

4-2013

## Understanding High-Achieving African American Students: A Quantitative Study at Grand Valley State University

John A. Gipson Jr.  
*Grand Valley State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/theses>

---

### ScholarWorks Citation

Gipson, John A. Jr., "Understanding High-Achieving African American Students: A Quantitative Study at Grand Valley State University" (2013). *Masters Theses*. 44.  
<https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/theses/44>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Research and Creative Practice at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gvsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gvsu.edu).

Understanding High-Achieving African American Students:

A Quantitative Study at Grand Valley State University

John A. Gipson Jr.

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Education

College of Education

April 2013

## **Acknowledgements**

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis advisor, Dr. Jay Cooper, for his guidance and support throughout this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Donald Mitchell and Dr. Christopher Hanks for assisting in my study and serving on my thesis committee.

Secondly, I would like to thank my family and friends for all of their assistance throughout my educational experience. I would like to thank my partner, Meghan Brown, for all of her encouragement throughout my graduate studies and for lending proofreading support throughout my career.

Third, I would like to thank Mr. Thomas Owens, Dr. Bart Merkle, and Dr. Elaine Collins for their guidance throughout my time with Grand Valley State University. In addition, I would like to thank the Statistical Consulting Center for assisting me with the development of my survey instrument. Lastly, I would like to thank all of my fellow colleagues within the College of Education and the CSAL program. Without the support of all of these individuals, this project would not have been possible.

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate characteristics of high-achieving African American students attending Grand Valley State University (GVSU).

A target population of 353 undergraduate students identifying as African American were invited to voluntarily participate in this study. These students possessed sophomore or higher status and maintained a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or greater at the time of survey distribution. 101 students completed the survey resulting in a response rate of 28.6%.

Due to the nature of the survey, descriptive statistics were utilized to report a majority of the results. However, a Chi Square Test of Independence with an alpha level of .05 was utilized, where applicable, to determine significant and non-significant relationships.

Statistically significant findings include: that high-achieving African American students who live within one hour of GVSU are more likely to possess a 3.75 to 4.00 GPA; and as GPA increases, one is less likely to consider leaving GVSU. Many additional findings are also discussed.

Expanding upon existing research, results from this study suggest that high-achieving African American students are most-frequently participating in the high-impact practices of service learning and internships. Additional expansions and affirmations of existing research are also discussed.

## **Table of Contents**

Thesis Approval Form.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract.....	4
List of Figures and Tables.....	8
Chapter One: Introduction	
Problem Statement.....	9
Importance of the Problem.....	10
Background of the Problem.....	12
Statement of Purpose.....	15
Research Questions.....	16
Hypotheses.....	16
Design, Data Collection, and Analysis.....	17
Definition of Terms.....	18
Delimitations of the Study.....	18
Limitations of the Study.....	19
Organization of the Thesis.....	19
Chapter Two: Review of Literature	
Introduction.....	21
Theoretical Framework.....	22
Synthesis of Research Literature.....	26
Summary.....	37

Conclusion.....	38
Chapter Three: Methodology	
Introduction.....	40
Research Design.....	40
Participants.....	41
Instrumentation.....	41
Rationale for Developing the Survey Instrument.....	42
Data Collection.....	44
Data Analysis.....	45
Summary.....	45
Chapter Four: Results	
Introduction.....	46
Context.....	46
Findings.....	46
Summary.....	56
Chapter Five: Conclusions	
Summary of the Study.....	58
Findings.....	60
Conclusion.....	60
Discussion.....	62
Recommendations for Practice.....	64
Recommendations for Future Research.....	66

References .....68

Appendices

Appendix A.....78

Appendix B.....82

Appendix C.....85

Appendix D.....86

## List of Figures and Tables

### Figure

1. Research Utilized throughout Literature Review.....	24-25
--	-------

### Table

1. Participant Characteristics.....	45
2. Hours per Week.....	46
3. Student Involvement.....	47
4. Mentorship and Interactions with Faculty.....	48
5. Distance to One's