fleming (1984) tests the common assumptions about the impact of black colleges. Are predominantly white schools better for African American students because they possess more resources? Do historically black schools provide a more supportive learning environment? Are African Americans students isolated on predominantly white campuses? Are black students progressing academically at a higher rate when enrolled in a historically black institution of higher education?

A trained psychologist, Fleming (1984) concentrates on understanding mental processes and behaviors and is therefore primarily concerned with the students and how they internalize their experiences rather than the higher education institutions per se. The schools serve as the backdrop to the study and provide a setting for comparison in order for the researcher to understand what happens to African American students enrolled in black colleges versus predominantly white schools. Most comparative studies on black and white higher education institutions yield noncomparable information because researchers ask different questions depending on the learning environment (Fleming, 1984). The strength of this research, particularly as it relates to historically black colleges
and universities, lies in the method. Studies pertaining to black colleges are often not empirically based. This cross-sectional study, however, consisted of approximately three thousand freshman and senior students (both black and white) enrolled in fifteen colleges throughout the states of Ohio, Georgia, Texas, and Mississippi. The sample of institutions included eight predominantly white schools and seven predominantly black schools. The collection of data spanned over three years. All students endured the same rigorous testing for approximately four to eight hours. They participated in personal interviews, completed questionnaires, and submitted their transcripts for evaluation. Additionally, the students engaged in tests of cognitive growth.

The research findings do not hide the negative truths often associated with historically black colleges and universities. According to Fleming (1984), “They only suggest that their deleterious impact on intellectual development is overestimated and that the significance of opportunities for academic progress, social participation, and interpersonal belonging is underestimated” (p. 150). Students overwhelming reported poor teacher quality, yet they boasted about the positive relationships they developed with their professors. The students valued the informal mentoring and words of encouragement from their professors on black college campuses. Although historically black colleges lack adequate resources, they maintain the ability to provide a more supportive and nurturing environment than predominantly white campuses. A supportive environment does not equate to a place of complete perfection and harmony as students on black college campuses have both positive and negative experiences.

Based on the data provided by participants, Fleming (1984) identifies three key aspects of a supportive learning environment. First, students must have the opportunity to
connect with other people. On black college campuses, students are better able to build relationships with their peers in addition to faculty and staff who can serve as role models. Second, students should be able to get involved with campus life. Historically black colleges and universities offer more opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular activities, particularly leadership roles. African American students on predominantly white campuses often feel a sense of powerlessness and are unable to fully engage in the college experience. Third, a supportive environment must provide a space where students feel able to succeed academically. Black college faculties are more likely to take the time to help students and affirm the belief that they are capable of achieving. Students report that faculty at predominantly white institutions lack interest in their well being and development. Overall, Fleming’s (1984) research does not advocate for black students to abandon predominantly white colleges and universities. These findings simply provide an awareness of students’ experiences so that and both historically black and predominantly white institutions of higher education are able to use this information as a means of improving their learning environments to better serve the students.

Faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

As Fleming (1984) indicates, students at black colleges rely heavily on and establish strong relationships with their faculty members. Indeed, faculty members employed at black colleges assume an enormous responsibility. Since black colleges were created as an intentional subordinate tier of traditional higher education (Brown, Ricard, & Donahoo, 2004), faculty must work hard to provide the recipients of such a system with the necessary tools to function and prosper in society.

“…the central challenging mission of black colleges has always been that of transforming socioeconomically and academically handicapped black youth into
productive citizens, competent professionals, businessman, and leaders. Since black colleges have never had the funds to adequately support this urgent mission, an uncommonly heavy burden has fallen upon the faculty” (Thompson, 1978).

Despite the rich history concerning the evolution and challenges of black colleges, little is known about the faculty of these institutions. Few empirical studies focus on the experiences of this particular cohort of educators (Johnson, 2004).

In one of the few studies to examine faculty work at black colleges, Roebuck and Murty (1993) provide information regarding the racial composition of faculty at historically black colleges and universities. In their studies on identifying the role of black institutions, the researchers report that approximately 55% of black college faculties are African American. Forty percent are white Americans and other non-black minorities make up the remaining 5% of the total faculty composition at historically black schools. The diversity among the faculty at black colleges is not similar on predominantly white campuses. African American faculty is highly underrepresented at majority institutions (Turner & Myers, 2000). Moore and Wagstaff (1974) propose that black educators prefer black campuses because of their concern for educating black students. The professors feel a sense of obligation to give back to their communities. Furthermore, most historically black colleges and universities value teaching and service and African American professors often favor this approach as opposed to the research focus on most predominantly white campuses. However, the challenges that concern faculty at black colleges is the low salaries they receive, meager institutional resources, and lack of respect with regards to professional recognition (Diener, 1985; Thompson, 1978).
Expanding on earlier studies, current research on faculty at historically black colleges and universities centers on the socialization process (Johnson, 2004) and the increased presence of white faculty members (Foster & Guyden, 2004). Johnson (2004) asserts that black colleges must be proactive toward implementing policies and procedures that ensure that faculty members engage in a positive and effective socialization process. The researcher suggests, for example, the development of orientation programs which would aid the faculty in building commitment and loyalty to the institution while allowing them time to get to know other colleagues. Monthly orientation meetings would provide a means for the institution to stay in contact with the faculty and assist them with any problems or other pertinent matters. The overall goal of the socialization process is to increase the retention of faculty at black colleges.

Examining socialization in conjunction with racial issues, Foster and Guyden (2004) concentrate on white faculty and their experiences on black college campuses. The founding of black colleges rests partially on the shoulders of white missionaries; therefore their presence in the role of faculty is not a new phenomenon. The researchers indicate that some white faculty are drawn to historically black colleges and universities because of a personal commitment to diversity, while others are recruited due to desegregation initiatives implemented at black institutions.

**Diversity on the Historically Black College Campus**

The race of faculty members is just one of the ways that diversity affects the modern black college. Beyond the limited scope of race, diversity in higher education includes a variety of concerns that influence the mission and students of each institution. Colleges and universities are identified in a myriad of ways. Terms such as community
college, liberal arts, research intensive, and doctoral granting provides a clear indication of the focus of the institutions and what they have to offer. The term, historically black, however, shifts the focus from what is being offered to whom it is being offered to. Historically black is a term that immediately conjures up an assumption about colleges and universities based on race first. The assumption persists that these particular schools are reserved for African American students, administrators, and faculty. The reality remains that while most historically black institutions are predominantly black in regard to population, they are not exclusively black. A growing body of research focusing on the experiences of white students and faculty suggests that access and opportunity provided by historically black colleges and universities are not limited to people of African decent.

Building on the work initiated by Fleming (1984), Conrad, Brier, and Braxton (1997) conducted a thorough examination of the experiences of white students enrolled in historically black colleges and universities. The researchers utilized an open-ended, multiple case study design and conducted individual interviews and focus groups with students, faculty, and administrators on historically black college campuses. The study consisted of the following five public institutions of higher education: North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, Winston-Salem University, Southern University at New Orleans, Kentucky State University, and Savannah State College. The researchers purposely selected these black colleges and universities because of their success in attracting a significant number of white students and because some of the schools received court mandates to desegregate.

The interviews conducted by Conrad et al. (1997) centered on one key question: What important factors contribute to white students’ attendance at historically black
colleges and universities? Initially, the researchers asked the participants to share their experiences and elaborate on this question. However, after two on-campus visits, they developed a rating instrument based on the information they gathered through the initial interviews. Conrad et al. (1997) identified fourteen major factors that influence the increased presence of white students on black college and university campuses and grouped them into three categories: (a) academic program offerings, (b) student financial support and (c) institutional characteristics. For the purpose of context, it is important to note that the five participating institutions, like most historically black institutions, are located in close proximity to predominantly white colleges and universities. Some of the responses of the participants, therefore, reflect the implications of this dichotomy. In their analysis, Conrad et al. (1997) divided the data into three categories: academic program offerings, student financial support and institutional characteristics.

*Academic program offerings.* Conrad et al. (1997) ranked the following responses in terms of importance to students: (1) program offerings in high-demand fields of study, (2) unique program offerings, (3) alternative program delivery systems, (4) graduate program offerings, and (5) positive reputation for quality. The participants reported that black colleges offered quality academic programs, particularly in demanding and competitive fields such as nursing, business, and engineering. One student said that the engineering program was so strong at North Carolina A&T that he could “overlook that it’s a black school” (Conrad, Brier, & Braxton, 1997, p.43). This small statement speaks volumes in regard to the negative perception often associated with black colleges and universities. The researchers discovered that historically black colleges and universities attracted white students because they offered unique programs not available at
predominantly white institutions. Students enrolled in more specialized fields of study and gained the opportunity to pursue disciplines outside of mainstream academe. The students revealed that many of the white institutions imposed enrollment caps that limited the amount of students permitted to pursue a specific academic major; therefore, they opted to attend the historically black institution.

In addition to academic offerings, many of the students favored historically black colleges and universities because of the availability of varied campus delivery systems. The black schools offered more flexibility in terms of weekend and evening course offerings and this appealed to nontraditional students such as part-time students and adult learners. The convenience of the program offerings afforded them the opportunity to fulfill other obligations, particularly with regard to work and family. The interviewees valued the graduate programs, specifically at the master’s level, that the black colleges and universities offered. The programs equipped students with a competitive edge and contributed to their overall marketability within the job market. According to Conrad et al. (1997) the participants in the study readily admitted the importance of the reputation of the school. Although they enrolled in institutions identified as historically black, white students sought quality academic programs and concerned themselves with how well their respective institutions ranked in comparison to other higher education institutions. The interviewees disclosed that the black college campuses provided them small class sizes and strong faculty members that nurtured and mentored them and showed a genuine interest in helping them to achieve their educational goals.

*Student financial support.* Besides academic issues, Conrad et al. (1997) discovered that the white students considered student scholarships and low cost of tuition
and fees as two important factors that contributed to their continued enrollment at historically black institutions of higher educations. Funding a college education is a fundamental concern and the students in the study indicated that the financial support often dictated whether or not they could pursue higher education and the institution that they would attend. Several interviewees emphasized that state supported grants and programs designed to attract other-race students played a significant role in attracting them to black college campuses. Students, faculty and administrators agreed that scholarships are one of the best ways to attract and maintain white students. A student candidly declared, “I am here for the money. There’s no way I would be here but for the money I am getting” (Conrad et al., 1997, p. 49). An administrator admitted that most white students attend black colleges because they offer more money to them coupled with the fact that historically black colleges and universities cost significantly less than institutions that are predominantly white. These findings attest to the power and persuasion of money.

**Institutional characteristics.** The final category of factors that influence the matriculation of white students in black colleges consist of the following institutional characteristics: (1) positive image as a multiracial institution, (2) supportive and inclusive campus culture, (3) white student recruitment, (4) articulation and cooperative agreements with predominantly white institutions, (5) positive external relations with community and professional constituencies, (6) safe environment, and (7) attractive campus appearance (Conrad et al., 1997). The interviewees viewed the black colleges as welcoming institutions and indicated that it is critical for black schools to make the general public aware that they are multiracial institutions of higher education in order to
attract more white students. The white students in the study reported that they desired a sense of comfort and selected black colleges that maintained a culture of inclusiveness. The study showed that faculty, administrators, and students often referred to their respective campuses as a family unit.

Despite the advantages identified in the study, interviewees recognized that historically black colleges and universities must deliberately recruit white students. Due to the public perception that black schools are reserved for black students, many white individuals are not aware of the access and opportunities available at historically black colleges and universities. A few suggestions for altering this perception include recruitment visits to majority white high schools, inviting white high school students to the campuses, and mailing white high school students brochures and other relevant information about the historically black colleges and universities (Conrad et al., 1997). Cooperative agreements established between predominantly white and historically black institutions of higher education aid in the process of encouraging white students to attend black colleges. Through articulation and cooperative agreements, the students enrolled in the predominantly white schools are able to acquaint themselves with the neighboring historically black colleges and universities by taking a few courses on their campuses. North Carolina A&T, for example, successfully recruited white students from two-year colleges due to such agreements.

Moreover, Conrad et al. (1997) also found that the relationships that historically black colleges and universities have with the surrounding communities and professional organizations influences the matriculation of white students. These relationships provide the schools with exposure to those individuals that are unfamiliar with them while
The participants in the research study considered a safe campus environment, both on-campus and off-campus, as a fundamental concern. An administrator stated that white students will enroll in black colleges if the schools offer strong programs and the students feel secure in their learning environment. The final institutional characteristic that the participants identified as an important factor is the appearance of the campus. A campus with attractive buildings and groomed lawns, for example, lured white students. The study showed that the aesthetics of the campus environment for some of the interviewees represented the college or university’s reputation for quality.

The fourteen factors identified by the researchers in this study provide insight into why white students choose to attend historically black colleges and universities. This information filled a void in black college literature because the topic was a relatively unexplored area of higher education research at the time. The discussion concerning the white presence on historically black college campuses started with the earlier works of sociologist Charles V. Willie (1981a, 1994); however, Conrad, Brier & Braxton (1997) further explored this area of research by conducting a systematic investigation. The multicase study design exhibited the researchers’ engagement in what Brown (2003) identifies as the emic approach to examining black colleges. The emic approach results when researchers invest the time and position themselves within black college campuses with an acute awareness of the cultural implications embedded within the institutions. The researchers visited all five historically black colleges and stayed on each campus between one and two days. The scope of the research extended beyond the perspectives of the students and included faculty and administration. The inclusion of all three
constituents (36 students, 12 faculty, and 32 administrators) strengthened the findings because it provided a more comprehensive view of why white students are attracted to historically black colleges.

Overall, the researchers discovered that the factors that influence white students to attend black colleges vary significantly from factors that contribute to students choosing to attend predominantly white institutions. The factors identified in this particular study serve as key suggestions to other black colleges seeking to increase the enrollment of white students. Conrad et al. (1997) recommend the following: (1) enhance the mission of the institutions by developing strong academic programs in competitive fields of study; (2) ensure the presence of unique programs of study unavailable at proximate predominantly white institutions; (3) increase state funding to aid in institutional enhancement, student financial aid support, and recruitment. Although these suggestions are aimed at increasing the matriculation of white students, they should be fundamental imperatives for historically black colleges and universities irrespective of the racial identity of the target student population. Ideally black colleges, like all other types of higher education institutions, should strive to be better equipped, more productive, and highly efficient for all students. The reality, however, is that perhaps with the focus shifting to white students, states will be more inclined to help black colleges become more attractive institutions.

Charles V. Willie (1981a) addressed the matter of racial dynamics on black college campuses by encouraging black postsecondary schools to increase their white populations. He believed that black colleges and universities should have a minimum of 20% white student body. He proposed that the monetary resources awarded to
predominantly white institutions to recruit African American students should also be
given to black colleges and universities to recruit white students to their campuses. The
idea is that in order for desegregation to occur in higher education, both predominantly
white and historically black colleges and universities must deliberately take action to
attract other-race students. His position stems from observing the positive impact that
minority status had on Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, an African American scholar and former
president of Morehouse College who earned two baccalaureate degrees from both a
historically black university and a predominantly white college. Willie (1981a) describes
Mays’ immersion in the majority white environment as a liberating experience in which
he excelled in spite of his minority status and realized that white people were not superior
beings. He deduced from this lesson that white people could also benefit from being a
minority by attending black colleges and universities. This experience at a historically
black college provides them the opportunity to interact with black people, learn from
them, and confront the negative stereotypes deeply embedded within their own
consciousness. The anticipated result is that the experience will force white students to
learn more about themselves and liberate them from the common belief that people of
African decent should be separate and unequal.

In a later article, *Black Colleges are not Just for Blacks Anymore*, Willie (1994)
continues to awaken the minds of individuals who believe that black colleges are only
beneficial to black people. His introspective argument relies heavily on his positionality
as an African American man, a sociologist, and Morehouse College alum. Additionally,
he draws upon his critical analysis and understanding of the academic literature on race,
politics, sociology, and education. Willie (1994) suggests that white students attending
black colleges could develop what W.E.B. DuBois identified as a double consciousness. This double consciousness enables them to gain a better self-concept while simultaneously learning about how African Americans perceive them now that the tables have turned and they are now the minority. He recognizes that his position may not be popular among supporters of black colleges and universities who fear that the infusion of a white student population will destroy the institutional cultural of the schools. In response, Willie (1994) asserts:

> If the proof of the pudding is in the eating of it, the beneficial contributions of predominantly Black colleges and universities to the higher education system of this nation can be truthfully attested to only by individuals who have experienced it. For those who are leery of the wisdom of this proposal, let me remind you of the words of wise in-laws in the family. They always say at the wedding ceremony that they are not losing a daughter but gaining a son, or vice-versa. Diversity is the source of our salvation. The addition of White students to predominantly Black colleges and universities will strengthen, not weaken, them. The institutions that pursue this policy will not lose students but will gain new allies and friends (p. 158).

This perspective suggests that white students do not pose a threat to the identity and legacy established at black schools. Willie (1994) views integration as a necessary step for all historically black colleges and universities to ensure their continued existence and progress.

Similar to Willie (1994), Brown (2002b) explores the issue of white students attending black colleges. In a seminal study, *Good Intentions: Collegiate Desegregation and Transdemographic Enrollment*, Brown (2002b) explores the implications of white students attending public historically black institutions. He conducted an ethnographic case study at Bluefield State University in which artifact gathering, participant observation, document analysis, and informal interviews were used to collect data. The uniqueness of Bluefield State College is that although by federal regulation it is identified
as a historically black university, the institution maintains the lowest African American student enrollment and highest white student enrollment of the nation’s black institutions of higher education. Additionally, the faculty is 92% white and at the time in which the study occurred, Bluefield State College was the only historically black school to have a white president.

In documenting and analyzing the significant changes that have taken place at Bluefield State University, Brown (2002b) coined the term transdemography to describe “…shifts in the statistical composition of the student population within the corresponding institutions based solely on race” (p. 264). This is particularly important for public historically black colleges and universities because they are indisputably the primary targets of desegregation initiatives. Bluefield State University, however, is an example of collegiate desegregation gone awry (Drummond, 2000; Levinson, 2000).

There are no Black Greek-letter organizations on campus. Most of the traditions typical of an HBCU have vanished. There is no Greek life, no marching band, limited Black faculty/staff presence, and no signs of the historic traditions of the formerly Black-populated student body (Brown, 2002b, p. 270).

While Bluefield State University intended to make its campus more diverse by increasing the enrollment of white students, the black population of students disappeared in the process. According to Brown (2002b), this transdemographic shift poses a survival conflict for public black colleges. The institutions have to decide whether they will fulfill the desegregation mandates and endure the consequence of losing the cultural identity attributed to black colleges; or they can reject the desegregation initiatives and risk legal penalty (Brown, 2002b).

The changes at Bluefield State University highlight the fear that often accompanies discussions of diversity at black colleges. Even so, some critics continue to
challenge the existence of these institutions believing that these campuses inhibit the establishment of the type of diversity they seek. The push toward making black colleges more integrated institutions resonates in the book, *Diversifying Historically Black Colleges and Universities: A New Higher Education Paradigm* (Sims, 1994). Sims (1994) approaches the issue of diversity from a more critical posture in which she asserts that black colleges are maintaining segregated campus environments. The primary objective of the book is to provide faculty, staff, students, and administrators of historically black colleges and universities with a *how to* guide to increasing the presence of diversity. The use of the term diversity throughout Sims’ (1994) book refers solely to the premise of increasing the presence of white students on historically black college campuses. She identifies the book, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, and Unequal*, by Andrew Hacker as an influence in her decision to focus only on white students. Her position is that although different ethnic groups exist, the dynamics between black and white people is a more prevalent concern due to the long history of segregation and inequality between the two groups. Similar to Willie’s (1981/1994) work, Sims (1994) details the need for and the benefits of diversity and why it is imperative for all historically black colleges and universities to take heed to what she identifies as the new higher education paradigm.

Diversity is not a new higher education topic. Most colleges and universities embrace the term diversity because it represents deliberate attempts at inclusiveness, access, and opportunity. Predominantly white institutions, in particular, regularly promote the value of making their campuses more diverse in terms of the population and heavily recruit other race students. The logic behind such initiatives stems partly from the
genuine desire to do the right thing and make higher education a viable option for all people. The other part of the explanation is that institutions of higher education cannot uphold the archaic doctrine of separate and unequal. Colleges and universities are required by law to make campuses more diverse in terms of racial composition. The push is for schools to embrace the idea of multiculturalism. Sims (1994) argues that the issue of diversity is somewhat problematic for historically black colleges and universities. She identifies it as the unspoken dilemma that black institutions of higher education fail to properly address. The key stakeholders readily recognize the need to diversify black schools, yet they fail to implement concrete plans of actions.

The dilemma of diversity remains unspoken because individuals invested in maintaining the legacy of black colleges worry about the implications of recruiting white students. The concern again is what will happen to the rich cultural identity that has served to empower black students? According to Sims (1994), the advantages of diversifying black colleges clearly outweigh the disadvantages and concerns about disrupting the cultural aspect of black college life. Diversity is a valuable tool that teaches tolerance and understanding. The matter of diversifying black colleges proves beneficial for the black students enrolled and the white students recruited as both groups are able to learn from each other’s experiences. The reoccurring message echoed throughout the book is that the world is not just black and white and institutions of higher education should not be also. The first step is convincing black college stakeholders of the importance and necessity of diversifying their campuses by increasing the white population of students. The second step, and perhaps the more critical one, is showing
historically black colleges and universities how to implement and maintain diversity initiatives.

The significance of Sims’ (1994) work is that she does provide a plan of action to aid black colleges in their efforts to diversifying their campuses. She suggests that the curriculum must be reformed and well suited to meet the needs of a more diverse student population. The addition of courses focusing on other cultures and languages, for example, shows a commitment to diversity. Historically black colleges and universities must aggressively recruit white students and Sims (1994) proposes the establishment of special committees devoted solely to this mission. The recruitment materials should be directed to both the white parents and the students. The message must be communicated that admission is open to all people regardless of their race, sex, or disability. The objective is to make white students feel comfortable and safe in an environment where they are the minority. The committee can also target junior high and high schools with a predominantly white student population and make them aware of the opportunities available at historically black institutions. A helpful recruitment strategy is to include white students currently enrolled in black colleges so that the students are able to see individuals who look like themselves and who are successfully functioning in an environment that is majority African American. In addition to recruitment initiatives, black colleges must be prepared to sustain their white student population. Sims (1994) recommends that historically black institutions restructure their campuses by implementing mandatory diversity workshops for faculty, creating support services that cater to the needs of white students, and by modifying extracurricular activities so that white students are able to participate and get involved.
The problem with most of the literature on diversity at historically black colleges and universities is that it often portrays these institutions as segregated institutions void of any type of diversity. These depictions often provide a false representation of the black college environment and ultimately contributes to the misconception that black schools are reserved only for black people. Indeed there is room for improvement in terms of increasing diversity and the suggestions on how to do so are quite helpful. The problem is that historically black colleges and universities do not get credit for the diversity they do have. Willie (1981b) posits that diversity is present on black college campuses in terms of the varying socioeconomic status of the student body. Historically black colleges and universities attract students from both poor and privileged backgrounds. The students are placed in an environment where they are forced to coexist. According to Willie (1981b), “Such diversity provides an inhospitable environment for the development of social class stereotypes” (p.7). This type of diversity serves as a valuable learning tool for students as they are able to confront some of the stereotypes that plague individuals based on issues of class and status. The black college campus serves as a platform for interaction, engagement, learning and ultimately growth in understanding and tolerance.

Profile of the American College President

“...no one will understand the college president in America, his services and responsibilities, without understanding the nature of the college and university themselves” (Stoke, 1959, p. 3).

The history of American higher education illustrates that presidents of institutions were traditionally white men selected from the clergy or other religious ministries (Cohen, 1998; Shapiro, 1998). Protestant religious denominations founded these institutions and the presidents were responsible for teaching ethics and moral philosophy.
In response to the changing times, however, the presidential profile has evolved into a more science driven and business-like approach (Kauffman, 1980). Burton (2003) suggests that three recent trends have emerged over the years in regard to the profiling of the college presidency. First, more institutions are hiring presidents outside of the faculty or academic ranks. Second, the path to the presidency is often complicated by issues of race, gender, and previous work experience. Third, more attention is given to the role of mentors and the importance of an institutional fit between the president and the college or university.

Given the important role and far-reaching influence of the college president, it is important to know who these people are and how they arrive at these positions Cohen and March (1986) examined the career path of presidents in their book, *Leadership and Ambiguity*. They identified the normative or traditional career ladder of college presidents which involved a teaching or faculty appointment, followed by significant administrative experience. The previous administrative experience included the position of department chairperson, dean, and vice-president/provost for academic affairs.

In a more recent study, Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) also examined the career path of college presidents. The three primary questions of the study include: (1) What are the alternate career paths followed by college presidents? (2) Is there a relationship between career path and institutional type? (3) Is there a relationship between the career path and the personal characteristics of presidents? The 1995 American Council on Education (ACE) report on college and university presidents provided the data for this analysis.
In their research, Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) operationally defined the path of the presidents’ careers into two major categories, traditional and non-traditional. They coined the terms steward and scholar to refer to the normative career ladder developed by Cohen and March (1986). Scholar-presidents referred to those presidents who held previous faculty positions and progressed through administrative appointments. The steward-president, on the other hand, represented presidents who did not have teaching experience and moved into the position strictly through the administrative path. The terms spanner and stranger were conceived in reference to the non-traditional category. According to Birnbaum and Umbach (2001), spanners were presidents who left the academy during some point in their career before assuming their position as president. Stranger-presidents were individuals who came from outside of higher education and had no teaching experience.

The findings of the study indicated that approximately 89% of all presidents followed one of the traditional paths. Scholar presidents represented 66.3% and stewards consisted of 22.4% of the sample studied. This suggests that the majority of presidents initiated their career as faculty members and moved through the academic ranks into the presidency.

**African American Presidents and Administrators**

Moving beyond issues of career trajectory, numerous research studies focus on African Americans and other people of color in higher education (Holmes, 2004). This racialized agenda indicates the recognition that race influences the way in which individuals experience various aspects of higher education. The majority of African American administrators work at historically black institutions (Roebuck & Murty,
1993). Although few studies concentrate solely on presidents, they are often included in the larger sample with other administrators.

Although he does not focus exclusively on college presidents, Hoskins (1978) produced a classic work on the status of black administrators in higher education. The purpose of his study was to determine if differences existed between black administrators at predominantly black institutions and black administrators at predominantly white institutions. The differences examined included background characteristics, methods of recruitment and/or selection, and opinions and perceptions toward employment. Administrators were selected from both black land-grant institutions and white land-grant institutions with the total population being 457. Participants were required to hold the title of assistant dean or higher. President was the highest academic office and although only one was found at the predominantly white institution, 18 responded from the predominantly black institutions. The researcher constructed a questionnaire and mailed them to all the identified black administrators. The results of the study are divided into three categories: background characteristics, recruitment methods, and professional characteristics.

*Background Characteristics.* The study showed that differences exist regarding background characteristics. Administrators at black institutions were older than their colleagues at white institutions. Hoskins (1978) suggests that this finding could have serious implications for the future of black institutions as these institutions may potentially experience a shortage of trained black professionals. In terms of educational level, the findings confirmed no significant differences existed between the administrators. This particular finding is important, according to the researcher, due to
the misguided assumption that black institutions are inferior learning environments. The type of institution where the administrators received their undergraduate degrees varied significantly. Administrators at black campuses primarily attended black institutions and the majority of those at white institutions were educated in predominantly white institutions. Both groups, however, received their advanced degrees (both at the master’s and doctoral level) at white institutions. This finding is not surprising due to the lack of graduate programs at many black institutions during the time of this study. Comparing the religious preference of the administrators resulted in significant differences.

Administrators at black institutions showed: Protestant, 53.7%; Roman Catholic, 3.8%; Black Muslim, 0.5%; and other religious preference, 3.9%. The findings for administrators on predominantly white campuses yielded: Protestant, 29.6%; Roman Catholic, 7.4%; Black Muslim, 0.00%; and other, 18.0% (Hoskins, 1978).

**Methods of Recruitment and/or Selection.** Similar to background characteristics, administrators at black colleges also experienced a more diverse collection of recruiting and selection procedures. The method of recruitment varied significantly between the administrators. Administrators at predominantly black institutions remained in the same institution for many years and came up through the ranks of their current position. Their responsibilities included teaching, raising funds for the institution, and administrative duties. Some of the administrators were recruited from other black institutions. At white institutions, however, the majority of the administrators obtained their positions by applying through vacancies. This finding does not suggest that the recruitment of black educators did not occur. According to Hoskins (1978), as soon as predominantly white institutions filled their predetermined quotas, they were more inclined to stop looking for
any more black candidates. In terms of learning of the position, at black institutions, the administrators learned of the position through friends or other professional colleagues. Similarly, the administrators at white institutions learned of their position through acquaintances, but often to a lesser degree. Administrators at white institutions were often found through search and screen committees (Hoskins, 1978).

Professional Characteristics. Administrators at predominantly black institutions acquired higher rank than administrators at white institutions. This finding is not surprising due to the fact that many black administrators were educated in the black schools, and often remained in these institutions for their professional careers. In terms of the type of students taught, no differences existed between the administrators. Both taught undergraduates, graduates, and a combination of both. Although white institutions offered more graduate level courses, administrators on black college campuses taught significantly more than their colleagues on predominantly white campuses. The time in the position varied between administrators. Black administrators at black schools had more seniority in their positions than administrators at white schools. No significant differences were found in the amount of time devoted to teaching, research and writing, and administrative responsibilities (Hoskins, 1978).

Focusing on one particular type of administrator, Lewis (1988) conducted a study exploring the career development of African American college presidents. The objective of the study was to determine if sponsored or contest mobility characterized their career development. Sponsored mobility referred to individuals who are selected early in their careers and are groomed and mentored into their occupational positions. Contest
mobility, on the other hand, identified persons who are socialized to value competition and strategic planning as the means to attain their career goals.

To gather data on the trajectory of African American college presidents, Lewis (1988) distributed a questionnaire concerning career mobility issues, and educational, personal, and professional background information. The total population included 169 African American college presidents and 93 questionnaires were returned for analysis. The researcher also conducted 20 follow-up interviews. The major findings of the study showed that the average African American college president is a black male between the ages of 50 and 59. Most of the presidents graduated from a historically black or predominantly black higher education institution as an undergraduate and pursued their graduate degrees at majority white institutions. African American college presidents generally resided over four-year historically black or predominantly black institutions. The results also revealed that career development cannot be characterized solely as sponsored or contest mobility. The researcher found that most of the presidents experienced some degree of both (Lewis, 1988).

Holmes (2004) conducted a more recent qualitative study on African American presidents. Entitled, *An Overview of African American College Presidents: A Game of Two Steps Forward, One Step Backward, and Standing Still*, the purpose of her study was to produce a profile of African American presidents in public and private institutions. More specifically, she focused on finding factors that the presidents considered to be most salient to both their success and failure. Six presidents, three males and three females, agreed to participate. Based on the Carnegie classification system of 1994, the
institutions in which they worked included one public doctorate-granting, three public community colleges, and two baccalaureates.

The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews and asked the participants about their career path and issues pertaining to the impact of race. The findings revealed similar themes across institutional types. The presidents discussed the importance of family and their role in pushing them to achieve academically and further their education on the collegiate level. Mentoring by other colleagues was also cited as being helpful in their adjustment and career development. Religious leaders and affiliation with religious organizations were also recognized as a great sense of comfort and encouragement. The presidents varied in age ranging from 55 to 64 and all of them had children who earned college degrees. In fact, three of them had children who were pursuing graduate or professional degrees. Four of the presidents attended predominantly white institutions throughout their educational process while two attended black colleges for their undergraduate degree and predominantly white schools for their graduate studies. In terms of career path, two of the presidents were serving as college president for the second time. The four remaining presidents held prior positions as vice president for academic affairs or the dean of instruction. All six presidents, however, held faculty positions in two and four year institutions prior to their job as president. Based on the 2002 findings of the ACE study on college presidents, Holmes (2004) found that African American administrators were similar to their white counterparts in terms of presidential characteristics.

Lindsay (1999) conducted a qualitative research study on African American women university executives. Information was gathered through semi-structured
interviews and an examination of the official school catalogs and other relevant written
documents on the institutions’ mission statements and strategic plans. The sample
consisted of three presidents and one provost of both public and private universities
located in various regions throughout the United States. One university was identified as
a historically black institution of higher education.

The researcher found that the four women executives earned doctoral degrees
from Research I institutions or reputable smaller schools. They discussed the importance
of mentoring and how it positively impacted their career. The women in the study
identified the critical role that their mothers and other African American women leaders
played in their career development, but also shared that it was difficult to have mentors as
the climbed the administrative ladder to the presidency because so few African American
women occupy this position. The executives addressed the challenges they faced as
African American women in positions dominated by white men. Lindsay (1999)
discovered a pattern that the women shared regarding the expectations of their work and
ability. The women executives believed that they had to go above and beyond the
responsibilities of their jobs because the expectations were higher for them in comparison
to white males. Despite this challenge, the women executives enjoyed serving as mentors
and role models, particularly for young women.

**Presidents of Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

Outside a few studies that look at the people who serve in these positions, the
early literature on presidents of historically black colleges and universities rests solely on
understanding their role in improving the conditions of their institutions. Most of the
early researchers were African American educators with an invested interest in the
success of education at black institutions. Willie and MacLeish (1978) conducted a survey on presidents of black colleges and asked the leaders about their priorities regarding the future direction of their institutions. Most of the sample stated that educational matters served as key priorities. Curriculum reform, faculty development, and the implementation of new graduate programs were a few suggestions the presidents found to be critical to the future success of historically black colleges and universities. Financial matters ranked second in terms of importance. The presidents viewed increasing funds for student aid, research, faculty salaries, equipment, and library resources as necessary improvements. The presidents also suggested the need for black institutions to improve in terms of management, particularly as it relates to recruiting more students and improving registration and public relations.

In addition to management concerns, (Willie and MacLeish, 1978) inquired about the presidents’ views toward the racial integration of black college campuses. The presidents emphasized that black colleges have always been diverse at all institutional levels including the students, faculty, and administrators. One president stated, “Government actions to reverse the consequences of centuries of racial desegregation must not be used as an excuse to dismantle or change the ethic orientation of the black public colleges of the country” (Willie & MacLeish, 1978 p. 145). Clearly the presidents recognized the value in making historically black colleges and universities more diverse institutions and expanding access and opportunity to all individuals irrespective of race, creed, or national origin. However, they also expressed the need to maintain the historic roots of the institutions and not to lose sight of the mission onto which black colleges were founded, the education of African American students.
Black college presidents are faced with numerous challenges, particularly as it relates to fiscal matters. The problems they face are severe and the support they receive is scant (Willie & MacLeish, 1978). Prezell Robinson, a former president of a black college, St. Augustine College, offers an introspective look into the president’s role in managing scarce resources. Robinson (1978) declares, “The tragedy of the inequity is that the American public, at large, seems to expect black colleges to produce more with less than any other segment of American higher education” (p. 158). This realization reflects the burden that black college presidents must overcome in order to ensure the survival of their institutions. Based on his experiences as a president, Robinson (1978) suggests that presidents must have an effective board of trustees. The trustees’ responsibilities include working to provide funds for the institution and establishing key objectives consistent with the charter of the institutions. The president does not work alone. As the chief academic officer, the president must demonstrate leadership skills and have the respect and confidence of the board of trustees, faculty, staff, and students. The overall responsibility of the black college president, according to Robinson (1978), is to provide leadership, be a good fundraiser and manager, and incorporate other administrators and faculty into the decision making processes.

The most current and comprehensive study on presidents of historically black colleges and universities is a dissertation authored by Debra Buchanan (1988). Similar to earlier studies, the purpose of this study was to determine the important roles for presidents of black colleges. The researcher also investigated the qualifications required of the position and examined both public and private institutions to find out if the presidents maintained congruent perceptions.
In Buchanan’s (1988) study, the population included 95% presidents of black colleges obtained through the National Association for Equal Opportunity (NAFEO). The researcher randomly selected four institutions (two public; two private) to investigate. In addition to the president, the academic vice president and the chair of the faculty senate or a senior faculty member were asked to participate in the study. Although the presidents served as the primary target, Buchanan (1988) solicited the varying perspectives in order to get a sense of how the role of the president was perceived by those outside of its rank. A total of twelve people participated in the study and each position was represented by four people. While the gender composition varied among the academic vice presidents and the senior faculty members, the sample of presidents consisted of all males. The researcher developed a questionnaire based on the assertions in the literature and conducted structured interviews.

Based on the research findings, the presidential roles considered most important include:

1. articulating a vision for the institution the position and examined both public and private institutions to find out if the presidents had congruent perceptions.
2. assembling an administrative team
3. providing leadership during crisis
4. planning for future directions
5. managing resources
6. providing a sense of unity for the achievement of common goals
7. providing an environment conducive to leadership development
8. securing financial support
9. shaping and reshaping institutional goals.

The qualifications viewed as most valuable to aspiring presidents were identified into three groups: academic preparation, professional experience, and personal qualities. The most valuable academic fields included psychology, law, social sciences, and education. Professor, department chair, academic dean, and academic vice president were considered key professional experiences. The personal qualities perceived as being important were good communication and interpersonal skills, astuteness, possession of high energy, future-focused, and effective management skills. Both public and private black colleges shared similar perceptions regarding the roles and qualifications of the presidents. The researcher attributed this congruence to the fact that historically black colleges and universities function in similar environments (Buchanan, 1988).

Conclusion

The review of the literature shows that historically black colleges and universities are an integral component of the American higher education system. The various commentaries from the myriad of sources indicate the overall interest in black colleges, particularly as it relates to the more popular areas of black college research which include history, desegregation, students, faculty, and diversity. The challenge is the fundamental topic of mission remains an overlooked area of research. Many scholars implicitly examine mission, yet few of them directly address the mission of historically black colleges and universities in a systematic manner. Many years ago W.E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington initiated the debate on the mission of historically black colleges, yet current scholarship neglects to thoroughly address it.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This is a qualitative study that uses elite interviewing to explore how presidents of four-year historically black colleges and universities define and implement the mission of their respective institutions. The objective is to move beyond the confines of traditional mission statements in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the role of black colleges within the larger system of higher education. The presidents are targeted because as the chief executive officers they possess a comprehensive authority and responsibility over the institutions and are therefore most qualified to address the topic of mission.

The following questions guide the research: How do presidents of four-year historically black colleges and universities define the mission of their institutions? How do presidents of four-year historically black colleges and universities implement the mission of their institutions? What do presidents of four-year historically black colleges and universities identify as significant barriers to mission implementation? This chapter details the research methods utilized for the study. The chapter is presented in six sections: (a) qualitative research, (b) conceptual framework, (c) population and sample, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, and (f) limitations of the study.

Qualitative Research

The study is employs qualitative research methods due to the nature of the questions posed. According to Schwandt (2001), qualitative inquiry, “…aims at understanding the meaning of human inquiry”(p. 213). McMillan & Schumacher (1997) echo this sentiment and offer the following:
Qualitative research is concerned with understanding the social phenomenon from the participants' perspective. Understanding is acquired by analyzing the many contexts of the participants and by narrating participants' meanings for these situations and events. Participants' meanings include their feelings, beliefs, ideals, thoughts, and actions (p. 392).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000), two of the foremost authorities on the method of qualitative research state:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 3).

Despite the various definitions of qualitative research, all of the authors' interpretations coincide with Bogdan & Biklen's (1998) identification of five features of qualitative inquiry which include naturalistic, descriptive, concern with process, inductive, and meaning. Situating the study within the context of qualitative method provides the researcher an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of how presidents of historically black colleges and universities make sense of their campuses. The primary focus is on quality, a word that identifies with the nature or essence of something. The qualitative approach is particularly useful because it creates a platform to give a voice to black college presidents; a voice that remains relatively silent in the academic literature.

*Elite Interviewing*

Interviews are conversations with structure and purpose (Kvale, 1996) that serve as a means for gaining multiple perspectives on a given topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). An elite interview focuses on participants who hold important and highly selective positions
of authority and influence. The study utilized the qualitative technique of elite interviewing as the vessel to better understand the mission of black colleges from an insider’s perspective. The president serves as the ultimate insider because she or he is responsible for all facets of campus operations. Presidents are elites because they occupy the most powerful position on campus as the highest ranking administrator. The biggest challenge with studying an elite group of people is gaining access to them (Dexter, 1970; Hertz & Imber, 1995; Moyser & Wagstaffe, 1987; Thomas, 1995). The process of acquiring access to participants and establishing a relationship with them is a critical component of qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Krathwohl, 1998; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Maxwell, 1996). According to Thomas (1995), elites are visible but not accessible. Perhaps this challenge helps to explain the lack of studies, particularly qualitative studies, available on presidents of historically black institutions of higher education.

Symbolic Interactionism

The qualitative research study is situated within the interpretive tradition of symbolic interactionism. According to Schwandt (2001), this social psychological theory results primarily from the works of George Hebert Mead and Hebert Blumer. Symbolic interactionism suggests that people construct meaning through social interactions. Although the act of making meaning is subjective, the process of interacting helps individuals to develop common definitions or shared perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). For the purposes of the study, symbolic interaction recognizes the role of the president and the environment in which they reside. Although presidents are elites, mission making is not an isolated process. Presidents are able to understand their
campuses through the interactions with students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the surrounding community.

**Conceptual Framework**

The framework for the study is embedded primarily in higher education’s core area of organization and governance. A helpful way to understand how colleges and universities work is to view them as organizations (Birbaum, 1988a; Bolman & Deal, 1997). Institutions of higher education represent what Scott (1998) describes as an open system organization. An open system consists of individuals with varied responsibilities who contribute to the collective mission on an organization. According to Scott (1998), “…the open system perspective stresses the reciprocal ties that bind and relate the organization with those elements that surround and penetrate it” (p. 100). The term governance refers to “…the structures and processes through which institutional participants interact with and influence each other and communicate with the larger environment” (Birnbaum, 1988a, p. 4). Organization and governance provides a useful foundation for analyzing the mission of historically black colleges and universities because it calls attention to the fact that institutions of higher education are multilayered organizations and the way in which they are governed varies across campuses. The assertion is not that black colleges operate in a different structural manner from other types of higher education institutions, but rather certain considerations should be made when attempting to examine them because of the population they primarily serve and their historical development. Additionally, all historically black colleges and universities are not the same and the assumption is that the presidents’ perspectives on mission will vary from one campus to the next. The purpose of this framework is to highlight the
following considerations that guide the study: (a) sensemaking, (b) organizational culture and context, and (c) contingency theory.

Sensemaking

The mission of a college or university defines its’ overall function, objective, and contribution. Although mission appears to be a fundamental component of any organization, creating, understanding, and articulating a sense of purpose is a complex process (Cohen & March, 1986; Hartley, 2002). Colleges and universities have numerous responsibilities. They are expected to provide an academic foundation, social awareness, build character, increase understanding, cultivate tolerance, shape morals and ultimately mold the minds of young people. The problem is that institutions of higher education attempt to be all things to all people and as a result, the basic topic of mission gets lost in the shuffle of other responsibilities. This problem does not negate the importance of understanding mission, but rather calls attention to the fact that discourse on this topic is needed, particularly for historically black colleges and universities.

Karl E. Weick (1995), an expert on organizational behavior, proposes the use of sensemaking as a framework to aid in the process of examining the dynamics of organizations. Sensemaking literally means to make sense of something. In the case of organizations, sensemaking is concerned with the ways in which individuals generate interpretations and construct meaning. Sensemaking is about processing, organizing, and transforming the subjective into something concrete. Sensemaking shapes organizational structure and influences behavior.

The seven features that best characterize sensemaking include (a) grounded in identity construction, (b) retrospective, (c) enactive of sensible environments, (d) social,
(e) ongoing, (f) focused on and extracted by cues, and (g) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995). Identity construction implies that sensemaking involves an individual, or a sensemaker. The identity of the sensemaker represents her role within an organization and it is constructed based on interactions with other people and the environment in which she is situated. The retrospective feature of sensemaking offers that “…people can know what they are doing only after they have done it” (Weick, 1995, p. 24). The creation of meaning requires attention and deliberate effort and it can only be accomplished after something has been lived or experienced. Individuals are more cognizant of what they have done, rather than what they are doing.

The enactive of sensible environments characteristic of sensemaking indicates that people help to create the environments that they are a part of. The environment is not a distant entity and sensemaking forces individuals to recognize that they are the environment because of the contributions they make that ultimately shapes and structure it. The social aspect of sensemaking simply suggests that the process does not occur in isolation. Sensemaking involves a sense of community, interaction, shared meanings, and common language and symbols. The reference to sensemaking as ongoing indicates that it is a process that never ceases because individuals are in a constant state of being. The need to extract cues from sensemaking suggests that because people are able to make sense out of every situation, it is important to help direct their attention. This feature of sensemaking is particularly helpful for researchers as they must provide the proper context in order to obtain relevant information from the sensemaker. Sensemaking should not be a meaningless process, nor driven by accuracy. According to Weick (1995), “…sensemaking is about plausibility, pragmatics, coherence, reasonableness, creation,
invention, and instrumentality” (p. 57). Individuals experience and interpret the world in varied ways and each of their respective truths is valuable.

Why is sensemaking an important consideration for the study of the mission of historically black colleges and universities? Black institutions of higher education, more than other types of postsecondary schools, consistently face questions concerning their worth. Many people opposed the mere development of these schools and as a result, they continue to struggle with justifying their place within the larger higher education system. The sensemaking lens provides an opportunity to attempt to answer the critics who are skeptical of the purpose that black colleges serve. Drawing from Weick’s (1995) explanation of sensemaking, here is an explanation of how the research study aligns with the seven aforementioned characteristics and how it utilizes this ontological framework as a guiding lens.

For the purpose of the study, the presidents of four-year historically black colleges and universities will serve as the sensemaker. As the chief executive officers, they remain abreast of all university operations and are therefore qualified to retrospectively make sense of the mission of their respective institutions. Presidents are an integral part of the campus environment and play key role in structuring the overall objectives. The president, however, does not act in isolation and recognizes the value of the social aspect of sensemaking. Board members, other administrators, faculty, staff, students, and the surrounding communities influence and contribute to ongoing decision making that impact the schools. The intent of the study is to extract cues only on the topic of mission and to provide presidents of historically black colleges and universities with
an opportunity to share their perspectives and tell their stories concerning the purpose of their institutions.

Organizational culture and context

Organizational culture represents a critical component of any organization, particularly colleges and universities. Researchers suggest that any attempt to thoroughly understanding how organizations work, begins with an examination of the culture (Clark, 1972; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Masland, 1985; Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Schein, 2004). Edgar H. Schein, a pioneer in the field of psychology, has created an extensive body of work focusing on the dynamics of organizations. In his most recent book, Organizational culture and leadership, Schein (2004) insists that when individuals attempt to study and analyze any type of organization, they must use a cultural lens. The concept of culture is complex because the word encompasses a multitude of meanings. Culture identifies a way of life, an attitude or behavior characteristic of a particular organization or social group. Culture is the invisible tapestry (Kuh & Whitt, 1988) that induces purpose and provides meaning (Masland, 1985). Culture is synonymous with words such as values, beliefs, rituals, norms, traditions, and background.

According to Schein (2004), the four key characteristics that distinguish culture from other terms include structural stability, depth, breadth, and patterning or integration. Structural stability means that culture is resilient and firmly established. This stability plays a major role in contributing to the overall identity of the organization. Culture is powerful in that as individuals matriculate in and out of organizations, the culture remains intact. Depth implies that culture is the foundation of any organization. Depth consists of the intangibles that may not be visible to the naked eye, yet it represents the
fabric of the organization that is readily felt. Breadth signifies the influential power of culture. Culture impacts every aspect of a functioning organization. Finally, the patternning or integration characteristic involves the merging of the synonymous words (traditions, norms, background, values, beliefs, and rituals) into what is identified as culture. Culture is all encompassing and understanding it enables individuals to engage in what Weick (1995) identifies as sensemaking.

Culture is a familiar term, yet it remains abstract. This abstractness contributes to the ongoing need to define, articulate, and measure what culture truly is.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of culture as a concept is that it points us to phenomena that are below the surface, that are powerful in their impact but invisible and to a considerable degree unconscious. In that sense, culture is to a group what personality or character is to an individual. We can see the behavior that results, but often we cannot see the forces underneath that cause certain kinds of behavior” (Schein, 2004, p. 8)

Historically black colleges and universities pose a similar kind of curiosity. Since their inception, black institutions of higher education have struggled to compete with the prestige, power, and resources afforded to majority white schools. The reality is that black colleges were founded on the premise of separate and unequal and they received less funding for the mere maintenance of their campuses. As a result, these schools were left with less of everything. Indeed black colleges have made significant progress, but they continue to fight for respect as viable higher education institutions. The irony is that despite the shortcomings of black colleges and universities, they persevere. The key question is how? How can black colleges attract so many students when they do not have the beautiful campus facilities of majority schools? How are historically black colleges able to enroll students with learning deficiencies, graduate them, and send a significant number off to graduate and professional schools? How is it that North Carolina A& T
State University is the leading producer of African American baccalaureates in engineering? How can Xavier University of Louisiana place more African Americans into medical school than any other school in the nation? With the majority of African American students attending predominantly white colleges, how is it that historically black colleges and universities remain the undergraduate home of most African American federal judges, medical doctors, army officers, and doctoral degree recipients (Brown, 2002a).

Fleming (1984) proffers that the mystique surrounding historically black colleges and universities stems partly from the inability to measure the intangible services they provide. The service of a nurturing campus environment or the provision of supportive faculty, for example, contributes to the ongoing achievement of students, yet these intangibles remain difficult to quantify. The inability to measure such services place black colleges and universities at a considerable disadvantage in regard to the research community because the value of these services often go unnoticed. Although a sense of wonder surrounds historically black colleges and the concept of culture, both undeniably perform a necessary function within the larger system of higher education.

In the book, *African American Culture and Heritage in Higher Education Research and Practice*, Kassie Freeman (1998) identifies herself an African American storyteller of higher education research and raises a critical question, “Why is it imperative to consider culture and heritage in academic research and policy making?” The problem, in her opinion, is that the real educational stories of black people are not properly depicted in academic research. Numerous studies target African Americans, but researchers often neglect to consider the culture and history of black people. This view
coincides with Brown’s (2003) assertion that one of the fallacies concerning research on black colleges is that most of the work is approached from an etic, or distant perspective. Investigators remain outsiders because they conduct research through observation and fail to fully engage in, or merely consider, the culture of the black college campus. An outsider is not limited only to non-African American investigators, but rather all researchers who fail to situate their study within a culturally sensitive framework. The absence of this consideration contributes to the plethora of inadequate stories told of the African American learning experience that dominate the field of education under the guise of reputable academic research.

The challenge is that improper assessment breeds improper solutions. In order to remedy this problem, Freeman (1998) proposes the need for a cultural context framework. She writes:

Cultural context, then, can be defined as interrelated characteristics that provide a perspective-frame of reference- for understanding individuals’ and/or groups’ ways of knowing and being. These interrelated characteristics generally include the sum total of the makeup of individuals. By way of example, cultural context is to the individual as conceptual framework is to research. When either is missing, the purpose, clarity of meaning, or sense of direction seems to be unclear or lost (Freeman, 1998, p. 2).

The consideration of cultural context is imperative for research on historically black colleges and universities. All higher education institutions have some degree of culture embedded with them. They possess their own language, symbols, rituals, traditions, and ceremonies (Manning, 2000) that impact sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Black colleges, however, receive regular recognition and often praise for providing a campus culture that is unique and empowering for African American students (Brown, 2002a; Brown & Davis, 2001; Fleming, 1984; Garibaldi, 1984; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). The framework
of cultural context forces the researcher to acknowledge that historically black colleges and universities have a distinct organizational culture as a group of institutions united in the historic mission of providing educational opportunities for African American students. In addition, all black colleges are different and each respective school has its own sense of culture. The examination of historically black colleges and universities, for the purposes of the study, requires deliberate consideration of culture and its’ influence on presidential perspectives on defining mission.

Contingency theory

The contingency theory operates primarily within an open system perspective that suggests that the environment plays a critical role in deciding the manner in which an organization functions (Birnbaum, 1998; Scott, 1998; Tierney, 1988). Contingency theory suggests that different situations require different patterns of behavior and traits (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989).

In an influential work entitled, *A Theory of Leadership*, Fiedler (1967) introduces the contingency model and asserts that effectiveness depends on the relationship between leadership style and the extent to which the situation allows the leader to exert influence over group members. In this particular context, leadership style refers to a personality factor that causes a leader to be either task-oriented or relationship-oriented. Leaders who are task-oriented tend to approach leadership in the traditional sense in which they take charge and direct group members. Conversely, relationship-oriented leaders approach leadership in a more cooperative manner by inviting group members to share in the decision-making responsibilities. The situation addressed in the contingency theory refers to characteristics of the particular environment in which the leader is located.
Fiedler (1967) proposes the consideration of three important situational factors: (1) the leader’s position power, (2) the structure of the task, and (3) the interpersonal relationship between leaders and other members of the organization. Position power is the extent to which the position itself authorizes leaders to control the direction of the organization by convincing group members to accept and follow their leadership. Task structure refers to the degree to which group members are presented clear goals and expectations regarding their assigned job. The interpersonal relationship between leaders and members, perhaps the most important of all three factors, reflects the amount of support group members provide to their leaders based on the leaders’ personality and work history within the organization.

The fundamental premise of contingency theory is that leadership varies depending on the demands of the external environment (Birnbaum, 1988b). In order to be effective, leaders must find a favorable fit within an organization. According to Fiedler (1967), a leader who performs well under one set of conditions does not necessarily translate into effective leadership in another situation. The contingency theory is relevant to the study of black college presidents because it validates the need for a more specialized focus of the college presidency. The traditional method of investigating college presidents consists of educators acquiring the perspectives from leaders of different institutional types ranging from large, research institutions to small, liberal arts colleges. While this approach is helpful in that it incorporates the experiences of a diverse group of presidents, the findings are presented in such a way that the value of the varying perspectives is lost. The concept of leadership is projected as a consensus because the gathered information is synthesized to the detriment of discovering the individuality of
the presidents based on the various kinds of institutions they lead. This method is particularly problematic for presidents of black colleges because these leaders are often excluded from larger studies of the college presidency. As a result, their leadership experience is neither considered nor documented. Contingency theory acknowledges the need to understand the dynamics of leadership and how leaders vary due to the situation in which they are placed.

The contingency theory is appropriate for the study because the theory calls attention to the black college environment, recognizing that black schools are a diverse group of institutions and that the ways in which presidents define the mission is contingent upon numerous factors. Brown (2003) states that the mission of black colleges is contingent upon time, place, and circumstance. Based on the tenets of contingency theory, the mission of black institutions is not a universal standard and presidents will define mission based on the values and priorities deemed important by the institution in which they lead. The assumption of the study is that although black colleges are not homogenous institutions, they share an organizational culture that differs significantly from mainstream higher education. The overall cultural context of the black college campus influences the ways in which presidents make sense of their institutions.

**Population and Sample**

The overall population of the study consists of presidents of four-year colleges and universities federally designated as historically black institutions of higher education (see Appendix A). The American higher education institution is comprised of 89 four-year historically black colleges and universities (Brown, 2002a; Brown, Ricard, & Donahoo, 2004; Coaxum, 2001; Fleming, 1984; Garibaldi, 1984; Roebuck & Murty,
The researcher utilized purposive (or purposeful) sampling which consists of strategically selecting participants based on their ability to provide optimal insight in regard to the focus of a research study (Creswell 1998; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Krathwohl 1998; Maxwell, 1996; McMillan & Schumacher, 1997; Schwandt, 2001). The complete population of 89 four-year historically black college presidents received an invitation to participate in the study in an effort to attain more inclusive results. A total of 15 presidents completed the project, yielding approximately 16.85% of the population of four-year historically black college and university presidents.

The strength of this research study lies in the size of the sample when compared to the existing studies on presidents of historically black colleges and universities. The American Council on Education produces a series of reports on the national corpus of college and university presidents. This demographic database is a popular source of information as it details the presidents’ length of service, age, educational background, a host of other characteristics (Ross & Green, 2000). While the information is statistically precise and empirically rigorous, masked within these facts are the place and future of black college presidents. In Buchanan’s (1988) study on the roles and qualifications of black college presidents, the researcher completed 12 interviews with presidents, academic vice presidents, and senior faculty members. Only four presidents participated in the study. Holmes (2004) examined the career path of African American presidents. The researcher interviewed six presidents, but the results remain unclear of how many of many were presidents of historically black colleges. This research study, however, provides in-depth examination of the mission of historically black colleges from 16.85%
of the total population of four-year presidents of black colleges, thus making it the largest collection of data on black college presidents to date.

**Data Collection**

The effort to recruit participants for the study occurred in five phases due to the challenge of gaining access to elites. First, participant solicitation began with the drafting of a request letter by the researcher. Upon the dissertation chair’s approval, the researcher mailed the letters to the campus addresses of the entire population of 89 four-year historically black college and university presidents (see Appendix C). The letter succinctly explained the purpose and significance of the study and the intent was to convince the presidents that the research would make a meaningful contribution to the field of higher education. Hill (2002) contends that the race of the interviewer influences the interview process. As a result, the researcher revealed her identity as an African American graduate of a historically black school as a means to gain access (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) to the chief academic officers. Second, the researcher sent an electronic copy of the official letter directly to the presidents or the executive assistant to the presidents, provided that the schools’ home websites disclosed the information. Third, the researcher attended the 2005 White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities conference held in Washington, D.C. Many black college presidents participated in the conference, coincidentally titled, *The Mission Continues*. Next, the researcher traveled to New Orleans, Louisiana to attend the annual 2006 NAFEO (National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education) conference on African Americans in higher education. Finally, the researcher made personal phone calls to the presidents’ offices as a means to encourage them to get involved with the study.
In addition to the five phases, the researcher employed the snowball sampling technique. In qualitative research, snowball sampling occurs when one participant encourages another individual to engage in the research study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The researcher made a deliberate effort to get a diverse sample of presidents and institutions represented. In regard to the presidents, the researcher tried to acquire an adequate representation of women and presidents who have held both short and long term tenures. Historically black colleges and universities are a diverse cohort of institutions, therefore, the researcher made every attempt to include institutions that varied in terms of size, sector, and geographic location.

Prior to the interviews, participating presidents received a letter of informed consent (see Appendix D). The letter explained that participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that the responses would remain confidential. Confidentiality is critical, particularly when interviewing elites such as college presidents. The researcher informed the presidents that pseudonyms would be used in place of their names and the names of their respective schools. In addition to the letter of informed consent, the presidents received a copy of the interview questions. Again, because presidents are part of an elite class, this courtesy was extended so that they would be fully abreast of the nature of the research study.

The telephone interviews lasted approximately 35 to 60 minutes. A total of 14 presidents granted the researcher permission to record the interviews and one requested not to be audio taped. The semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix E) consisted of three categories of questions. The first set of questions served as a warm up or a getting to know you better type of question. These questions centered on the presidents’
personal background and their journey to acquiring the position. The specific research questions made up the second category. These questions steered the presidents’ attention directly to their institutions and their role within them. The third category asked questions about black colleges as a whole. The objective was to obtain presidential perspectives on the current and future state of all historically black colleges and universities based on their experiences as leaders of these institutions of higher education.

The researcher offered to send all of the participants a copy of the interview transcripts upon the completion of the telephone interview. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this process as member check. The offering of the transcribed interview occurred as a way to ensure the accuracy of the interview by allowing the presidents an opportunity to exam and provide feedback on the communication. Only one president accepted.

Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed all of the information gathered from the interviews with the 15 presidents. Primarily this occurred in order to ensure the accuracy of the information, but transcribing the interviews also provided the researcher with the opportunity to become immersed in the data which later aided in the coding process. Each interview was transcribed on the day that the interview took place in order to manage the large volume of data. The researcher began to identify emerging themes from the data throughout the interview and transcription process. As the presidents offered their perspectives on the mission of black colleges, both common and divergent themes emerged. The information was coded and analyzed based on the identified themes.
Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study include:

1. The study focuses only on four-year historically black colleges, not predominantly black colleges and universities or other minority serving institutions. Predominantly black institutions refer to colleges and universities with an enrollment of more than 50% African American student population (see Appendix B).

2. Although the study has the highest percentage of historically black college and university presidents included in a research study, it does not provide for the generalizability possible from unanimous participation.

3. The fact that the researcher conducted all of the interviews by telephone, may have influenced the way in which the presidents responded to the questions and how much information they disclosed. The presidents in the study may have been more comfortable talking with researcher if a relationship could have been established through personal contact.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of study. First, thorough profiles of both the presidents and the historically black colleges and universities sampled for the study establishes the context of the research findings. In addition to seeking answers to the specific research questions posed, an equally important underlying objective of the study is to bring attention to and focus on black colleges and the presidents who lead them. Prior to gaining the presidents’ perspectives on what constitutes their schools’ mission, the study would be remiss without careful examination of who they are as individuals and the details that distinguishes one historically black college from the next one.

The information provided comes primarily from the interviews with the presidents coupled with investigation of the various historically black college and university official school websites. The presidents varied in terms of how responsive they were to the interview questions and the black colleges varied in terms of how much information they detailed on their websites. Consequently, the scope of the profiles differs. Despite the varying levels of information provided, the study acknowledges the contributions of the total 15 participating presidents and schools (see Table 1). Although numerous studies focus on college presidents in general, presidents of historically black colleges and universities are either included in the periphery or completely omitted from the discussion. Accordingly, the study moves beyond the profile of the credentials and offers a more personal account of the presidents’ path to the position. This study provides a platform for presidents of black colleges to tell their stories and showcase their respective institutions of higher education. Pseudonyms replace the names of both the presidents
and the schools in order to protect their identities as agreed upon in the letter of informed consent.

Second, this chapter of the study details the presidents’ responses to the specific research questions posed. The presidents offered their perspectives on (a) how they define the mission of their respective institutions, (b) their role in implementing the mission, and (c) significant barriers that hinder mission implementation. The assertion is that black colleges have a distinct organizational culture due to the minority population they primarily serve. Presidents of historically black colleges and universities possess a comprehensive understanding of how these institutions function and are therefore able to provide valuable insight to their role in the larger system of American higher education.

Finally, the chapter concludes with the presidents’ perspectives on the current state of historically black colleges and universities as a whole. Black colleges face many of the same challenges and the presidents, as leaders of these institutions, share similar experiences. They offer their views on pressing concerns including (a) whether or not black colleges and universities serve a unique mission in comparison to other types of higher education institutions, (b) the relevance of the historic mission of educating African Americans, and (c) the overall importance of historically black colleges and universities.
Table 1

Profile of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Founding Year</th>
<th>Student Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morrison State University</td>
<td>Dr. Clarence Myers</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Early 1900s</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jemison State University</td>
<td>Dr. Scales Donahoo</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Late 1800s</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bassett State University</td>
<td>Dr. Bobby Isaac</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Late 1800s</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tubman University</td>
<td>Dr. Nathan Dudley</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Mid 1900s</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giovanni State University</td>
<td>Dr. Sultan Rovaris</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Late 1800s</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Angelou</td>
<td>Dr. Mathilda Marie</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Late 1800s</td>
<td>3,775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott King College</td>
<td>Dr. Earl Davis</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Mid 1800s</td>
<td>949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winfrey College</td>
<td>Ms. Mary Frances</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Mid 1800s</td>
<td>970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chisholm State University</td>
<td>Mr. Devon Lamard</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Early 1800s</td>
<td>1,545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurston State University</td>
<td>Dr. Jared Auguste</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Late 1800s</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walker University</td>
<td>Dr. Trevis Freeman</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Late 1800s</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shabazz University</td>
<td>Dr. Kerry Foster</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Mid 1800s</td>
<td>8,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooks University</td>
<td>Dr. Acosta Lee</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Mid 1900s</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waters University</td>
<td>Dr. Lyelle Boutte</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Late 1800s</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height University</td>
<td>Dr. John Spencer</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Early 1900s</td>
<td>7,700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-Pseudonyms replace the name of the college or university and the president.

Profile of Participating Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Contrary to popular belief, historically black colleges and universities are not all the same. Indeed they share a similar history and perhaps similar challenges, but black colleges possess their own identity and uniqueness in addition to their own strengths and weaknesses. The following descriptions aim to profile the black colleges and universities represented in the study as distinct higher education institutions. The profiles include information on historical development, student enrollment, degree offerings, and other relevant attributes attached to the represented historically black colleges and universities.
Morrison State University

Morrison State University is a public, comprehensive, liberal arts higher education institution founded in the early 1900s. The school is located in an urban, metropolitan city in the northeast region of the United States. The university developed as a normal school and its’ primary function was to prepare school teachers. Thirty-eight years after its’ founding, Morrison State University’s curriculum expanded and the institution began to offer baccalaureate degrees outside of teacher education. Currently, the school remains as the only higher education institution in the state to manage a public school. Currently, Morrison State University offers 53 undergraduate programs and nine master’s degree programs which include evening, weekend, and distance learning courses. Approximately 4000 students make up the campus population and the most popular majors include nursing, education, and social work.

Jemison State University

Jemison State University developed in the late 1800s as a land grant institution under the provisions of the Second Morrill Act of 1890. Originally referred to as a Colored Institute, Jemison State University’s early curriculum centered on teacher preparation and vocational training. As a result of Brown v. Board of Education, the public school transitioned into a predominantly white, older student population. Jemison State University, located on the east coast, has approximately 5000 students and offers twenty-two undergraduate programs in the field of criminal justice, business, teacher education, and social work. The school has two graduate programs at the master’s level in biotechnology and media studies. Additionally, Jemison State University provides
students with an opportunity to enroll in pre-professional programs that include dentistry, law, medicine, engineering, and pharmacy.

_Bassett State University_

The founding of Bassett State University occurred in the late 1800s as the only school in the state that provided education to African Americans. This land grant institution combines liberal arts and vocational training. The school, located in small town in the south, currently enrolls 5000 students and some of the most popular majors include education, accounting, computer science, and political science. Students choose from 54 undergraduate programs, 12 graduate programs, and 18 teacher certification programs. Bassett State University upholds the distinction of being the only higher education institution in the state to offer an undergraduate nuclear engineering program and the Doctor of Education degree.

_Tubman University_

Tubman University is a private, Christian graduate school of theology. The school developed in the mid 1900s and represents a consortium of several religious denominations including Baptist, United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal, Christian Methodist Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Church of God in Christ. Tubman University is located in a major metropolitan city in the south. The institution enrolls approximately 450 students and offers both masters and doctoral level degrees.

_Giovanni State University_

Giovanni State University is a land grant institution chartered in the late 1800s. This comprehensive, liberal arts school began as an industrial high school and achieved university status in the late 1900s. Giovanni State University is located in a relatively
small town in the southern region of the United States. Students choose from over 50 academic majors and Giovanni State University offers masters degrees in education and counseling, public health, and animal science. The school enrolls 3000 students and 94% of the student population is African American. Giovanni State University sends more African American students to dental and medical school than any other institution in its state.

*University of Angelou*

University of Angelou, a land grant institution, developed in the late 1800s. Previously known as an academy, this liberal arts institution maintains a strong connection with the Methodist Episcopal Church. In the mid 1940s, the school transitioned into a college and later attained university status. University of Angelou is found in the northeast quadrant of the United States and currently enrolls approximately 3,775 students and offers baccalaureate degrees in 26 disciplines, 13 teaching programs, and 8 pre-professional programs. In addition to the host of masters degrees offered, University of Angelou offers the Doctor of Philosophy in organizational leadership, toxicology, food science and technology, and marine estuarine and environmental science.

*Scott King College*

The founding of Scott King College dates back to the mid 1800s. The school began as a seminary and conferred its first bachelor’s degree in the late 1800s. This private, liberal arts institution offers 23 majors and minors only at the undergraduate level in a variety of areas including accounting, education, biology, chemistry, and mathematics. Scott King College is located in the state’s capital city in the northeast
region of the states. Currently the school enrolls approximately 949 students and provides course offerings during the evenings and weekends. Scott King College maintains strong ties to the United Methodist Church.

*Winfrey College*

Winfrey College, chartered in the mid 1800s, began as a teacher training school. This private, liberal arts school sits on a former plantation in a southern state. Winfrey College conferred the first bachelor’s degree in the early 1900s and currently offers undergraduate degrees in the humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, and education. The school preserves a strong Christian foundation as it provides educational opportunities to nearly 970 students.

*Chisholm State University*

Chisholm State University, originally a teachers college, developed in the early 1800s. The Quakers helped to build this public, liberal arts institution and it attained university status in the late 1900s. The school offers baccalaureate degrees in over 30 disciplines of study and a master’s degree in education. While teaching remains a popular profession among students, they are also majoring in business, medicine, communications, and government services. Currently Chisholm State University services approximately 1545 students.

*Hurston State University*

Hurston State University is a land grant institution founded in the late 1800s. Originally called an Industrial College for Colored Youth, Hurston State University is the oldest public black college in this southern state. Hurston State University became a degree granting institution in the early 1900s. The school is located in a city that has a
population of 137,000. The current student enrollment is 2,500 and the student faculty ratio is approximately 16:1. Hurston State University offers 22 undergraduate majors and master’s degree opportunities in public administration, marine science, and social work. Additionally, Hurston State University is the only school in the region to offer a four-year naval Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) program.

*Walker University*

Walker University developed in the late 1800s as a land grant institution. The campus is located in a rural community in the southern region of the United States. Walker University awarded the first bachelor’s degree in 1900s and it remains to be the only historically black university in the state. The estimated current student enrollment is 3,000. Walker offers masters level programs in rehabilitation counseling and education and a doctorate in physical therapy. This liberal arts institution is known particularly for goat research.

*Shabazz University*

Shabazz University, a land grant institution, developed in the mid 1800s as the training ground for future teachers of color. The school granted the first Bachelor of Science degree in the early 1900s and it boasts as the second oldest school in this southern state. Currently Shabazz University enrolls approximately 8,350 students and offers 39 undergraduate majors, 31 master’s degree options, and four doctoral programs. Shabazz University regularly produces a high number of nurses, engineers, and educators.
Brooks University

In the mid 1900s, Brooks University developed as a branch unit of a larger system of education. This public, liberal arts school opened its doors for instruction in 1959. Brooks University is located in a metropolitan city in the south. Currently the school enrolls 4,000 students and a few of the most popular undergraduate majors on campus include education, business administration, social work, and criminal justice. Brooks University offers graduate instruction in computer information systems, criminal justice, education in urban schools, and social work at the master’s level.

Waters State University

Waters State University is a public, liberal arts institution founded in the late 1800s as a black teachers college. Waters State University conferred the first bachelor’s degree in the early 1900s and after Brown v. Board of Education, the school integrated. The current student enrollment is approximately 3,500 and most of the students are Caucasian. Waters State University, located on the east coast, offers both baccalaureate and associate degrees and some of the fields include nursing, computer science, accounting, and education.

Height University

Height University, founded in the early 1900s, opened its doors as a religious training school in the south. Although originally chartered as a private school, Height University was the first state-supported liberal arts college for African Americans in the nation. This public institution focused primarily on training teachers and preparing principles and now enrolls approximately 7,700 students majoring in nursing and pre-professional programs such as medicine, law, and dentistry. Height University offers
masters degrees in education, business administration, information science, library science, and public administration. Additionally, Height University has its own school of law.

**Observations**

Historically black colleges and universities share a common ancestry. All of them developed for the purpose of educating African Americans during a time when black people did not have access and opportunity. Early on, all of them focused on the mission of religious training and teacher preparation. All of them transitioned from secondary schools into degree granting higher education institutions. Despite these similarities, the profiles of the 15 historically black colleges and universities included in this study reveal the following distinctions that reflect their diversity:

1. Six out of the 15 black colleges were land grant institutions.
2. Twelve of the schools were public and three were private.
3. The historically black colleges and universities were dispersed across 11 states in the south and northeast regions of the United States.
4. Two of the black colleges only offered baccalaureate degrees and five of the schools offered doctoral degrees.
5. The number of students enrolled in the schools varied from a small campus of 450 students to a larger campus population of 8,350.
6. Two of the historically black schools maintained a predominantly white student population.
7. The total sample of schools offered a variety of academic majors including nursing, education, computer science, nuclear engineering, biotechnology, and pre-professional programs that consists of law, dentistry, medicine, and pharmacy.
Profile of Presidents in the Study

The majority of research available on historically black colleges and universities generally focuses on two key constituents, students and faculty. Administrators, particularly the presidents, receive minimal attention in the academic literature. Consequently, the field of higher education is void of a comprehensive body of work that profiles this particular cohort of leaders.

The interest in college presidents stems partly from their status as elites. Elites are individuals of rank, power, and influence that evoke a great sense of curiosity, wonder, mystique (Dexter, 1970; Hertz & Imber, 1995; Moyser & Wagstaffe, 1987; Thomas, 1995). The fascination with elites usually centers on who they are as individuals and how they were able to acquire such a selective position. This section of the study, therefore, addresses this fascination and presents profiles of the participating historically black college and university presidents (see Table 2). The first interview question presented to the presidents asked, “Can you tell me about yourself and how you arrived at the college presidency?” Although this was a warm up question, it manifested into a significant part of the research findings. Surprisingly, the presidents provided more detail than anticipated. They spoke candidly, and some at length, about their experiences. This question alone created an opportunity to learn about the presidents on a more personal level. The information is relevant because without careful consideration and systematic investigation of these leaders, the literature is incomplete of a holistic view of black colleges in America and higher education leadership.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>Inauguration</th>
<th>Undergraduate Institution</th>
<th>Undergraduate Major</th>
<th>Graduate Institution</th>
<th>Highest Degree Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Clarence Myers</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Springfield College</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>University of Pittsburg</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Scales Donahoo</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Tennessee State University</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Vanderbilt Peabody College</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Bobby Isaac</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>“Bassett” State University</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Michigan State</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Nathan Dudley</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Trinity College</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>Howard University</td>
<td>D.Min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Sultan Rovaris</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Oberlin College</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Stanford University</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Mathilda Marie</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Howard University</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Howard University</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Earl Davis</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>University of Georgia</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Georgia State University</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Mary Frances</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>“Winfrey” College</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Jackson State University</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Devon Lamard</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Hampton University</td>
<td>Industrial Education</td>
<td>George Washington University</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Jared Auguste</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>University of Massachusetts Amherst</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>University of Massachusetts Amherst</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Trevis Freeman</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>“Walker” University</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>University of Oklahoma</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Kerry Foster</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>University of Kentucky</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Duke University</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Acosta Lee</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Morehouse College</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>Howard University</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Lyelle Boutte</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>University of Missouri</td>
<td>Elementary Education</td>
<td>Indiana University Bloomington</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. John Spencer</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Florida A&amp;M University</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Florida State University</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-Pseudonyms replace the name of the presidents.

The following profiles provide an overview of the presidents’ trajectory including their educational background, prior work experience, and other relevant information.
Dr. Clarence Myers

Dr. Clarence Myers serves as the president of Morrison State University. His appointment began in March 2003. He earned his bachelor’s degree in sociology from Springfield College, his master’s degree in social work from the University of Connecticut, a master’s degree in public health from the University of Pittsburgh, and a doctoral degree in social welfare policy from the University of Pittsburgh. Dr. Myers worked at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Minnesota as an assistant professor. He went on to the University of Connecticut and held appointments in the School of Social Work, School of Allied Health, and the School of Medicine. During his time at the University of Connecticut, Dr. Myers achieved full professor status in a matter of eight years and transitioned into the position of Associate Dean for Research and Development. He served as vice president for academic affairs at Eastern Connecticut State University and prior to assuming the presidency at Morrison State University, Dr. Myers held the position of Vice Chancellor of Student and Multicultural Affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Dr. Scales Donahoo

Dr. Scales Donahoo resides as the ninth president of Jemison State University. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree in English from Tennessee State University and Master of Science degree in journalism from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Dr. Donahoo worked as a public information officer for the Department of Mental Health and returned to school and acquired his Doctor of Education degree in higher education administration from George Peabody College for Teachers of Vanderbilt University. After graduation, Dr. Donahoo completed post-doctoral studies at
the Carnegie Mellon University. He worked extensively at Norfolk State University, a historically black school, as the Executive Assistant to the President, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs, and Vice President for Student Affairs. Dr. Donahoo achieved tenure status as an associate professor of journalism during his time at Norfolk State University. He later served as president of Philander Smith College, a historically black school in Little Rock, Arkansas prior to becoming the president of Jemison State University in September 1987.

**Dr. Bobby Isaac**

Dr. Bobby Isaac is the ninth president of Bassett State University. He earned both his Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics and Master of Education degree from Bassett State University. He later received the Doctor of Philosophy degree in higher education from Michigan State University. While at Michigan State University, Dr. Bobby Isaac was an institutional research analyst and assistant professor. He later returned to Bassett State University and held numerous positions including Research Fellow, Assistant Director of the Institutional Self-Study, Director of the Institutional Self-Study, and Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs. Dr. Isaac’s career took a drastic turn due to his decision to return to the classroom. He became a professor of mathematics for 16 years. Dr. Isaac accepted the position of Interim Executive Vice President prior to assuming his role as president of Bassett State University in July 2004.

**Dr. Nathan Dudley**

Dr. Nathan Dudley serves as the seventh president of Tubman University. His appointment began in September 2004. Dr. Dudley received his bachelor’s degree from Trinity College, Master of Divinity degree from Duke University, and Doctor of Ministry
degree from Howard University, a historically black school. His career began at another historically black institution of higher education, Hampton University where he served as Dean of the Chapel and Chairman of the religious affairs department. During his time at Hampton University, Dr. Dudley taught religion and philosophy for over 20 years. He moved on to Virginia State University as a professor in the philosophy department and the Associate Vice President of Student Affairs. Dr. Dudley also worked at Chicago State University, a predominantly black institution, as the Vice President of Student Affairs before taking over the presidency at Tubman University.

**Dr. Sultan Rovaris**

Dr. Sultan Rovaris attended Oberlin College as undergraduate and studied economics. He earned his master’s degree in education from Cleveland State University. Dr. Rovaris went to Stanford University and acquired a second master’s degree and the Doctor of Philosophy in higher education administration. He began his career teaching at the University of California at Santa-Cruz and moved to the State University of New York at Buffalo where he was promoted to associate professor. Dr. Rovaris transitioned to Louisiana State University to become department chair and was promoted to full professor. At Medgar Evers College he became the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Dr. Rovaris now serves as the seventh president of Giovanni State University and his appointment began in October 2001.

**Dr. Mathilda Marie**

Dr. Mathilda Marie’s appointment as the 13th president of the University of Angelou occurred in 2002. She began her pursuit of higher education at Howard University where she majored in English and earned her Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts,
and Doctor of Philosophy. Dr. Marie started her career as a faculty member and taught English at City University of New York and two historically black schools, Bowie State University and the University of the District of Columbia. In addition to her responsibilities as a professor at the University of the District of Columbia, she served as the Assistant Chair of the Department of English and the Associate Dean for the College of Liberal and Fine Arts. Prior to assuming the presidency at University of Angelou, Dr. Marie held the position of Academic Vice President of Norfolk State University.

Dr. Earl Davis

Dr. Earl Davis is the 12th president of Scott King College. His appointment began in December 2005. He received his Bachelor of Science in Agriculture degree in biology from the University of Georgia followed by a Master of Science degree in college student personnel services from Miami University. Dr. Davis attended Georgia State University where he earned the Doctor of Philosophy in higher education. He started his career as the Coordinator of Greek Life at Emory University and then transitioned to the Assistant Director of Student Activities at Georgia State University. Dr. Davis held the positions of Director of Student Activities at Old Dominion University and Vice President for Student Affairs at Albany State University. Currently Dr. Davis resides as the youngest president of any historically black college or university.

Ms. Mary Frances

Ms. Mary Frances makes history as the first female president appointed at Winfrey College. She attended Winfrey College as an undergraduate and received her bachelor’s degree in psychology. She enrolled in another historically black school, Jackson State University, and earned her master’s degree in public policy administration.
Ms. Frances is currently pursuing the doctoral degree in organizational management and leadership. At the start of her career, Ms. Frances served as the Executive Director of the Mental Health Association, Executive Director for the governor’s office of federal state programs and Commissioner for the state’s group on workers compensation. Ms. Frances returned to Winfrey College and she had the dual role of being the Executive Assistant to the president and the Director of the Health and Wellness Center. She later accepted the position for Vice President for Institutional Advancement and then appointed interim president. In May 2002, one month later, she assumed the responsibility of the role and became the 13th president of Winfrey College

Mr. Devon Lamard

Mr. Devon Lamard serves as the interim president of Chisholm State University. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in industrial education from Hampton University and a Master of Arts degree in personnel management and administration from George Washington University. He dedicated 34 years of his professional career to the United States army and held the position of Commander of the national ROTC. Mr. Lamard retired from the military as a Major General and spent six years in managerial jobs in private industry and information technology business. He returned to his alma mater, Hampton University, as Director of the Data Conversion and Management Laboratory and later assumed the role of interim president of Chisholm State University in January 2004.

Dr. Jared Auguste

Dr. Jared Auguste serves as the 11th president of Hurston State University. He earned a bachelor’s degree in English with a minor in American studies from the
University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He completed his Doctor of Education degree in multicultural education with a focus on organizational change at University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Dr. Auguste began his career as a faculty member at Old Dominion University and remained there until he acquired tenure. He joined the faculty at Hampton University and served as Dean of the School Liberal Arts and Education and later promoted to Vice President for Planning and Dean of the Graduate College. Dr. Auguste assumed his role as president of Hurston State University in July 1997.

**Dr. Trevis Freeman**

Dr. Trevis Freeman’s appointment as the 14th president of Walker University occurred in October 1979. He received his bachelor’s degree from Walker University, master’s degree from Oklahoma State University, and the Doctor of Philosophy in higher education from the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Freeman studied for two summers at the University of California at Berkley and then spent a year on a national science foundation fellowship at the Ohio State University. He arrived at Walker University as a biology professor and Assistant Registrar. One year later he became the registrar full time and then elevated to Dean of Student Affairs where he served for nearly 10 years. Dr. Freeman served as interim president prior to taking full responsibility of the presidency of Walker University. Dr. Freeman is pending the status of President Emeritus.

**Dr. Kerry Foster**

Dr. Kerry Foster assumed the presidency at Shabazz University in August 2003. He holds both a bachelor degree and a master degree in history from the University of Kentucky. Dr. Foster furthered his education and completed his doctorate in history from Duke University. Dr. Foster served as professor and provost at both Duke University and
University of Texas at Arlington. Prior to taking the position as president of Shabazz University, he was the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and provost at University of Texas at Arlington.

Dr. Acosta Lee

Dr. Acosta Lee is the president of Brooks University. He attended Morehouse College, a historically black school, and received a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry. At Howard University, he earned both a master’s degree and Doctor of Philosophy in physical chemistry. He became full professor of chemistry at Southern University and A&M College, another historically black school. Dr. Lee accepted the position of Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs prior to first assuming the interim position and then the full presidency in May 2002 at Brooks University.

Dr. Lyelle Boutte

Dr. Lyelle Boutte serves as the 12th president of Waters University and began his appointment in September 2002. He attended Lincoln University of Missouri, a historically black school, and earned a bachelor’s degree in elementary education. Dr. Boutte went to Bradley University and earned three master’s degrees in elementary education, educational administration, and secondary education/community college education. At Indiana University Bloomington, he attained the Doctor of Education in educational administration with a minor in business administration. Dr. Boutte went to Lincoln University of Missouri and served as a professor and Associate Dean of Education. Dr Boutte held administrative posts at three additional historically black universities. He served as Dean at North Carolina A&T State University, Provost at
Harris-Stowe State University, and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at Elizabeth City State University.

Dr. John Spencer

Dr. John Spencer occupies the presidency at Height University. He attended Florida A&M University, a historically black school, and earned a bachelor’s degree in political science. He furthered his education by acquiring a master’s degree and Doctor of Philosophy from Florida State University. Dr. Spencer started as a faculty member teaching public policy, public administration, and political science at the University of Central Florida. He remained there for six years and returned to Florida A&M University as a professor of political science. In addition, he accepted the position of Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs and moved up the ranks into the position of Provost prior to his presidential appointment at Height University in June 2001.

Observations

The aforementioned profiles detail the unique experiences and characteristics of presidents participating in the study. The information is particularly relevant due to the lack of investigative inquiry targeting this group of academic leaders. The profile is helpful because it provides a more concrete representation of who these individuals are and how they ascended to the presidency.

The participants’ varied experiences exposed the following observations of key similarities and differences among the presidents in regard to background, educational attainment, and prior work experience:

1. All of the 15 presidents were persons of African descent.
2. Two of the presidents were female and 13 were male.
3. Thirteen of the presidents earned doctoral degrees including the Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Education, and the Doctor of Ministry. Two of the presidents received master’s degrees as their highest degree.

4. Nine of the presidents received bachelor’s degrees from a historically black college or university.

5. Three of the presidents earned doctoral degrees from historically black schools; one president earned a bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, and doctoral degree from black colleges.

6. Although the programs of study differed among the presidents, five out of the 15 participants earned doctorates in higher education or higher education administration.

7. Prior to occupying the presidency, 11 of the 15 participants worked on black college campuses in varied capacities.

8. Two of the presidents spent their entire careers solely at historically black colleges and universities.

9. One president dedicated his higher education career to one historically black school, his undergraduate alma mater. Currently he is pending the status of President Emeritus.

10. Four of the participants never worked in a historically black college setting prior to acquiring the presidency. These four presidents did not attend a black college as an undergraduate nor as a graduate student.

11. Only one of the participants served as president prior to his current appointment. The school was a historically black institution of higher education.

12. Twelve of the presidents have held their position for less than five years. Two presidents have maintained extensive tenures as one is approaching 19 years and the other has almost served 27 years.

So what does this information reveal about presidents of black colleges? Perhaps the most obvious observation is that a strong correlation exists between individuals who attend and work in black colleges and those who attain the presidency. Sixty percent of the sample earned bachelor’s degrees from a historically black school while 73% of the participants worked on a black college campus prior to becoming president. This
information suggests that historically black colleges and universities possess a boomerang effect that provides individuals with the incentive to return. Dr. Clarence Myers, for example, was aware of this correlation. He did not attend a historically black school nor did he work at one prior to applying for the presidency at Morrison State University. He shared, “I was considered for the presidency at two other schools and I was surprised to get this one because I didn’t attend an HBCU and HBCUs generally want their own” (Dr. Clarence Myers, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

Overall, the majority of presidents of black colleges follow what Cohen and March (1986) identify as the normative or traditional career route. More specifically, 87% of the presidents fit into the category of what Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) refer to as scholar-presidents. Scholars are those presidents who held previous faculty positions and progressed up the administrative ladder. The participants in the study taught courses in various disciplines such as journalism, mathematics, philosophy, biology, political science and chemistry. The administrative positions included Assistant Director of Student Activities, Associate Dean of Education, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Student Affairs, and Vice President for Academic Affairs, just to name a few. The presidents in the study shared the following thoughts concerning career patterns:

Dr. Myers I took the traditional route. I was an assistant professor, an associate, then full. I was a vice president for academic affairs and a vice chancellor for student affairs. Yeah it’s somewhat old fashioned and I recognize that there are other routes, like straight administration. But I firmly believe in academic rigor and there’s no substitute for that (Dr. Clarence Myers, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

Dr. Marie I love research and scholarship and investigation and things of that nature. I kind of moved through the ranks and in our profession if you are a good teacher you become the department chair and if you are good at chairs you
become deans. If you are good at the deanship you become vice president and then president and that is what happened to me (Dr. Mathilda Marie, personal communication, July 29, 2005).

Dr. Rovaris I began to map the traditional route to the presidency: assistant professor, associate professor, tenure, full professor, department chair, dean, vice president and then president. I surmised that because of the color of my skin I should probably follow the traditional route so that people could not use that against me (Dr. Sultan Rovaris, personal communication, August 15, 2005).

The overwhelming sentiment of the interview responses indicate that the majority of black college presidents value and recommend the traditional or old fashioned route to attaining the rank of president. The participants stressed the importance of being in the classroom and working directly with students. The presidents viewed teaching as a prerequisite to being an effective administrator.

Notwithstanding, 13% of the sample fit into what Cohen and March (1986) identify as the non-traditional path. One of the participating presidents is a steward-president. According to Birnbaum and Umbach (2001), a steward-president is a president without teaching experience who moves up the ranks through administrative appointments. The lone steward-president in the study is a woman who worked primarily in state government and then transitioned in lower level academic administration prior to attaining the presidency. The other non-traditional president fits into the category of what Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) refer to as the stranger-president. The stranger is a president who has no experience in a higher education environment. The stranger-president in the sample is a man who spent his entire career in the military prior to becoming interim president. Mr. Devon Lamard offered the following:

The road that I have followed to this position today has probably been one that is a little unusual, that is somewhat different. But in terms of what someone might consider qualifications or background for the position and all those sorts of things,
I think that in all my years of leadership and significant managerial responsibility in government and in private industry, certainly has prepared me very well to do leadership and management on a university campus. So I don’t feel like a fish out of water by any means at all in terms of the leader responsibilities and managerial responsibilities that I have for people, for resources, for infrastructure, for planning ahead for development, all those things that are so key and essential on the university campus (Mr. Devon Lamard, personal communication, August 16, 2005).

This perspective broadens the expectation of what constitutes a college president and sheds light on the fact that all individuals do not have to follow the established path in order to attain the presidency. While the traditional route is the most popular, the non-traditional presidents were unapologetic for their background and experiences. The non-traditional presidents remained steadfast in their beliefs that they were qualified and deserving of the position. In fact, the steward-president made school history when she became the first woman president of institution’s history. This accomplishment alone suggests that non-traditional does not equate to wrong or less than. The non-traditional path simply means different or taking the road less traveled by. The path to the presidency, however, involves more than academic degree attainment and prior work experience.

Path to the Presidency: Beneath the Credentials

The college presidency is a rather exclusive position. As evidenced in the presidential profiles, the position does not require a specific academic major or an absolute prior work record, although clearly certain levels of credentials are necessary due to the demanding responsibilities of the job (Kauffman, 1980). The participants in the study, however, revealed other dimensions to their journeys. They emphasized other influences that played a major role in structuring their careers toward the path of the
presidency. This section of the study provides a more intimate look into their experiences by examining their path beneath the credentials.

**The Path: Planned or Unintentional**

Eighty percent of the presidents in the study said that the college presidency was an unintentional career move. Dr. Scales Donahoo stated:

> My initial career goal was to become a VP [vice president] for student affairs by the time I was 41 and I think in terms of how my career moved, that happened when I was 32. I just never thought about being a college president… (Dr. Scales Donahoo, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

Many of the participants shared this experience. They did not aspire to be a college president because most of them enjoyed their roles as professors and high-level administrators. The one position, however, that the majority of the participants aspired to was the vice president for student affairs. This position appeared to be the pinnacle of their academic career. The presidents engaged in what Lee (1988) identifies as sponsored mobility which means that they were groomed and mentored into the position of president.

Conversely, 20% of the participants in the study reported that they planned to be a college president early on in their careers. According to Dr. Earl Davis:

> It was very intentional in terms of wanting to be a president…in terms of the preparation and things I knew I needed to do: get a Ph.D., to be involved in some teaching, do some research, all those things involved in professional associations I knew I needed to do all those things so it was very intentional (Dr. Earl Davis, personal communication, August 2, 2005).

Individuals who desired to be the president positioned themselves and structured their careers accordingly. They engaged in what Lee (1988) identifies as contest mobility which refers to career development as an experience involving a competitive spirit and strategic planning.
The Choice: Why Lead a Black College?

The American higher education system is comprised of many types of colleges and universities, so why lead a black college? The questions posed to the participants in the study were, “Why did you choose to become a president of a historically black college or university? Was it conscious choice to lead a black institution of higher education?” The following are a few informative responses:

Dr. Spencer  It was. Again, being a graduate of an HBCU and having worked at Florida A&M for 18 years, I have a deep love and respect for our institutions and what we do. When I look at colleges and universities across America, we need to ensure that we have a continuous stream of enlightened leadership at the helm of our colleges and universities. I thought I had something significant to contribute to HBCUs and again with my background coming from a single parent home, home with limited resources…people like that need champions and I think that I can do that and so that’s the special appeal to me to be a part of these institutions (Dr. John Spencer, personal communication, August 19, 2005).

Dr. Myers  HBCUs are the best shot at getting African American students through. They have a better sense of support and they are nurturing institutions…All black people do not have to attend an HBCU in order to get an education or to be successful. It is a matter of choice (Dr. Clarence Myers, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

Ms. Frances  Well it was a conscious choice to work at a historically black college or university…I think that the work that these institutions do is so very important to America’s position in world affairs. We educate, the historically black colleges and universities, a mass of young people who might not otherwise have an opportunity to get an education. It does not mean that they do not have the intellectual capacity of college level work, often they lacked exposure and they lacked the means of financing their education. And they come into an environment at an HBCU knowing that they are with people who really care and they are nurturing. It is a nurturing, supportive environment. They are not just a number. They have names and faces and success is very important (Ms. Mary Frances, personal communication, August 15, 2005).

Dr. Isaac  I think I could be president at another kind of institution, but I do not think that my passion and commitment would be as great. I definitely have a passion for this university and a commitment to all historically black
colleges and universities (Dr. Bobby Isaac, personal communication, July 12, 2005).

Dr. Foster For me it meant going home to a home that I had never been to but Afro American had always been my thing and you do know that I am black. I joke and tell folk I have been black all my life; it’s not something I just decided to become. The folks on the committee said you’re going to an HBCU…you’ve never been here. I said well wait a minute, I didn’t decide just yesterday on this black thing, I have been black forever in every way [laughs]. As long as I can remember I have been black is what I told folks so it was a conscious decision because I really did believe that a lot of the values, a lot of my goals, I could make a difference here. I wanted to believe that I could make a difference everywhere I have been but I decided that I could make an even greater difference here than I could at other schools (Dr. Kerry Foster, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

Dr. Marie Yes because I started my life at what one would call a major institution…As hard as I worked there, there was a social piece that was missing and having been the product of an HBCU, that is Howard, where my whole life revolved around the university…At this university I did my work and I separated and I was not socially or culturally in the tapestry of the institution. Since this was going to be my life’s work, I made a conscious decision to find something that would give me peace to know that I was doing my work in an area where I was needed and appreciated and where I as an individual would feel as if I had not sold out my race and so yet it was a conscious decision to find work at an HBCU and to let it be my life’s work. In essence it is a cliché but people say you bloom where you’re planted (Dr. Mathilda Marie, personal communication, July 29, 2005).

All of the presidents’ responses indicate that leading a black college or university provides them with a great sense of personal and professional gratification. They choose to work on these campuses because they want to give back and are committed to making a difference in the lives of African American youth. The presidents find great fulfillment in knowing that their work is appreciated. Although numerous institutions of higher education exist, the presidents believe that the need is greatest on black college campuses. They feel connected to the institutions because many of presidents attended black colleges as undergraduates. This kinship ultimately forces them to take on the
responsibility of making these schools better because in their opinion, black colleges serve a critical function. The decision to lead them, therefore, is an easy one. Dr. Mathilda Marie said it best, “You bloom where you’re planted” (Dr. Mathilda Marie, personal communication, July 29, 2005).

The attitude toward choosing the presidency at a black college was not completely positive for all of the participants in the study. Prior to taking their positions, two presidents openly shared a few of their reservations about working at a historically black school:

Dr. Rovaris I made some generalizations about HBCUs that were not necessarily positive at this time 25 years ago: autocratic leadership, poor financial management at the business office and at the financial aid office; a lot of nepotism, people being hired because of who they know, who they are related to rather than cause they have the skills necessary for the job. Academic programs that were good but not necessarily as good as they could be and people not seeming to care…I didn’t think that it necessarily had to be that way so I was looking for an opportunity to demonstrate that things could be different at HBCUs and that was basically what lead me to HBCUs (Dr. Sultan Rovaris, personal communication, August 15, 2005).

Dr. Davis I had decided that to work at an HBCU I had to be able to come in at a level where I could really make some changes and make an impact. In particular from student affairs…a lot of the student affairs folks at HBCUs did not have the classic student affairs training, they sort of just ended up in it but they didn’t get a master’s in student personnel. Most of them are counselors and don’t have Ph.D.’s in higher education (Dr. Earl Davis, personal communication, August 2, 2005).

Despite their reservations, both presidents approached the decision to lead black institutions from a genuine place of concern. The negative perceptions did not distance them from black campuses, but rather motivated them to want to make a positive impact and meaningful change. An interesting observation is that the two presidents who shared their skepticism did not attend nor have prior work experience in a historically black college or university environment. They graduated from and worked exclusively on
predominantly white college campuses, yet the presidents developed negative beliefs of black colleges. The problem is that they made generalizations about this group of institutions and this contributes to negative perceptions that plague black colleges as they are regularly misunderstood and often misrepresented (Brown & Freeman, 2004; Fleming, 1984; Willie, 1994)

Dr. Kerry Foster shared a similar generalization when he discussed his decision to become the president of a historically black college. He feared that black colleges did not have the resources to adequately compensate him and therefore considered other options. Dr. Kerry Foster admitted that he intended to work at a black college, but only at the end of his career. This confession speaks volumes and raises critical concern. Why is a waiting period necessary? African American students, professors, and administrators often attest to the benefits of attending historically black colleges and universities, but when they have an opportunity to work at these schools, they decide to wait. What are they waiting for? Surely money is a valid issue since black colleges have struggled to compete with majority institutions. But if everyone waits, who will serve the students on these campuses? In order for black colleges to continue to flourish, they must be equipped with a strong faculty and administration that are eager and choose not to wait.

*The Influence of Family and Mentors*

In addition to their credentials and work experience, the presidents mentioned the importance of family and mentors and their influence on their path to the presidency. Family set the expectation at an early age. The expectation was not to be a college president, per se, but that the key to a successful life is rooted in a good education. They learned to appreciate the value of an education and recognized that as African Americans,
an education is an imperative tool. The educational background of the presidents’ parents, in particular, served as an influential force in their lives. Some of the presidents came from homes where their families did not attain a high school diploma or a college degree. They, in turn, used this as a source of motivation to do better with the opportunities presented to them. Their parents’ lack of education motivated them to want more education.

Similarly, presidents reared in homes with college educated families knew the expectation because their parents served as real models. They were fortunate enough to grow up experiencing the benefits of an education. Families not only exposed them to the value of higher education in general, but specifically historically black colleges and universities. Dr. Scales Donahoo shared:

My father and mother were both graduates of TSU [Tennessee State University] and in fact that’s where they met. They both earned their degrees from TSU and each worked for TSU for 39 years. So when my parents built a home, they literally built a home facing the men’s dormitory. I basically grew up across the street from TSU. The first couple of years of my life, I lived in an apartment above the health center at TSU. My family goes way back with TSU (Dr. Scales Donahoo, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

This recollection is indicative of many of the presidents’ experiences. The exposure to historically black schools through their parents allowed them the opportunity to establish a certain level of comfort and familiarity with the institutions. In the case of Dr. Scales Donahoo, he followed in his parents footsteps and attended Tennessee State University as an undergraduate. Dr. Earl Davis, on the other hand, attended predominantly white institutions but marveled at his parents’ accomplishment of graduating from two historically black schools. Although he did not have the connection firsthand, the stories shared by his parents provided him with a glimpse into the black college experience.
While family influenced presidents by setting the expectation to get an education, mentors played a critical role in guiding their careers specifically toward the college presidency. Eighty percent of the participants in the study reported that the presidency was not a calculated career move; therefore, somewhere along their journey someone planted a new seed of expectation. Dr. Clarence Myers, for example, said that his mentor, a college president, told him that he had presidential potential and this sparked his interest in pursuing the position. Dr. Scales Donahoo had not heard of Philander Smith College when his mentor asked him if he would be interested in the presidency. His mentor encouraged him and took the liberty of nominating him for his first presidential appointment. After Dr. Scales Donahoo served as president for a few years, his mentor nominated him again for the presidency at Jemison State University. Overall, mentors played a significant role in encouraging the presidents to think beyond the limits they set for themselves.

**Defining the Mission**

M. Christopher Brown (2003) identifies several fallacies associated with research on historically black colleges and universities. He argues that the fallacy of assumptive evidence occurs when researchers make assumptions about black colleges based on prior nonempirical scholarship. This process ignites a vicious cycle that perpetuates false representations of black colleges rooted primarily in unsubstantiated information. The findings of this study, however, are a result of systematic investigation and credible participation. Through semi-structured interviews, 15 presidents shared their perspectives on the topic of mission based on their experiences as leaders of black colleges. The findings are significant because they provide a fresh view on an abandoned topic started
by W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington while serving as a building block for future research.

What is the mission of historically black colleges and universities? Mission refers to the explicit role, purpose, and function of the institution. This question forces presidents to reflect on their schools’ distinct place within the larger academy and ultimately ask, “What is our reason for being?” The conceptual framework of the study proposes that raising this rather broad question allows presidents the opportunity to engage in what Weick (1995) identifies as sensemaking. The process of sensemaking is concerned with ways in which individuals construct meaning and generate interpretations. Sensemaking is valuable, particularly for the purpose of defining the mission of historically black colleges and universities, because things that are easily taken for granted, are not questioned. Sensemaking calls for everyday things, everyday assumptions to be questioned.

The research question is, “How do presidents of four-year historically black colleges and universities define the mission of their institutions?” The question attempts to gain varying perspectives on mission, recognizing the diversity that exists among historically black schools. According to Brown (2003):

The idea that mission adoption and adherence are universal and consistent across and throughout all black colleges is the fallacy of mission stability. There is not a cogent mission statement that can be universally applied to all black colleges. Moreover, if there were, there would not be and is not consistent application of that mission across all black colleges. Research that attempts to investigate whether black colleges are fulfilling their mission is deceived by the assumption of mission stability. No cohort of institutions is the same perennially in an omnipresent and circumstantial form. The way in which institutions individually and even collectively define their mission is contingent on time place, and circumstance (Brown, 2003, p. 38).
The study adheres to Brown’s (2003) assertion and does not seek to produce a solitary definition of mission applicable to all historically black colleges and universities, but rather create a more comprehensive view drawn from multiple perspectives. The intent is to allow four-year presidents from different backgrounds who are leaders of various types of black colleges to share their personal definitions of their institution’s mission. Do their perspectives collide or coincide?

**Common Themes**

Despite the diversity of the sample of historically black colleges and universities represented in the study, the presidents shared similar perspectives in regard to defining the mission of their schools. The study utilizes theme analysis as a means to convey their responses. Theme analysis refers to recurring qualities or characteristics that provide explanation to research inquiry (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). Based on the interview responses, the presidents’ shared the following common themes with regard to defining mission: access and opportunity, preparation for leadership, and land grant mission.

*Access and opportunity.* In defining the mission of their respective institutions, the presidents’ most consistent response was that historically black colleges and universities provide African Americans with access and opportunity. Black colleges developed during a time dominated by legal segregation and racial discrimination. Black colleges developed out of necessity because predominantly white schools would not admit African Americans students. Although black students are currently free to apply to all colleges and universities throughout the nation, the presidents’ declare that the mission of black colleges is to remain committed to serving the African American student population by providing them with more educational options. The following responses
illustrate how presidents define the mission of their historically black higher education institution:

Dr. Donahoo  I think that the purpose is to give people the opportunity to reach their academic potential. This school, as is the case with most HBCUs, believes strongly in people having opportunities and not being highly selective in terms of eliminating the opportunities before a person can have a chance to go to their first class...hopefully their potential is to successfully complete a baccalaureate program (Dr. Scales Donahoo, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

Dr. Isaac There are a couple of words that I think clearly define the mission of this university. The mission really is to deal with access, opportunity, and affordability; to be sure that we are providing opportunities for that segment of the population that might be underserved or is underserved and would not necessarily be served by other institutions within society (Dr. Bobby Isaac, personal communication, July 12, 2005).

Dr. Rovaris Well I think that the mission of [Giovanni State University] is that it continues to have a commitment to providing opportunities for students of African decent that are not available on many other campuses. Secondly [Giovanni State University] is state institution so part of its mission is to be available to students in the state regardless of background (Dr. Sultan Rovaris, personal communication, August 15, 2005).

Dr. Boutte It is an educational institution designated as primarily serving students for baccalaureate education with some selected associate degree programs that is designed primarily to offer an affordable education to students in the state and other places in the world as well including foreign students as well as persons from other states but primarily a baccalaureate institution (Dr. Lyelle Boutte, personal communication, September 26, 2005).

Dr. Marie Our mission is...I am an unusual university conjured in eighteen years old, but the dominant reason this institution was founded was to educate people of color; that was the dominant reason and so my major mission is to bring education to people of color. I am a comprehensive university doing what comprehensive universities do. I offer the bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees so scholarship inquiry engagement, all of that student learning, all of those factors come into the mission of providing comprehensive education (Dr. Mathilda Marie, personal communication, July 29, 2005).

Dr. Davis Well succinctly for us it really has been to provide that access to higher education for academically talented students and those who have the
potential to be talented….We are not unlike most HBCUs. There are a few elite institutions that have not had to address these issues, but the vast majority are in the situation like us. Simply put, after Brown v. Board, 90% of black folks who went to college went to HBCUs. After that happened it was a whole new ball game, white institutions got in the game for black students and really have just out competed black schools and so now 16% of all black students attend HBCUs. So schools are just staying open really by just admitting whoever they can to get in. So you have the most at-risk students that are coming in with marginal GPAs, some less than 2.0., marginal standardized test scores, and poor family background, so we’re just struggling along trying to keep doors open because the game has changed a lot and unfortunately I think that they [HBCUs] were really slower to react to that. And so I grew up in Atlanta with all those HBCUs there, I was number two in my class and there was no HBCU in Atlanta that actively recruited me and that is ridiculous. It’s sort of like, I keep trying to tell people, I have to tell the president at Morehouse they need to give me an honorary degree because every time I tell people I’m from Atlanta, they assume I went to Morehouse. I’m like no I went to Georgia, Morehouse never recruited me. And so this is mid-80’s. We didn’t go after the top kids nationally. And now people are scrambling because it is like whoa we are having trouble making our budgets and numbers are dropping and schools are closing. All that is happening and so people keep the doors open basically. Like I challenge our institution, it’s not so much the academically talented because we’re getting few of those students. We are getting those that have potential and now potential sometimes is just defined as those who are living and breathing and not in terms of any proven academic potential. It’s just like they have an interest in coming to college and we admit those students (Dr. Earl Davis, personal communication, August 2, 2005).

The presidents in the study assert that the mission of historically black colleges and universities is to serve students with varying needs by providing access and opportunity. Many students, particularly African American students, enter college and are not academically prepared due to poor schooling at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels. The presidents’ contend that black colleges give these students the opportunity to pursue higher education because the focus is on their potential.

Dr. Earl Davis, the youngest and newest president, was noticeably the most critical in comparison to the rest of the sample, but provided thoughtful insight with
regard to defining the mission. He argued that black colleges do a poor job of recruiting high caliber African American students. Surely, most majority institutions have more resources and incentives to offer, but Dr. Davis contends that black colleges do not even attempt to compete. This lack of effort contributes to the enrollment of African American students at predominantly white colleges and universities, as high achieving students go overlooked. A challenge for black colleges, therefore, is accepting the consequence of not recruiting top scholars. Dr. Davis proffers that black colleges must recognize and embrace their mission of educating students who lack proper academic preparation.

Historically black colleges and universities have the special ability to meet students wherever they are and transform them into successful college graduates. While black colleges vary in their admissions policies, many accept students with low grade point averages and meager standardized test scores. The overwhelming response of the sample, however, was that the access and opportunities that black colleges provide, particularly for African American students, remain unparalleled in majority colleges and universities. In comparison to most predominantly white institutions, black colleges tend to have lower tuition rates which make pursuing higher education a more attainable goal.

Historically black colleges and universities are an option among the many higher education institutions available to high school graduates. Predominantly white institutions no longer prohibit African American student participation; therefore, black students are free to enroll in these institutions. Students attend the school of their choice and the presidents’ recognized that all black students do not have to attend a historically black school. Dr. Kerry Foster stated:
I tell people and maybe you’ll say I’m overstating it, if you are admitted to UT [University of Texas] Austin and you don’t go to UT Austin, there are a lot of other good schools you could go to. If you’re admitted to Duke and you don’t go to Duke, where do you go? Vanderbilt, Emory, UVA [University of Virginia], Princeton, my heavens, those are pretty good options. For many students if you don’t go to [Shabazz University] you don’t go to college and that’s a big difference (Dr. Kerry Foster, personal communication, August 12, 2005).

This argument reflects the harsh reality that many African American students do not have options regarding their quest to attain a college degree. History reveals that African Americans struggled to merely gain the right to an education and early on their education was separate and unequal. As a result, the schooling process left lasting deficiencies that continue to affect their ability to succeed and place them at a considerable disadvantage. Black colleges, for some black students, are their saving grace as these schools recognize that a deficiency does not mean defeat. Students are able to make their dream of pursuing a higher education into a reality that otherwise may have not manifested. Overall, the general consensus among the presidents in the study is that black colleges serve a necessary mission. Dr. Clarence Myers summed it up best by saying that although students can attend many colleges and universities, “HBCUs are the best shot at getting African American students through” (Dr. Clarence Myers, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

Preparation for leadership. In addition to providing access and opportunity, another common theme among the presidents was that the mission of historically black colleges and universities is to prepare students for leadership roles. Kannerstein (1978) identified leadership as a critical component of the mission of black colleges and the following interview responses reveal the presidents’ value of leadership:

Ms. Frances We have a liberal arts perspective and we educate men and women for leadership, for citizenship, to use their education to make a difference and
to affect change, certainly in a global world today. But that has been part of [Winfrey College’s] mission...we have always been able to produce those young people who go out into the world and use their education to uplift humanity… (Ms. Mary Frances, personal communication, August 15, 2005).

**Mr. Lamard** I would say that [Chisholm’s] mission is, in its’ uniqueness, buried in the the experience of historically black colleges over the past almost 200 years. Historically black colleges in this country has been a principal route for African Americans in particular to gain access to higher education and then to have a developmental experience that has prepared a distinct majority of African Americans for leadership and for professional pursuits in our country that would not have otherwise happened (Mr. Devon Lamard, personal communication, August 15, 2005).

**Dr. Spencer** If you go back to the historical mission of [Height University]…the mission was to create a leadership class for the African American community and that is still part of the fabric of this institution. We want to produce a leadership class for the globe…So that is what we want to do is create these pathways to leadership positions for our students so that they can operate in a diverse and global environment (Dr. John Spencer, personal communication, August 19, 2005).

**Dr. Freeman** I would describe the university as one that is student centered. We do perceive our students as our customers and as such, everything that we do, we ultimately want it to enhance and enrich the lives of students who enroll and come to us. We prepare our students when they graduate to be able to go to the world from [Walker University]…when they believe that they are prepared to go to the world and become leaders, that sets a higher standard. Many students come and all they know is their community. They can go back to their communities, that’s alright; they are prepared to go to any community, not only in America but in the world (Dr. Trevis Freeman, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

**Dr. Auguste** Our primary purpose is really to create the kinds of educational experiences that enable particularly minority citizens to gain some distinct advantages, position themselves for leadership, and position themselves into the world and become part of that cadre that not only by their very action change the world, but that they also impact in a conscious way the structure and nature of things. So we talk about gaining distinct economic advantage, we talk about imbuing our students with a definitive sense of public service, we believe in servant leadership; we preach and teach it all the time, but also positioning themselves for leadership in all things (Dr. Jared Auguste, personal communication, July 20, 2005).
Presidents of black colleges promote that the mission of their schools is to equip students with the necessary tools to consciously take on positions of leadership. The goal is for students to take what they have learned on black college campuses and use their knowledge and skills to make positive change in both the African American community and the world at-large. The objective is to teach them to think beyond the confines of their respective environments and make a difference in the global environment.

The mission of black colleges is to instill a sense of responsibility in their students to serve others, to give back and making meaningful contributions to the world. Presidents value leadership because it serves as an avenue for African Americans to acquire positions of power and influence. Historically black colleges and universities remain the undergraduate home of the majority of African American leaders in this country (Brown, 2002b; Browning & Williams, 1978; Fleming, 1984; Garibaldi, 1984; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). The presidents in the study, therefore, aspire to continue this legacy.

Land grant mission. Forty percent of the historically black colleges and universities represented in the study were land grant institutions. A land grant institution is a college or university designated by Congress to receive funds to educate students on agriculture, mechanical arts, and military training as a result of the Morrill Act of 1862 and the Morrill Act of 1890 (Brown, 1999; Cohen, 1998; Geiger, 1999). When asked to define the mission of their college or university, 50% of the presidents of land grant schools mentioned their land grant mission.

Dr. Mathilda Marie, president of University of Angelou, stated, “Our institution is a land grant institution which means we have a special charge to look at conserving the
environment, the ocean around us, the air and the land” (Dr. Mathilda Marie, personal communication, July 29, 2005). Walker University president, Dr. Trevis Freeman, echoed the sentiment:

[Walker University] is the state’s only historically African American university. It is classified as an 1890 land grant institution…Our mission is a very unique mission in that we, as a land grant institution, have the responsibility as all land grant universities have for research, teaching, outreach, and community service; that’s the overall focus of our institution. In research, our focus as a land grant institution has been on a niche in the animal kingdom that we decided to focus our agriculture focus on and that of course is the goat. We are and have developed at [Walker University] the world’s largest center for goat research. We are it and those goats have taken us to the world. We provide research as well as train scientists in goat research in all aspects that include nutrition, meat, fiber, the cashmere goats. We raise goats and help the government use them in conservation in the mountains. We use our goats to assist the bureau land management as well as other forest services of the United States in controlling the undergrowth in parts of America. So we are goat research; we are the goat ropers of the country (Dr. Trevis Freeman, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

The presidents’ recognition of their land grant mission indicates that the institutions remain committed to fulfilling their responsibilities as dictated by the Morrill Act of 1862 and the Morrill Act of 1890. The presidents, however, did not limit their schools’ mission to focus solely on land grant duties. They emphasized the importance of providing their students with a wide range of options regarding their educational pursuits by exposing them to a myriad of academic majors. All of the presidents of land grant institutions, however, did not mention their land grant mission. This omission was a surprise considering the amount of financial support that is provided to these schools due to their status as land grant colleges and universities. Perhaps the presidents simply neglected to mention this function, or maybe the land grant mission is not an integral part of their respective campuses.
Divergent Perspectives

In addition to the common defining themes of access and opportunity, preparation for leadership, and the land grant function, the presidents in the study offered divergent perspectives when asked to define the mission of their respective historically black college or university. These perspectives merit recognition because they broaden the idea of what constitutes the mission of black colleges. Mission is a comprehensive term and the presidents’ responses encompassed many dimensions due to the diverse nature of the historically black schools they lead.

According to Dr. Nathan Dudley, “The mission of [Tubman University] is to train Christian leaders to lead the church and the global community (Dr. Nathan Dudley, personal communication, July 20, 2005). Tubman University serves a more specialized function in comparison to the other historically black colleges and universities represented in the study because the institution is a Christian graduate school of theology. Its’ identity as a school of theology dictates the mission as one that is dedicated to educating young men and women in preparation for the ministry. Tubman University’s mission incorporates the common theme of preparing students for leadership; however, the leadership at this particular institution concentrates on helping students become spiritual leaders as teachers, pastors, and preachers.

Walker University president, Dr. Trevis Freeman, disclosed that a critical component of his institution’s mission is an ongoing commitment to providing international programs and opportunities for their student body:

As an African American university, we believe it is important to give students an opportunity to learn more about Africa particularly, and other countries. So our study abroad program is six weeks where students go and get six hour credits in various parts of Africa: South Africa, West
Africa, down in the Caribbean, Dominican Republic, and this year Belize and many of the underdeveloped countries in the world. We are finding that the experience broadens their perspectives of themselves, of the world, and they benefit much. We have a strong international program here. We’ve created a degree in international studies where the students learn the critical languages. Now that we live in a world community and because of the diversity of our campus, we have access on the campus. A lot of people can teach a lot of these languages such as Japanese and Chinese. Historically, all we’ve ever been able to do is French, German, and Spanish but the critical languages now are these others so we now offer those in addition to the basics. We have a degree in teaching English as a second language and that’s one of our master’s programs because with our urban mission in preparing our teachers to go into the urban centers of America particularly, they have to be diverse and be able to teach English as a second language which is becoming more and more important (Dr. Trevis Freeman, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

This view of mission illustrates the president’s concern for exposing students to the international world. The focus on Africa, in particular, suggests that the school values the idea of educating African American students about their ancestry. The study abroad programs allow students to see the world and fully experience life and culture outside of the United States. This mission of international exposure recognizes the increased need for students of historically black colleges and universities to be equipped with an awareness and understanding of the global world in order to be viable candidates for the competitive job market.

**Implementing the Mission**

Defining the mission of historically black colleges and universities involves articulating the overall purpose, role, and function of the institutions. The articulation, however, is only the first step. The next phase of the study shifts the focus from the colleges and universities to the role the president. The guiding research question is, “How do presidents of historically black colleges and universities implement the mission of
their institutions?" The objective is to understand how the presidents make mission manifest. How do they contribute to carrying out the mission they articulate?

**Common Themes**

The president plays a vital role in ensuring that the college or university is functioning properly (Birnbaum, 1988b; Buchanan, 1988). The responsibilities of maintenance and supervision coupled with the pressures and expectations of leading an academic institution, distinctly separates this position from other higher education administrative employment (Birnbaum, 1992; Cohen & March, 1986; Kauffman, 1980). The presidents in the study shared two common themes that identified their role in implementing the mission of their respective college or university. The first theme is that the presidents view themselves as the visible representative of their institutions and the second theme is that they employ strategic planning to accomplish the mission they articulate.

*The representative of the school.* Representative is an inclusive term that identifies the president as an authoritative presence on campus. As representatives, presidents have certain responsibilities and with those responsibilities come expectations. They are expected to be involved with campus matters and decision making because they represent the voice of the institutions. As the representatives, the presidents possess power and influence. The following interview responses demonstrate how the presidents in the study, as representatives of their schools, described their role in implementing the mission of their historically black college and university:

Dr. Isaac   The president serves as the face on this mission providing the motivation, focusing all of the attention on being sure that this vision and this mission is accomplished and being certain and accountable to the board and other
stakeholders for the fulfillment of that mission. The president has to be sure that the resources of the university are aligned with the mission and its strategic plans and aims. That is the role of the president and that is easier said than done (Dr. Bobby Isaac, personal communication, July 12, 2005).

Dr. Myers  Everything runs through this office because they want my input. In this state, the institutions are known by the president and what the president does. Presidents set the tone and adherence to the mission. As the president you have to recognize the need and find the resources to grow and prosper (Dr. Clarence Myers, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

Dr. Auguste  A president helps to define an institution’s character and ethos in part by how he interacts with that community and how he positions himself within that community and how he models what the institution is all about (Dr. Jared Auguste, personal communication, July 20, 2005).

Dr. Dudley  I play a role in implementing the mission at all levels. I am engaged in the faculty meetings, directing the activities of my vice presidents and people who directly report to me play a role. As the chief spokesman for the institution and as the principal fundraiser for the institution, I have a critical role in fulfilling the mission of the institution (Dr. Nathan Dudley, personal communication, July 20, 2005).

Dr. Davis  I think that the president is that person who tries to make the mission statement come to life which is why we’re looking at ours and probably by the time I get out of here, it will change because it needs to be something that is succinct enough. Most mission statements are too long and too elaborate that people don’t know what they mean anyway. So we have got to condense it to something that everybody around campus can grasp and everybody can speak the sentence that this is what we are about and then we do all these different things to make this happen. So part of it will be to be that spokesperson for…but right now we’re going through a phase where I’m really trying to help us redefine what the mission is so that we’re all on the same page to say this is our mission (Dr. Earl Davis, personal communication, August 2, 2005).

Dr. Freeman  The president is the voice. You have to step up to the plate. You can not lead from behind. Your institution, fortunately or unfortunately, you represent it. When you speak people see [Walker University] and must hear [Walker University] and that’s kind of how I have mannered. I do believe in shared purposes. I do share a lot of responsibilities. I have strong teams including students in the process. I believe that my style has been that of engagement on the part of the entire university. All of our publics must buy in to the success of the university (Dr. Trevis Freeman, personal communication, July 7, 2005).
The presidents’ responses identify a few of the key roles and responsibilities of the black college presidency. As the highest ranking chief academic officers, they serve a critical function as representatives of their colleges and universities. Presidents confront accountability issues and have to ensure that their schools are providing the services they promote and meeting the needs of the campus and community. They are the face of their colleges and universities and ultimately have the task of setting the tone of the overall campus. Interestingly, the mere mention of a president’s name is synonymous with their institution. Consequently, the reputations of black college presidents influence the perception of their schools due to their representative role.

The expectation is that presidents, as the institutional leaders, will take charge and implement the mission of their college and university in the appropriate manner. But in order to implement mission, presidents need adequate resources. While they have countless responsibilities, a significant part of their job includes fundraising. Fundraising is an important responsibility, particularly for presidents of historically black colleges and universities due to the financial constraints these institutions endure. Resources allow presidents the opportunity to turn their institutions’ mission into reality. Without resources, presidents can not initiate new academic programs, recruit new faculty, nor renovate aging facilities. The challenge, therefore, is finding innovating ways to acquire the necessary funds so that mission may manifest.

Although the president is the representative of the school and has to stay abreast of all university operations, she or he recognizes that mission implementation does not occur in isolation. Indeed, presidents have power, but their success as leaders and the prosperity of their schools is contingent upon the support and involvement of faculty,
staff, students, and the community. The effort is a collective one and in order to implement mission, presidents must have a strategic plan.

*Strategic planning.* Presidents, as representatives of colleges and universities, define mission, seek the resources to implement mission, and the next logical phase involves strategic planning. Higher education is a major enterprise. Colleges and universities are organized in a hierarchical manner composed on many individuals. Despite the hierarchy of power and command, in order for institutions to reach maximum potential, all invested individuals must demonstrate hard work and dedication to accomplish the established mission. Presidents of historically black colleges and universities acknowledge that they do not work alone and that it takes a whole village to implement the mission of their respective schools. Three of the presidents participating in the study offered the following perspectives:

**Dr. Donahoo** When I came here in 1987, we started a strategic planning process. We have a record of having three year strategic plans. The strategic plans are divided among the administrative divisions. There’s a plan for academic affairs, planning and advancement, administration, finance, and student affairs. And each plan is a three year plan and we have 3 year goals with annual objectives and quarterly strategies and that is the format for the plan. The goals and objectives are related to the mission statement. The strategic plan for each division is driven by the mission statement. In every quarter I would meet with each vice president to find out how they are doing in terms of the strategies for their plans and now I do that on a monthly basis. And that is how I’m able to monitor how we’re doing in terms of making certain that our priorities are consistent with our mission statement. We’re now in our sixth cycle of strategic planning (Dr. Scales Donahoo, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

**Dr. Marie** I am the leader of the institution and the buck stops here. I believe in strategic planning and I believe in the implementation of the strategic plan so that your strategic plan grows out from your mission. So you look at your mission statement and you look at what the state requires of you and you formulate your strategic initiative to match that. When I finish my strategic plan, everybody who works at the institution must see themselves in it. It’s like a family portrait. If your family took a portrait and you
didn’t see yourself in it, something is wrong with the portrait. So whether you cut the grass or teach graduate students or undergraduates which is so important, or greet people on the telephone or work in security, you are to be effective in this strategic plan which is geared toward improving the institution and working towards learning outcomes and I keep telling them, making good better….My role is to make sure that it is implemented and it’s not just a document that you do and it’s good and you put it on the shelf. We have periodic meetings to see how we are accomplishing our goals and then you have an assessment plan that’s tied into it and you do your research to make sure that what you say you would like to do, you’ve done and then you take the results and work it into the new plan for next year. And so we have a five year plan, but we also have an annual plan to see what we’ve accomplished and then I do an annual report which is very much an overview, it’s not a detailed report. But the president’s role in all of this for me, because we are a small university with only just about 4000 students right now…The president wears many hats. I am hands on. I sit at the table and write things and answer my own mail and do things; I’m not just a figure head president going about talking about what other people do. I write proposals and get them funded. I am literally a part of the workforce, not just the leader. If I do this, my vice president also must do this and everyone involved is to be a productive contributing citizen. My job is to make sure that is true (Dr. Mathilda Marie, personal communication, July 29, 2005).

Dr. Auguste  One is the development and communication and inculcation of a vision derived from the mission derived from history derived from the character and culture of the institution. But that projects it forward in ways that perhaps others can’t immediately see; not only about the future of the institution but the future of the people that are here. So articulating communication and inculcating vision is one thing that I have to do….The second thing is that one must be very conscious of definitive, practical, strategic planning which is how do you get to the vision; how do you use the mission to structure a root to the vision? That is the process by which you enable the community, the university community itself to design its various paths to that vision and to take ownership of those paths and to hold themselves and each other accountable for the annual pursuit of that vision (Dr. Jared Auguste, personal communication, July 20, 2005).

The interview responses illustrate the presidents’ engagement in symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is a social psychological theory that suggests that people make meanings through social interactions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The presidents in this
study define and implement mission based on the consideration and involvement of others.

Strategic planning helps presidents of historically black colleges and universities get organized in preparation for mission implementation. The presidents establish a reasonable time frame to get the work accomplished. Although the time frame varies from one institution to the next, the overall objective is to get everyone, including the faculty, students, administration, and the surrounding community to work toward common goals. The president’s job is to create a campus of shared responsibility and strategically develop teams to achieve the mission of the institution. Teams allow individuals an opportunity to play an active role in the planning process and provide a platform for their voices to be heard and incorporated into the agenda.

Dr. Mathilda Marie, a female president, offered an interesting perspective with regard to involving the entire campus community in the strategic planning process. She said that at Winfrey College, her strategic plan is like a family portrait. Dr. Marie’s goal is to ensure that everyone who attends and works at the institution see themselves in the portrait. The family portrait strategic plan idea serves an excellent way to encourage shared responsibility and campus involvement.

The presidents in the study stressed the importance of the history of black colleges and universities. Despite the progress of these institutions, the presidents remain mindful of the struggle and the historic mission of educating African American students. The presidents relied heavily on the mission statements adopted by their colleges and universities. The mission statements serve as the foundation on which many of the presidents build their strategic plans.
Complementary Perspectives

The following perspectives offered by presidents in the study echo the common themes of being a representative of the school and strategic planning. The responses, however, add new dimensions to the way in which the implementation process occurs.

**Dr. Rovaris**  
Generally my role in almost everything that goes on at the university is to make sure that I put into place the best qualified individuals in leadership roles and then provide the resources, human and material, for them to do their jobs the best that they could. So when we speak about the land grant mission for example, we had a highly qualified dean of our college of agriculture and I worked with him regularly and directly and through the vice president for academic affairs to ensure that he had the resources necessary to move that college forward and to bring the university’s land grant mission forward. And the same is true with regard to the commitment to African American students since this school’s inception in 1895. Our associate vice president for enrollment management…his responsibility was to ensure that the doors were open for African American students where possible and we admitted those students and ensured that they were retained to the best of our ability and ultimately graduate (Dr. Sultan Rovaris, personal communication, August 15, 2005).

**Ms. Frances**  
As the president of the college, we establish a vision for the institution that is built upon the consensus and input from the members of the institution. I draw from the history of this great college and I look at where we are today, where we want to be in the future. I look at the whole context of higher education and how the landscape is changing and where do we want [Winfrey College] to fit in. I put faces and words to that mission, particularly that I am able to communicate that, work to get not only the college community here to buy in, but also our external constituents—alumni, friends, donors, to look at [Winfrey College] and to promote that everyday to bring the vision of the college before the members of the [Winfrey College] community and also for our alumni and friends through communication, with face to face meetings, through expressions in the written form and in the spoken form (Ms. Mary Frances, personal communication, August 15, 2005).

**Mr. Lamard**  
I am responsible to ensure that every aspect of that mission is accomplished. We place students first and everything that we do is geared toward successful student performance. In order to achieve successful student performance…that means graduation, and graduation with the qualifications to go on to a higher level, to post graduate level education, and to enter professional fields to pursue various professional fields. Then
you must develop and maintain relevant academic programs that meet the needs of students. You must take a larger view towards student development that’s not only the classroom, but it’s outside of the classroom in terms of their cultural, moral, holistic development so that students not only understand their academic courses. They have to develop academically but they also need to develop in a holistic way so that they are able to perform well within the rigors of society that will ask them to do a lot of other things other than just performing their profession. Secondly, we must have the facilities, the infrastructure and the overall environment for students that enhance learning and that takes care of them well…that provides them a good surrounding to study and for living and for social development as well. We have a responsibility to maintain our attachment to the past and building roads to the future and that’s through our alumni and through other associations and relationships that help to propel the university forward on a continuing basis. Our university has a responsibility for being a good citizen and espousing good citizenship in the surrounding communities and in the area in which we live. Then we also must capitalize and develop our human capital, that human capital being faculty, being staff… because we can only continue to put students first as we enrich our human capital and make certain that we have the right people in the right jobs providing the right things for our students (Mr. Devon Lamard, personal communication, August 16, 2005).

Dr. Lee Well obviously the decisions I make from a day to day basis should be guided by the mission because after all, if you don’t look at that mission then you take the university outside of what it is intended to do. My decisions, my involvement in the community, my involvement in the state, my involvement outside the state all was geared toward making sure that black citizens had the opportunity to get a higher education (Dr. Acosta Lee, personal communication, August 25, 2005).

Dr. Spencer First of all… I tell my faculty this all the time and I really mean it; when you really look at the mission of a university that mission is delivered in large part by the faculty. So how I implement that mission here at the institution is that I am engaged in the recruitment of faculty, in the retention of faculty, and in their professional development. I also play an active role in the recruitment of students to the university and so I am very concerned about the recruitment and retention of students and creating ways for them to go on to graduate and professional school; especially to get Ph.D.’s and plant that seed that once they get the Ph.D. that they will come back to their alma mater and be a part of this faculty and administration (Dr. John Spencer, personal communication, August 19, 2005).
In order to successfully implement the mission of their historically black colleges and universities, presidents surround themselves with individuals who contribute to helping the mission manifest. The objective is to employ qualified people to occupy key leadership and faculty positions. The presidents’ job becomes easier when they can rely on and share responsibilities with a competent group of administrators and faculty. As previously mentioned, mission implementation does not occur in isolation. In addition to appreciating the input of students and faculty, the presidents also expressed the desire to have more participation from alumni and donors. The relationships with alumni and donors aid in the growth of black colleges because they contribute to the financial well being of the institutions. The challenge for black colleges is finding ways to nurture those relationships and establish meaningful connections. The goal is to encourage the alumni and donors to get involved with the campus so that they are able to contribute to the needs of the school.

**Challenges to Mission Implementation**

The presidents in the study play a key role in defining and implementing the mission of black colleges. While the presidents are able to easily set the parameters of what their institutions are expected to do and establish their particular role in aiding the process, challenges often preclude them from reaching their desired goals. Black colleges have a long history of struggle as they developed during a time of intense racial segregation and discrimination. Although they have experienced growth and much success, black colleges continue to face obstacles as they attempt to remain relevant institutions of higher education.
Common Themes

This section of the study addresses the challenges that presidents face when they attempt to implement the mission of their institutions. Despite the differences among historically black colleges and universities, they share similar struggles. The presidents in the study elaborated on the two common themes of financial constraints and resistance to change.

Financial constraints. Consistent with the literature on black colleges, the dominant challenge that these institutions endure is not having adequate financial resources (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Brown, Ricard & Donahoo, 2004; Browning & Williams, 1978; Fleming 1984; Garibaldi, 1984; Kannerstein, 1978; Thompson, 1998). Colleges and universities are a business and in order for any type of business to efficiently operate and reach its’ maximum potential, money is an absolute necessity. The problem, as evidenced in the following responses, is that money is such a powerful tool that it impacts every aspect of a college or university’s function.

Dr. Dudley One of the primary barriers to all historically black colleges and universities is the absence of discretionary funding. Most of the funds raised by and donated to historically black colleges and universities tend to go to mission… the absence of discretionary funding to do some of the creative programming that we would like to do is not available so we engage in writing a number of proposals and seeking external funding (Dr. Nathan Dudley, personal communication, July 20, 2005).

Dr. Rovaris Certainly money is one. HBCUs do not receive the kind of support be it foundation or personal from alumni that predominantly white institutions receive. We typically don’t have the same kinds of endowments. Secondly, as a public HBCU, we suffer from the fact that the board of regents and the chancellor’s office still do not fully understand the function of historically black colleges and universities so they don’t receive the kind of support that they should receive (Dr. Sultan Rovaris, personal communication, August 15, 2005).
Ms. Frances Well the barriers that most institutions face today even smaller institutions, particularly HBCUs, is funding and having adequate finances; the resources to really implement your vision and to do the kinds of things that you would really like to see done at your institutions. We have to find the available resources to help support the young people who are coming into our colleges who want an education (Ms. Mary Frances, personal communication, August 15, 2005).

Mr. Lamard Since we are a state university we are faced with the prospect of requiring more and more in terms of funding from individual students and their families. As we develop programs and infrastructure more and more for our universities today, we are expected to raise more and more of those dollars from outside sources. A lot of your success in fundraising depends on your success with a number of other things that your university will have the capability to do. You also have to be concerned about a number of students that arrive at your university these days that are not exceptionally well prepared out of high school. You find yourself presented with the formidable challenge to bring your students along and a number of them have a lot of catching up to do so you have to be concerned about that and that gives you some barriers if you will (Mr. Devon Lamard, personal communication August 16, 2005).

Dr. Foster The challenge is that it is going to cost money to do things. Consequently, we have got to have the resources for them and we’ve also have to have the type of faculty, facilities, and so forth. We can’t say to them [students] come here and then they’ve been on another campus and say oh yeah we don’t have those kinds of things because you know we’re a black school. We don’t have the best lab…they don’t want to hear that stuff. They don’t deserve that stuff. They deserve the best that other schools have. What it has meant and people haven’t liked it, we’ve had to raise the cost of attending this school substantially since I have been here. But before I ever came I said there are some good universities and there are some cheap universities. There are no good cheap universities. We are talking about an investment and so that is something else we have to do. The bottom line though, the biggest challenge would be our lack of will in making these things happen. Everywhere I’ve ever been all my life boils down to understanding there are barriers, roadblocks, and so forth. What are we going to do about it? How do we get to our goals anyway? The bottom line is we going to come up with a strategy to reach the goals that we set. I don’t worry about these other things in the way because it’s what I’m going to do and that’s been my whole story (Dr. Kerry Foster, personal communication, August 12, 2005).

Dr. Lee The biggest challenge is financial. Historically black colleges and universities have been, are, and for some foreseeable future will be under funded. It makes it very difficult to do our job so we have to do more with
less and that’s an awfully difficult task. But you know what, we’ve been doing it now for over a hundred years. We continue to do it and we do it very well. Other schools try, but they simply don’t have that mentoring and nurturing atmosphere that we have at our HBCUs (Dr. Acosta Lee, personal communication, August 25, 2005).

Dr. Spencer I think that the challenges to not just [Height University] but to almost all HBCUs has to do with funding. Funding takes on a lot of subcategories but to give you an example, here in this state we have what you could pretty much call a tier system. Institutions are classified by their missions and the way that you are classified impacts the salaries that can be paid to administrators as well as faculty. In this competitive market place that we have, if we’re not able to get funding to pay competitive salaries, sometimes we miss out on the best talent and we have to make do with who we can recruit. The other part of the funding has to do with external fundraising, not just from the state but the ability to bring major gifts to institutions. You’re studying higher education and what you’re going to learn more and more as you go forward is that a lot of the fundraising is dependent upon the types of programs that you have. In other words, corporations for instance want to invest in programs that will produce people who will eventually come and work for them. Well, if HBCUs don’t have the programs, or the programs at the level that will attract the funding, then we continue to be in a position of struggle. So funding is one area and I think another area is our facilities, our physical plant. More and more young people want to study in environments that are attractive, that are comfortable and have all of the things that you would expect in the 21st century. Because of this historical underinvestment in our institutions, some of our physical plants are not up to par. When young people and their families visit campuses and they want to go and see the dormitories, they want to see the library, they want to see the cafeteria, well if those facilities are not where they should be, our institutions are never going to be flagship institutions. Then I think the other thing is enrollment. One of the things that defines the quality of an institution is the caliber of its student body and we have to be, and when I see we I mean the HBCU community, needs to be in a position where we have a good chance of recruiting to our campuses the top talent including National Achievement Scholars, National Merit Scholars, National Hispanic Scholars. Until we get a critical mass of students like that, then as these rankings come out like US News and World Report and all these others, our institutions are not going to be there in significant numbers because much of what they use for these rankings have to do with graduation rates and retention rates (Dr. John Spencer, personal communication, August 19, 2005).

Dr. Boutte I think that you will hear from almost every president that you will interview that the major challenge is funding. That is one of the major things all of us, not only HBCU presidents, but I think most public school
presidents will say funding is one of the major things that we all see. Without funding you can’t go into some of the programs you know that there is a market for sometimes and it just limits you (Dr. Lyelle Boutte, personal communication, September 26, 2005).

Dr. Davis I guess just because of the climate in higher education right now you have the intense competition for students. Predominantly white institutions have better fiscal resources so they’re able to actually buy students. The example I use is Texas A& M because there’s a big article on them in the Chronicle. I want to say in the fall where the president said look, Texas A& M does not look like the state of Texas in terms of diversity so we’re about to fix this up. And of the things they have is a half a million dollars that they can use so that if they offer a scholarship to a student and the student is going somewhere else, they can dump more money on that student. It’s just a bidding war. So that’s happening with students and it’s also happening with faculty and staff. I know a lot of your HBCU campuses you’re seeing aging faculty because the younger, newer scholars are going after…you know they want to get paid. The average salary at the black schools are much smaller so they are going to go where the money is and if the big white schools have the money and they really want the black scholar, that’s who they are going to get. Those become the mission, the major obstacles in terms of the intense competition for faculty, staff, and students and a lot of that is predicated on how much money you have. Unfortunately HBCUs don’t have the financial resources to compete in that game (Dr. Earl Davis, personal communication, August 2, 2005).

Overall, financial constraints contribute to the ongoing struggles that presidents of historically black colleges and universities experience. The lack of adequate funds prohibits them from creating innovative academic programs that will attract more students. Due to insufficient funds, schools have to raise the cost of tuition which makes the idea of pursuing higher education an unattainable goal for some students. Financial constraints hinder black colleges from competing with predominantly white institutions because they can not contend, for example, with the sprawling facilities and faculty salaries. Black colleges and universities were developed as separate and unequal institutions when compared to predominantly white schools. The perpetual challenge of
not having sufficient funding continues to cripple historically black colleges and universities and place them at a considerable disadvantage.

One out of the 15 presidents participating in the study, however, stated that financial constraints do not interfere with mission implementation. He offered the following response:

Dr. Donahoo I don’t know of any barriers that are insurmountable. I think throughout higher education and throughout the states, and this is not unique to HBCUs, many states are experiencing reducing funding to higher education. State appropriations have been reduced over the last several years. In my experience, that has not been a barrier to us accomplishing our mission (Dr. Scales Donahoo, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

His response says that black colleges experience the same type of financial cuts as other types of higher education institutions. Based on his experience, the financial constraints are not an unmanageable challenge. This perspective attests to the resiliency of black colleges and the presidents who lead them. In spite of the difficulty, they persevere.

Resistance to change. While the presidents disclosed that financial constraints are the primary source of struggle for black colleges, they also indicated that people employed at these institutions are resistant to change. Change is often an uncomfortable experience for people because they fear the unknown. As presidents attempt to stay current and competitive in the higher education system, they have to be open to new possibilities and ways of doing things. Unfortunately, they have to convince their support staff that change will benefit and not hurt the institutions. A few of the presidents in the study shared the following:

Dr. Isaac Sometimes the unwillingness to change is a challenge. Sometimes the status quo, the existing programs, the existing activities that you have that have been long term at the university those programs and activities tend to consume resources. And once you lock resources in, it is kind of difficult
to move them around to address new and emerging needs and issues and concerns (Dr. Bobby Isaac, personal communication, July 12, 2005).

Dr. Foster

There are always going to be people who view…you will see where there are folk who are saying we don’t need to be recruiting Hispanic students. I don’t want to take up all your time but I would argue the very comments that they are making were the comments that some whites made about folk like me going to the University of Kentucky back in 1968. I keep saying that you all ought to be ashamed of yourselves to say those things because it’s not true. These folk will enhance our institutions; they won’t take anything away from our institutions. That is one challenge that there are many people who don’t see the need for that (Dr. Kerry Foster, personal communication, August 12, 2005).

Dr. Rovaris

I think that one of things that our campuses as HBCUs are particularly crippled with is a very high level of resistance to change. You may be familiar with the crab in the barrel phenomenon. There’s a lot of internal resistance to forward movement on our campuses (Dr. Sultan Rovaris, personal communication, August 15, 2005).

Dr. Auguste

The one challenge is the continuing disbelief of significant players in the process. A people’s depth of degradation often puts blinders on them about their potential future and causes them to want to take slower, more careful, fearful steps or in some cases no steps at all, but to hold on to what they believe has been the accomplishment of the past. So disbelief among significant players is one major barrier. A second major challenge is really the intent to destroy by members in power and the majority community; and in some cases those in the minority community who have issues with direction and vision, or with personalities, or with what they have experienced in the past, or what they perceive to be their own power mispositioning. The third major barrier is in as much as we primarily serve in a press community there is really only one generation into legal equality. The resources that the alumni of that community can bring to bare, are always less than one one-thousandth of what can be brought to bear by the alumni of other kinds of institutions. The ability to compete on several fronts is circumscribed by the outcomes of history (Dr. Jared Auguste, personal communication, July 20, 2005).

The general sentiment of the presidents is that individuals find comfort in what has worked for black colleges in the past, remain proud of their legacy and accomplishments, and abandon the possibility of change and improvement. This resistance to change occurs because many black college employees have occupied their
positions for a considerable amount of time and they do not recognize the new needs of
the institution. As a result, historically black colleges and universities do not experience
growth and this precludes them from being able to compete with other colleges and
universities across the nation. Presidents, therefore, have to create a comfortable balance
in preserving the history of the black colleges and universities while simultaneously
moving them in new directions.

Is the Mission Unique?

Historically black colleges and universities are not restricted to African American
students. Ultimately, students decide whether they want to attend a black school or select
from a host of other options they have. Historically black colleges and universities are a
piece of the larger puzzle of the American higher system. The challenge, however, is that
these particular schools disproportionately carry the burden of having to justify their
existence (Brown & Freeman, 2002; Garibaldi, 1984; Brown, Ricard, & Donahoo, 2004;
Fleming, 1984). Consequently, black colleges continue to fight at convincing the world
of their unique role. The interview question posed to the presidents in the study was,
“Based on your experience, do you believe that historically black institutions have a
unique mission in comparison to other types of higher education institutions?”

Common Themes

This section of the study details the common themes that emerged in regard to the
presidents’ responses to the unique character of historically black colleges and
universities. While many of the responses overlap, the two themes include overcoming
obstacles and the preservation of culture.
Overcoming obstacles. Black colleges and universities operate in the face of considerable obstacles. The presidents offer their perspectives on how these obstacles give black schools a unique identity and role in the larger academy.

Dr. Rovaris There’s no question in my mind that they do. I mentioned the fact that we admit students who would not be admissible in some other institutions. Generally speaking, tuition and cost are lower and we provide an environment where we are willing to take students from where they are to take them to where they need to be which is not always the case on predominantly white campuses. Generally speaking, we provide a sense of leadership development opportunities that are not available for students of African descent on predominantly white campuses. For example, at [Giovanni State University] we have over 80 student organizations and any black student on the campus has an opportunity to serve in a leadership role in those organizations; whereas on the predominantly white campus it would be much more competitive and difficult for black students to get involved in those organizations. The other thing is that some of our campuses provide a sense of reservoir of black culture if you will, that you typically would not find on predominantly white campuses. So there are some uniquenesses that I think continue to distinguish HBCUs and continue to argue for their perseverance (Dr. Sultan Rovaris, personal communication, August 15, 2005).

Dr. Marie Yes is the major answer; but any institution that accepts poor people, people without personal resources where family income is not abundant to contribute to the education, any institution that accepts students who went to high school and elementary school that are not of the best quality, any institution that is handicapped by the lack of facilities and operating budgets will have areas that are weak or needing. I must hasten to say that black institutions have produced the major numbers of black professionals in this country. Even if these students go on to majority institutions for their graduate and professional work, many of the black leaders we are looking at today had their beginnings in a humble black college someplace. One of the things I never do and I would encourage you not to do that is to judge HBCUs from their deficiencies which is lack of money. What we lack in money we certainly compensate for in spirit, in cultural preservation in the ability to retain and motivate in the historical proof that we are a vital force in educating the world. We had African students at black colleges long before Africa became popular….The fact is that there is so many strengths at these institutions where we achieve our goals despite the shortage of funds that I would encourage people to spin it around and begin to look at our historic contributions to this country and our ability to sustain ourselves despite all kinds of things that could make
us angry. But like Desmond Tutu says, “There is no future without forgiveness.” After we recognize the challenges we face, we just sit up later, work harder and encourage other people to do the same (Dr. Mathilda Marie, personal communication, July 29, 2005).

Mr. Lamard  Well the uniqueness, if you want to call it that, lies in who you provide access to. Your uniqueness in my view boils down to access and that is you are trying to provide access to young people who may not otherwise be able to get into college and universities that have more restricted access that’s based on the criteria that we use these days in selecting our student bodies. So yes two things are unique about historically black colleges. One is the access that you provide to young people and believe me access is not universal across all historically black colleges either…The second part of our uniqueness is the success rate at which we graduate young people from our universities and put them into the work force as competitive candidates (Mr. Devon Lamard, personal communication, August 16, 2005).

Ms. Frances  In a sense, maybe not as unique, but I think they have a special mission because HBCUs are still drawing from the marketplace of first generation college entrance which is different than some institutions. Many of our students who come to us don’t have the advantage of being exposed to country clubs or being exposed to a variety of career choices. Many of them didn’t even believe until someone told them that college was a viable option to them. They don’t have the advantage of being surrounded by magazines that deal with world affairs. They don’t have the advantage of having the kind of people in their homes to talk about that you can be a judge or you can be a lawyer. That’s beginning to change but a lot of our institutions…we still draw from a marketplace of young people who are the first people in their families to ever seek a college education. For small communities, we’re their hope; we are that link with the opportunity. I often say here [Winfrey College] has really educated and graduated some of the foremost leaders in this country and even abroad. We have alumni who live in Switzerland and South Africa, West Africa and other European countries but still, those people came from small communities. I often say to them that our institutions, the historically black colleges and universities, must be able to swing on the doors of hope and opportunity and we must be able to afford these young people at least at chance to have a seat at the broad table of human opportunity. And that’s what I look at us, the role is saying, sometimes we take these young people from nowhere USA and we take them somewhere globally. We help them to stretch their reach and expand their minds to all the possibilities that are out here and help them to believe and realize the American dream (Ms. Mary Frances, personal communication, August 15, 2005).

The presidents attest to the reality that black colleges function with disadvantages.
Students enter the campuses and are often not prepared academically. They are from poor family backgrounds and have not been exposed to life outside of their present circumstance. Some of the students are first generation college students and are unaware of the full possibilities of their educational training. In addition to the disadvantages that students bring to black college campuses, the institutions possess their own set of challenges. In spite of all this, historically black colleges and universities persevere. They are unique because they provide students with leadership development opportunities that they would not be able to experience on predominantly white campuses. According to the presidents, black colleges are responsible for educating many of the African American leaders of this country. Historically black colleges continue to contribute to the world by producing African American professionals, in general, who positively impact the world.

*Preservation of culture.* Black colleges and universities possess a distinct academic culture (Freeman, 1998; Brown 2002b). The following presidents’ responses address the idea that black colleges have a unique identity and overall environment that contributes to the positive experience students have.

**Dr. Auguste** Absolutely. We are at the heart of the educational enterprise. We’re also the institution in whatever communities we reside that have the most profound understanding of the local condition and culture of the minority community and therefore are best positioned to impact that. We’re also the primary preservers and purveyors of the culture and history of the African American community, and done right, we are the best possible laboratories for the final address to the questions of what constitutes an appropriate address to American diversity (Dr. Jared Auguste, personal communication, July 20, 2005).

**Dr. Freeman** I do. I do think that the fact that we are the only historically African American institution in the state…and there are about 30 plus others. We, the public presidents, all come together every month. The presidents will tell me often that they can not do for their black students what we can do. It’s the environment. You see they can get them a degree; they can get a degree as they can get a degree here. But [Walker University] gives them
that empowerment that you can’t hardly define; it’s the sense of belonging and ownership. They can not even when they try, and they do. I’m not talking about acceptance, I’m not talking about segregation, I’m talking about nothing but the environment. All [Walker University] is doing is the same things the other schools are doing, but it’s the environment that makes the difference. At [Walker University] it is a choice for all students here in the state…and for black students particularly. We find that many black students who come to [Walker University] and get their undergraduate degree really move into the major universities with so much more self-confidence and they move on successfully. I think it’s that empowerment. I can achieve (Dr. Trevis Freeman, personal communication, July 7, 2005).

Dr. Dudley Now let me be perfectly honest with you. I think the question that people raise about whether or not black colleges have a unique mission is an uninformed question because the same raisers of those questions don’t raise the question on whether or not Catholic colleges have a unique mission or whether Jewish colleges have a unique mission but they tend to ask it about black colleges. Now having said that, there is a significantly unique mission and part of that is to keep actively alive the sense of history, tradition, and culture of African American contributions to this nation and the world. In addition to providing quality academic education, its mission is also as a repository of history, culture, and tradition (Dr. Nathan Dudley, personal communication, July 20, 2005).

Historically black colleges and universities possess a unique understanding of the condition of African American people. Black schools acknowledge and celebrate the culture and history of black students. This type of environment empowers them and gives them a greater sense of confidence. This nurturing environment helps students to believe that they are capable of succeeding. Dr. Nathan Dudley asserts that black colleges should not be questioned about their role in the higher education because they have already proven that they are significant institutions.

*The Provision of Role Models*

One president in the study shared a unique perspective in regard to identifying the unique mission of historically black colleges. Although some of his response coincided
with the other presidents’ perspectives, he suggested that black colleges are unique because they provide students with role models. He proffered:

Dr. Foster There is a niche, a place for historically black schools just like there are for religious schools, just like there are for major research, just like there are for small colleges. Here is what I believe; I believe that there is really something to the role model effect of seeing people of color in positions from A to Z. I think if you go pick your school, they ought to talk about their legacy, their history and so forth. Well it’s important for students to hear that about ours as well. Again, while I’m sure that every school will say they provide leadership opportunities for students and I’m not doubting that, but I’m not so sure if the black students I encounter here from top to bottom in leadership positions would be in those same positions at some of the predominantly white schools. I didn’t say that there wouldn’t be any in there, of course there would be. I really do believe that we give them some opportunities to be involved, engaged, and so forth in a way that they might not get. Just by the same token I bet you Smith and Mount Holyoke and so forth, does some of the same things for women. These women could be leaders at Princeton or anywhere, but I think Mount Holyoke and Smith might give them more opportunity and I think that is what [Shabazz University] might do for black folk. (Dr. Kerry Foster, personal communication, August 12, 2005).

The presence of African American role models enables students to see the manifestation of hard work and dedication in the lives of the African American leaders on their campuses. They are able to see themselves in their professors and the administration; this is a unique contribution of black colleges. Both predominantly white institutions and historically black colleges and universities employ African Americans. The difference, however, is that students on black college campuses are able to witness African Americans in high rank positions such as department chair, dean, vice president for academic affairs, and ultimately the position of president.

The Relevance of the Historic Mission

The historic mission of black colleges refers to the idea that the initial purpose of these institutions was to educate African American students when most existing colleges
and universities were not open to them. Recognizing that African Americans no longer suffer from legal restrictions and that black colleges themselves experience mandates for increased racial diversity, this study asked the presidents if the historic mission remains relevant. The shared the following:

Dr. Isaac I think that the key word is access. I am not sure that we want to limit it only to African Americans because there are a number of citizens in our nation whose backgrounds and socioeconomic standings are quite similar to that of African Americans. So I think our institutions are committed and dedicated to providing access to educational opportunities irrespective of the ethnic background of the individual (Dr. Bobby Isaac, personal communication, July 12, 2005).

Dr. Dudley It is still primarily on African American students but the thing is, historically black colleges have never excluded whites or anybody else. One of the reasons that they have remained predominantly African American has been a factor of the choices that non-African Americans have made not to attend (Dr. Nathan Dudley, personal communication, July 20, 2005).

Dr. Rovaris I think for the most part there are some exceptions. There are a number of schools like West Virginia College, Kentucky State that are approximately 50% white. Frankly I don’t know the extent to which they continue with any part of their admission related to students of African decent. I suspect that there is some continuance of that but for the most part I think that HBCUs continue to be HBCUs and continue to focus on their primary clientele, students of African decent (Dr. Sultan Rovaris, personal communication August 15, 2005).

Dr. Marie Yes. As long as the conditions in society persist, the need for black colleges will always be there. Nobody questions the legitimacy of a religious college, a military college, or any other specialized college and so until this society is such that the need no longer exists, I would say yes it is...My institution is loaded with white kids whose family income is no greater than that of the blacks. The poor white people that some people would call other names and I don’t name call but you know the term for white people such as hillbillies, trailer park, white trash, all of that. The profile of these students is the same for poor black students and don’t forget now that in black education you have Hampton and Spelman and Howard and [University of Angelou] that have some kids here who can posture and drive their Mercedes to class and go sailing when they go home and fly to Europe, the French Riviera for their vacation. Don’t forget now that black is not a word that means downtrodden, daddy left home,
mother had ten children, it doesn’t mean that. The black middle class is what Zora Neale Hurston called, ‘the best kept secret’ in an essay she wrote in 1938 and it is true. Go to Bennett College and look what’s inside of their cafeteria; they have woodwork to make your mouth water. Go to any of these institutions you’ll find artwork and historical pieces. You see, we have to struggle with this business of image….If some people ever saw how black people live for real in their homes, they would deny us opportunity because they would think we’re moving too fast or moving out of the place that sociology has created for us. So I hasten to say, black does not mean poor, downtrodden and it means Condoleezza Rice it means Colin Powell. The world sees the sniper kid or the drug addict or someone who holds you up; that’s what the world sees and that’s their choice to codify us (Dr. Mathilda Marie, personal communication, July 29, 2005).

Dr. Davis Yeah I think it is but part of what’s happening is that because we’re losing so many to the majority institutions, more and more people are talking about, well we need to get into the Hispanic market. So, when I hear that here I don’t jump up and down, I’m saying, “I don’t think we’ve competed for black students.” That’s my thing. We stopped competing and I’m not willing just to say well because people are just trying to figure out how do we pay the bills, let’s try to get Hispanic students. But then you get a critical mass of Hispanic students, it’ll be Bluefield [State University] but it’ll be just a different population, you’ll have more Hispanics. It will be an HBCU that’s mostly Hispanic and that will happen. I think that we have to start competing for the students and we’ve got to be able to succinctly say this is what we do better than other folks and this is how we show we do it (Dr. Earl Davis, personal communication, August 2, 2005).

Ms. Frances Yes our focus is still on African American students. One of the things I say here is that we want to make sure that we encourage diversity on our campus, geographically, racial, gender wise and all of that. But we have to also respect the historic mission of the college. We don’t change it because the world might be changing because there still is a real place for an institution like ours. And I think that more historically black colleges and universities must respect and maintain ownership of that historic mission. So often we want to become the images of our sister institutions that are predominantly white and those that are Ivy League and those that are better endowed. It does not mean that you don’t really ascribe to growth in your institutions, but to realize that within that same content and context you can offer a quality education and a quality environment to steal a specific population of students. I am committed to making sure that these young people will have access to higher education. I feel very strongly that if we fail at our institutions to provide the opportunity for these young people to receive a higher education, then we’ve failed; we fail our society and we fail America in a sense…if we don’t educate these
young people, 50 years from today, our democracy will perhaps look like those countries that we are sending our sons and daughters in to defend and protect. We are educating, all of our institutions of higher education, but more particular our historically black colleges and universities, are the preservers and keepers of the American promise and also of sustaining a vibrant democracy where all citizens have an opportunity to participate equally (Ms. Mary Frances, personal communication, August 15, 2005).

Dr. Foster I would say that back then many of them [black colleges] were designed to provide services to whites. If you look at the fact that they were creating mechanics, homemakers, and cooks with emphasis on the industrial arts… while that could benefit blacks, it also was a benefit to whites and it was also to create citizens for white America. The interesting thing I would argue about an HBCU back during the day 1880s and so on, was that whites supported them and blacks did but they may have been supporting them for different reasons. Whites could see them as being beneficial and maybe creating docile people and so forth. Blacks could see this as leading to freedom in a certain way. Even though the curriculum may have been dominated with white thinking at some period of time in some schools, black people were nevertheless able to turn that around; it was better than no school… (Dr. Kerry Foster, personal communication, August 12, 2005).

The majority of the presidents identified the historic mission of historically black colleges as a relevant mission today. Although a few schools that are categorized as historically black institutions maintain a predominant white student enrollment, overall, black colleges remain committed to serving African American students. The presidents point out, however, that black colleges are not discriminatory institutions and that they welcome all students irrespective of race. The problem, as stated by Dr. Nathan Dudley, is that non-African Americans choose not to attend historically black schools. Black colleges, therefore, have to compete for the best and brightest students and Dr. Earl Davis argues that rather than looking to the Hispanic student population, black colleges need to focus on recruiting African American students. The historic mission of educating African Americans continues to be a priority among presidents of historically black colleges and universities.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter concludes the study and provides recommendations for policy and practice. The results of this study provide some insights into the ways black college presidents define and implement the mission of their institutions. Additionally, the study identifies critical challenges that presidents of historically black college and universities face as they attempt to preserve the legacy and maintain the relevance of these institutions in the larger higher education system. Just as this study answers some questions about the topic of mission, it also raises important questions and concerns. What did the presidents in the study not say? What themes were not identified?

The research findings indicate matters that presidents of these institutions should focus on as they lead these colleges and universities in a higher education environment that continues to devalue their contributions. Likewise, this study also highlights some issues related to historically black colleges and universities that remain under-researched and need more attention from both policy analysts and educational scholars. The future of black colleges depends on ongoing assessment of their current condition in order to make meaningful improvement.

The Difficulty in Defining Mission

The term mission refers to an institution’s explicit role, purpose, and function within the larger system of higher education. The overarching question posed to the presidents in the study was, “How do you personally define the mission of your college or university?” Assumed to be a rather simple and direct one, this question turned out to be somewhat difficult for the presidents to answer. Although the participants received a
copy of all of the questions prior to the interview, this particular question garnered a slight pause or hesitation before the presidents responded. Following this awkward silence, the presidents’ began to discuss, and often times, recite their official school mission statements.

Approximately seven out of the 15 presidents found it difficult to articulate a personal definition of mission because they could not disconnect from their institutions’ mission statements. Mission statements have power because they are symbolic and represent an ingrained fabric of a college or university’s identity. This study, however, forced the presidents to engage in what Weick (1995) identifies as sensemaking. As detailed in the conceptual framework, sensemaking simply means to make sense of something. Sensemaking is concerned with the ways in which individuals construct meaning and generate interpretations. Sensemaking is a useful lens for the purpose of this study because it makes the presidents process and organize their own thoughts about mission, independent of the actual mission statements. The responses, therefore, represent an introspective analysis of mission and reflect what Brown (2003) identifies as an emic approach to researching historically black colleges and universities. The data from an emic approach is valuable because it provides information on black colleges from an insider’s perspective.

In addition to the difficulty in defining mission, the presidents in the study also experienced difficulty in discussing the mission of their respective schools without the inclusion of other historically black colleges and universities. They often spoke in terms of “we” and “our institutions” as if to suggest the importance of similarities that unite black colleges. Dr. Earl Davis, president of Scott King College, likened black colleges to
church hymnals. He said that although some people are Baptist, Episcopalian, or Methodist, they all sing from the same hymnal books.

Although a simple word, mission has complex meaning. The meaning is complex because the term embodies a myriad of considerations, particularly in regard to higher education institutions. According to Hendrickson (1991), colleges and universities establish relationships with numerous constituencies including the government and the public at-large. The relationships bind institutions to a commitment to provide academic learning and instruction for students. In turn, these commitments influence the ways in which the presidents conceptualize and implement mission. In their attempts to define mission, presidents have to ask the tough questions: Why do we exist? What purpose do we serve? How do our historically black colleges and universities contribute to the larger system of higher education? As evidenced in the results of the research, the answers to these tough questions represent what the presidents in the study value about their institutions. The responses reveal the presidents’ priorities. The results, however, do not reflect the totality of the mission of black colleges. The presidents in the study are a sample of presidents who lead four-year black colleges. Their perspectives on mission, therefore, are not generalizable to all historically black colleges and universities or other higher education institutions.

The Mission is not Unique, but it Matters

The majority of research on historically black colleges and universities directly states or indirectly implies that black colleges serve a unique mission in comparison to other types of higher education institutions. The review of the literature indicates that black colleges and universities provide African American students with an empowering
educational experience with which predominantly white institutions remain unable to compete. At the time that historically black colleges and universities were founded, their mission of specifically serving African American students did make them unique because few other colleges and universities made any effort to admit or educate these individuals. On the surface, the results of this study further support the belief that black colleges serve a unique mission based on the responses of the presidents. Most of the presidents eagerly proclaimed that black colleges do serve a unique mission and effortlessly explained the reasons why. A few of the presidents said that black colleges are not different from other higher education institutions, but also proceeded to detail the special qualities that historically black colleges and universities possess. In the modern higher education landscape, federal, state, and institution anti-discrimination policies make what was once a unique college mission now appears to be an antiquated purpose. Further analysis into the presidents’ responses reveal that black colleges and universities do not serve a unique mission, but their mission matters because they cater to a special population of student learners who continue to need services and assistance that other types of institutions fail to make available to them.

Although two of the universities represented in the study (Jemison State University and Waters University) maintain a predominantly white student population, most black colleges primarily educate and serve African American students. The focus on this special population of students influences the overall mission of the college or university as the leaders of these institutions aim to provide the best services based on the needs of their student body. As Freeman (1998) suggests, black colleges maintain a distinct campus culture. Black colleges and universities are aware of and understand the
critical needs of black students. When the presidents in the study offered definitions on the mission of their respective schools, they discussed matters applicable to all higher education institutions. In general, colleges and universities: (a) provide access and opportunities for learning, (b) prepare students for leadership roles, and (c) equip students to successfully transition into graduate and professional schools. If the focus shifts off of African American students, the mission of historically black colleges and universities mirrors the mission of other types of colleges and universities.

A few of the presidents found the question concerning the unique role of black colleges to be somewhat offensive. Their attitude stemmed from the harsh reality that historically black colleges and universities disproportionately carry the burden of having to justify why they exist. The presidents reaffirmed Benjamin E. Mays’ (1978) argument that other types of institutions such as Catholic colleges, for example, do not receive the type of scrutiny that black colleges endure. The presidents’ attitudes echoed Charles V. Willie’s (1984) assertion that historically black colleges have yet to convince the general public of their role and overall significance, despite their proven success. The reasoning behind this scrutiny is that historically black colleges and universities did not start on an equal playing field within mainstream higher education. Black colleges were created as separate and unequal higher education institutions and predominantly white institutions continue to dominate and control the playing field especially in graduate and professional education. The challenge for presidents and other supporters of black colleges is recognizing that these racially identifiable institutions will continue to face questions concerning mission. As this study indicates, the solution is the provision of information
addressing the purpose, role, and function of black colleges from credible sources, such as the college and university presidents themselves.

Despite the presidents’ resentment toward having their institutions identified as unique or the implication that these schools are not as good as their predominantly white counterparts, the study participants proudly acknowledged the special qualities endemic to their respective schools. Historically black colleges face many obstacles, yet they continue to persevere. For example, many of these institutions lack adequate financial resources, which can prevent them from maintaining updated learning facilities or utilizing current technology. In spite of such resource limitations, these institutions of higher education succeed in preparing and positioning African American students for future achievement.

In essence, the struggle of black colleges is their trademark. Yet, similar to the struggle of African American people in the United States, the struggle of historically black colleges and universities reflects their strength and resiliency as they continue to do more with less. Black colleges provide black students with an academic environment that respects and celebrates their culture and history. The celebration on these campuses is not limited to the month of February, but rather acknowledged throughout the year and incorporated into the curriculum and daily activities. Another special quality of black colleges is their ability to provide positive African American role models for students. Students have opportunities to observe African Americans occupy all facets of the faculty and administration. Perhaps the greatest quality of historically black colleges and universities is their ability to enroll academically under prepared students and transform them into college graduates. As Kannerstein (1978) contends, black colleges are more
concerned with what happens to students after they leave the campuses, rather than what
the students bring to the campus in their freshman year. In doing so, black colleges and
universities remain committed to a service mission that focuses on serving the whole
needs of students as people by preparing to succeed in both college and in life. The
mission of historically black colleges and universities matters to the African American
community because these institutions represent a constant reminder that higher education
is an attainable goal.

The Servant Leader

The service element of the black college mission is very important to the
individuals who lead these schools. Dr. Clarence Myers, president of Morrison State
University, suggested that being the president of a historically black college or university
is similar to being the pastor of a large church. This analogy coincided with the research
results on the presidents’ perceptions of their role in implementing the mission of their
college or university. Similar to the relationship a pastor has with a church congregation,
presidents of black colleges view themselves as the visible representatives of their
schools. Both pastors and presidents represent the face and voice of their respective
institutions. Pastors and presidents also engage in strategic planning to accomplish
specific goals. The key is that neither of these leaders can reach their goals in isolation,
but rather must surround themselves with a cooperative and competent team in order to
be successful.

Essentially, presidents of black colleges and universities utilize what Robert
Greenleaf (1977) identifies as servant leadership. The basic principle of servant
leadership is that a great leader is a servant first and a leader second. Despite the
prevalent challenges and negative perceptions that plague these institutions, many of the presidents in the study stated that they deliberately chose to lead a historically black college or university. These individuals simply recognized the need and desired to serve. Presidents of black colleges remain committed to serving their institutions by placing the students’ needs as their first priority. As servant leaders, black college presidents implement the mission of their institutions through collaborative efforts as they welcome input from faculty, students, alumni, and the general public.

In addition to presidents of black colleges being servant leaders, these individuals also promote the idea of servant leadership on their campuses. Throughout the interviews, presidents stressed the importance of providing students with a sense of responsibility to give of themselves. While black colleges give students the academic tools for individual success, they also encourage them to be active in community service in order to uplift the condition of all African American people. In doing so, these servant leaders not only ensure that their institutions effectively prepare students to achieve professional and personal success, but also fulfill the public service mission attached to higher education in general by instilling their students with the skills and desire to use their education to uplift and benefit others. Historically black colleges must strive to be to students what the black church is to black people- a place of forgiveness and hope.

**Race: The Salient Yet Silent Theme**

Historically black colleges and universities are undeniably racially identifiable higher education institutions. Although all black colleges do not have a dominant African American student enrollment, the inescapable assumption is that these schools are populated with persons of African descent. A school that is identified as a liberal arts,
doctoral granting institution, or community college, for example, immediately conjures up ideas about their focus and what type of education is being provided to students. The federal designation of a school as a historically black college or university, on the other hand, shifts the attention from what is being offered to whom it is being offered to. Any discussion of black colleges is incomplete without addressing the issue of race. A few of the presidents in the study mention race, but they do not fully explore or expose the topic in a meaningful manner. Race emerged as the salient, yet silent theme.

The topic of race and understanding the implications of race is critically important, particularly as it relates to the mission of historically black colleges and universities. This study defines mission as the overall role, purpose, and function of higher education institutions. The first step to understanding mission (or the current state of any phenomenon) requires an examination of the history of these institutions. How did these particular colleges and universities come to be? The history literature paints a very vivid picture of black colleges and universities being born out of necessity as a means to educate former enslaved men, women and their progeny. Black colleges developed during a tumultuous time of racial tension and segregation as laws precluded African American people from the ability to acquire an education. The root of the problem was and continues to be the matter of race and pervasiveness of racism that dictates the way in which the world turns.

The presidents in the study effortlessly communicated the class argument about the obstacles of black colleges and how these higher education institutions are at a considerable disadvantage when compared to predominantly white institutions. The overwhelming agreement among the presidents when asked to identify the challenges that
hinder mission implementation was that black colleges lack adequate financial resources. Historically black colleges and universities are often unable to compete with many higher education institutions because they are not in a financial position to recruit top quality faculty, improve building facilities, and broaden course offerings. Surely the class issue is a valid one, but what about race? Race is like the big elephant in the room that all of the presidents see, but act as if the enormous animal is invisible. Race is the invisible elephant that explains why black colleges are often perceived in a negative manner. Race is the unidentified theme that clarifies why these schools are heavily scrutinized and criticized. Race is the unnamed fact that exposes the huge discrepancy in the way in which funds are distributed among black versus predominantly white colleges and universities. Race is the unspoken truth that reveals why studies on the college presidency only include presidents of black colleges in the periphery. Race is the hidden reason why black colleges are often not found in the US News and World Report rankings. Ultimately, race is the salient, yet silent theme.

A few of the presidents in the study mentioned the race factor, but they quickly moved on to the next part of the dialogue. In discussing the many challenges associated with leading historically black schools, noticeably missing from the transcripts was any direct reference to the word racism, racial discrimination, or racial prejudice. Why was this the case? Perhaps the matter of race remained relatively silent because the presidents did not find it pertinent to the topic at hand. Perhaps the presidents in the study held back because they did not know the researcher or the intentions of the research for fear that their words could potentially be matched with identity. The problem is that their silence suggests that race is not an important issue. The politically correct thing to do is to
pretend that the world is colorblind and that black people have properly overcome issues of past social oppressions. The reality is that race is powerful; it dictates, divides, and conquers. Historically black colleges and universities, as a result, continue to deal with the repercussions of its’ wrath.

**Recommendations**

The mission of historically black colleges and universities is intricately connected to the history of the institutions. The rich history of black colleges continues to influence the ways in which presidents define and implement mission. Individuals interested in attaining the college presidency at black colleges must be aware of the cultural traditions, the legacy, the language, and the overall focus that these institutions value because these things infiltrate all aspects of campus life. The presidency at black colleges requires an inherent desire to serve and a deliberate commitment to overcome obstacles.

Historically black colleges and universities erroneously attempt to emulate traditional higher education institutions, particularly as it relates to student population. Federal and state diversity initiatives are rampant and resultantly black colleges are the primary targets of desegregation initiatives. African American researchers such as Charles V. Willie (1994) and Sebrenia Sims (1994) advocate the need for black colleges to become more diverse in terms of racial composition. More specifically, both agree that historically black colleges and universities should deliberately recruit white students. Willie (1994) audaciously states that black colleges are not only for black people and that these institutions should maintain a 20% white student population. What about Hispanic and Asian students? Why are these students not the focus of diversity initiatives? Undoubtedly the push toward diversity is a noble act, but the challenging question is,
“How much is enough?” First the argument is for a minimum 20% white student presence, but the expectation will slowly but surely increase. What will the future of historically black colleges and universities look like? They will ultimately lose their identity as cultural repositories for African American people. Black colleges will stray from the historic mission for which they were founded. Rather than trying to mimic traditional colleges and universities, historically black colleges and universities must take pride in their special niche in the larger higher education system and continue to preserve the legacy of providing access and opportunity specifically to African American students.

Black colleges must continue to focus on African American students as they are often underserved at majority colleges and universities. For many African American students, black colleges are their only option and leaders of these institutions must not lose sight of this special-needs population. Black colleges must accept this responsibility and continue to make provisions for students who lack proper academic preparation, but possess great potential. If historically black colleges and universities will not cater to this population, who will? In addition to serving students with poor academic preparation, black colleges must become more active in recruiting high achieving African American students. Historically black colleges and universities have to be more assertive in making sure that these students are aware of the opportunities available and the services provided.

In order for black colleges to continue to prosper, presidents, administrators, and faculty have to find ways to encourage students to return to and support their alma maters. Sixty percent of the presidents in the study graduated from a historically black college or university as an undergraduate student. This research finding suggests that their experiences as students at black colleges played a role in their decision to become
leaders of these institutions. The future of black colleges depends on graduates of black colleges. Who knows these institutions better than individuals who learn, live, and work at these colleges and universities? Who better to lead black colleges than individuals who genuinely care about and have a vested interest in their prosperity? Concurring with the testimony of Dr. Mathilda Marie, president of University of Angelou, individuals bloom where they are planted.

The public at-large may never be convinced of the mission or usefulness of black colleges. Presidents and other supporters of these institutions must not take offense, but rather embrace this experience as an opportunity to educate others regarding the contributions of these colleges and universities. Another way to inform the public at-large of the contributions of these institutions is through comprehensive academic research. Scholars need to investigate black colleges in a more systematic manner as to attain accurate and reliable information that not only demonstrates what these institutions do, but also offer some direction in helping them to better fulfill their mission. Further research should explore the official mission statements of black colleges. Because presidents in this study found it difficult to disconnect from their mission statements, a need exists to examine whether there is congruence between how presidents of black colleges define mission and what the mission statements dictate. Also, many of the presidents in the study mentioned the important role that mentors played in their career development. Future studies should also examine this relationship and discover how these mentors impacted their careers.

Mission Matters: Presidential Perspectives on the Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the Higher Education System reignites the topic of mission
started by W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington. The results of this study provide a
glimpse into this multidimensional topic from the presidents of these four-year
institutions. The ways in which the leaders define, implement, and face the challenges
associated with mission suggest that black colleges are a critical piece to the larger puzzle
of American higher education. The assertion that black colleges do not offer a unique
mission does not negate the unique qualities they possess, nor does it aim to belittle their
contributions. Black colleges serve a necessary function as they educate and graduate a
significant amount of African American students. Borrowing the words of Dr. Bobby
Isaac, president of Bassett State University, historically black colleges and universities
are an oasis in the jungle; ultimately their mission matters.
REFERENCES


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Appendix A

FOUR-YEAR HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES and UNIVERSITIES
Alabama
1. Alabama A & M University (public)
2. Alabama State University (public)
3. Miles College (private)
4. Oakwood College (private)
5. Selma University (private)
6. Stillman College (private)
7. Talladega College (private)
8. Tuskegee University (private)

Arkansas
9. Arkansas Baptist College (private)
10. Philander Smith College (private)
11. University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (public)

Delaware
12. Delaware State University (public)

District of Columbia
13. Howard University (private)
14. University of the District of Columbia (public)

Florida
15. Bethune-Cookman College (private)
16. Edward Waters College (private)
17. Florida A & M University (public)
18. Florida Memorial College (private)

Georgia
19. Albany State College (public)
20. Clark Atlanta University (private)
21. Fort Valley State College (public)
22. Interdenominational Theological Center (private)
23. Morehouse College (private)
24. Morehouse School of Medicine (private)
25. Morris Brown College (private)
26. Paine College (private)
27. Savannah State College (public)
28. Spelman College (private)

Kentucky
29. Kentucky State University (public)

Louisiana
30. Dillard University (private)
31. Grambling State University (public)
32. Southern University A & M College – Baton Rouge (public)
33. Southern University at New Orleans (public)
34. Xavier University of Louisiana (private)

Maryland
35. Bowie State University (public)
36. Coppin State University (public)
37. Morgan State University (public)
38. University of Maryland – Eastern Shore (public)

Mississippi
39. Alcorn State University (public)
40. Jackson State University (public)
41. Mississippi Valley State University (public)
42. Rust College (private)
43. Tougaloo College (private)
Missouri
44. Harris-Stowe State College (public)
45. Lincoln University (public)

North Carolina
46. Barber-Scotia College (private)
47. Bennett College (private)
48. Elizabeth City State University (public)
49. Fayetteville State University (public)
50. Johnson C. Smith University (private)
51. Livingstone College (private)
52. North Carolina A & T State University (public)
53. North Carolina Central University (public)
54. St. Augustine’s College (private)
55. Shaw University (private)
56. Winston-Salem State University (public)

Ohio
57. Central State University (public)
58. Wilberforce University (private)

Oklahoma
59. Langston University (public)

Pennsylvania
60. Cheyney State University (public)
61. Lincoln University (public)

South Carolina
62. Allen University (private)
63. Benedict College (private)
64. Claflin College (private)
65. Morris College (private)
66. South Carolina State University (public)
67. Voorhees College (private)

Tennessee
68. Fisk University (private)
69. Knoxville College (private)
70. Lane College (private)
71. LeMoyne-Owen College (private)
72. Meharry Medical College (private)
73. Tennessee State University (public)

Texas
74. Huston-Tillotson College (private)
75. Jarvis Christian College (private)
76. Paul Quinn College (private)
77. Prairie View A & M University (public)
78. Southwestern Christian College (private)
79. Texas College (private)
80. Texas Southern University (public)
81. Wiley College (private)

Virginia
82. Hampton University (private)
83. Norfolk State University (public)
84. Saint Paul’s College (private)
85. Virginia State University (public)
86. Virginia Union University (private)
West Virginia
87. Bluefield State College (public)
88. West Virginia State University (public)

U.S. Virgin Islands
89. University of the Virgin Islands (public)
Appendix B

PREDOMINANTLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITEES
Alabama
1. Wallace Community College- Sparks Campus (public; two-year)
2. John M. Patterson State Technical College (public; two-year)
3. Reid State Technical College (public; two-year)

California
4. Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science (private; four-year)
5. Compton Community College (public; two-year)
6. Los Angeles Southwest College (public; two-year)
7. West Los Angeles College (public; two-year)

District of Columbia
8. Southeastern University (private; four-year)

Georgia
9. Albany Technical Institute (public; two-year)
10. Atlanta Metropolitan College (public; two-year)
11. Bauder College (private; two-year)
12. Central Georgia Technical College (public; two-year)
13. Columbus Technical College (public; two-year)
14. DeKalb Technical College (public; two-year)
15. Georgia Military College- Augusta-Fort Gordon Campus (public; two-year)
16. Georgia Military College- Fort McPherson Campus (public; two-year)
17. Gupton Jones College of Funeral Service (public; two-year)
18. Herzing College-Atlanta (private; four-year)
19. Savannah Technical College (public; two-year)

Illinois
20. Chicago State University (public; four-year)
21. East St. Louis Community College (public; two-year)
22. East-West University (private; four-year)
23. Kennedy-King College (public; two-year)
24. Malcolm X College (public; two-year)
25. Olive-Harvey College (public; two-year)

**Indiana**
26. Martin University (private; four-year)

**Kentucky**
27. Simmons University [Bible College] (private; four-year)

**Maryland**
28. Baltimore City Community College (public; two-year)
29. Prince George’s Community College (public; two-year)
30. Sojourner-Douglass College (private; four-year)

**Massachusetts**
31. Roxbury Community College (public; two-year)

**Michigan**
32. Davenport University-Dearborn (private; four-year)
33. Davenport University-Flint (private; four-year)
34. Wayne County Community College (public; two-year)

**Mississippi**
35. East Mississippi Community College (public; two-year)
36. Mississippi Delta Community College (public; two-year)
37. Natchez Junior College (private; two-year)

**New Jersey**
38. Bloomfield College (private; four-year)
39. Essex County College (public; two-year)
New York
40. Audrey Cohen College (private; four-year)
41. Fiorello H. LaGuardia (public; two-year)
42. Helene Fuld College of Nursing of North General Hospital (private; two-year)
43. Long Island College Hospital School of Nursing (private; two-year)
44. Medgar Evers College (public; four-year)
45. New York City Technical College (public; two-year)
46. York College (public; four-year)

North Carolina
47. Edgecombe Community College (public; two-year)
48. Roanoke-Chowan Community College (public; two-year)

Ohio
49. Cuyahoga Community College (public; two-year)

Pennsylvania
50. Peirce College (private; four-year)

South Carolina
51. Williamsburg Technical College (public; two-year)

Tennessee
52. Southwest Tennessee Community College (public; two-year)

Texas
53. Bay Ridge Christian College (private; two-year)

Virginia
54. Virginia University at Lynchburg (private; four-year)
U.S. Virgin Islands

55. University of the Virgin Islands (public; four-year)
Appendix C

REQUEST LETTER FOR PARTICIPANTS
Dear Dr. ____________:

You are invited to participate in a national study on the mission and future of four-year historically black colleges and universities. The research examines how presidents interpret and implement the mission in institutional policies and practices. The objective of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding of black colleges and their explicit purpose and function within higher education.

My name is Ronyelle Bertrand Ricard and I am an African American Ph.D. candidate in Higher Education at The Pennsylvania State University. I am a graduate of a historically black university, Xavier University of Louisiana, and as a researcher of these institutions, I have discovered that despite a growing volume of research on black colleges, different conceptions of what they are and what they do remains an issue of contention. Consequently, black colleges continue to be inaccurately described and assessed. This study is important because it brings absolute attention to black college campuses in an attempt to identify their specific mission within the higher education landscape. The findings of this study will contribute to the limited body of empirical research examining historically black colleges and universities and it will also assist in identifying the contributions of these institutions.

The study is being conducted under the auspices of my dissertation chair, Dr. M. Christopher Brown II via the Center for the Study of Higher Education at The Pennsylvania State University.

If you are interested in participating in this study, I would like to schedule an on-campus or telephone interview. The interview will be confidential (no names or institutions will be identified) and will last twenty to thirty minutes. Please contact me via telephone (h.202-248-4304; c.713-446-6584) or email (rdb177@psu.edu).

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and I appreciate your consideration of my request. The nation must learn more about the mission and importance of our historically black colleges and universities.

Sincerely,

_________________________
Ronyelle Bertrand Ricard

_________________________
M. Christopher Brown II, Ph.D.
Dissertation Chair
Appendix D

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT
Title of Project: Mission Matters: Presidential Perspectives on the Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the Higher Education System

Principal Investigator: Ronyelle Bertrand Ricard
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202-248-4304
rdb177@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. M. Christopher Brown II
400 Rackley Building
University Park, PA
202-293-2450
mcb161@psu.edu

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to examine how presidents of four-year historically black college and universities (HBCUs) interpret and implement the mission of their institutions.

2. Procedures to be followed: Interviews will conducted and audio taped by telephone and personal campus visits.

3. Discomforts and Risks: There is minimal likelihood of risk.

4. Benefits: This project will provide an in-depth analysis of various four-year HBCUs and identify their role within the larger system of higher education.

5. Duration/Time: Each participant will engage in one interview lasting approximately twenty to thirty minutes.

6. Statement of Confidentiality: The confidentiality of your responses is assured. There will not be identifiable information published throughout this research process of any participants. Pseudonyms will be used in place of the name of your respective institution. The Office of Research Protections may review records related to this project.

7. Right to Ask Questions: You can ask questions about this research by contacting the principal investigator (contact information listed above). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact The Pennsylvania State University’s Office of Research Protections at (814) 865-1775.

8. Compensation: There is no compensation available for participation.
9. Voluntary Participation: Participation is strictly voluntary and participants may withdraw from this project at any time. Participants can decline to answer specific questions during the interview process. Please select one of the following:

- Yes, I agree to be voice-recorded during the personal interview
- No, I do not agree to be voice-recorded during the personal interview

You must be 18 years or older to consent to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form for your records.

________________________________________     ______________________
Participant Signature          Date

________________________________________    ______________________
Person Obtaining Consent       Date
Appendix E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS
1. Can you tell me about yourself and how you arrived at the college presidency?
   • Family, Education, Past Professional Careers

2. Why did you choose to become a president of a historically black college or university? Was it conscious choice to lead a black school?

3. How would you personally define the mission of your institution? (Mission is defined as the institution’s explicit role, purpose, and function within the larger system of higher education).

4. In your role as president, how do you implement the mission of your institution?

5. What do you perceive as challenges to mission implementation?

6. Based on your experience, do you believe that historically black colleges and universities have a ‘unique’ mission in comparison to other types of higher education institutions?

7. What is your personal definition of a historically black college or university?

8. The ‘historic’ mission of black colleges refers to the fact that they were created to provide educational opportunities to African Americans. Do you believe that this historic mission is still relevant today? Do you believe that the focus is still on African American students?

9. Why are black colleges and universities important institutions of higher education?

10. What do you think are a few critical challenges facing black colleges and universities today?

11. Is there anything else that you would like to add that you may feel is important to my research?
VITA

RONYELLE BERTRAND RICARD

EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy  The Pennsylvania State University  August 2006

Master of Education  University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  August 2000

Bachelor of Science  Xavier University of Louisiana  May 1999

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
Coordinator for Professional Development and Research
July 2006- Present

The United Negro College Fund
Research Intern, Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute
August 2004-December 2004

The Pennsylvania State University
Graduate Research Assistant, Department of Education Policy Studies, Center for the Study of Higher Education (Professors: Dr. M.C. Brown, II; Dr. L. Lattuca; Dr. C. Colbeck)
January 2002- December 2004

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Admissions Coordinator, Department of Educational Organization and Leadership
August 2001- December 2001

Graduate Advisor, College of Liberal Arts and Science, Bridge Transition Program
August 2000-May 2001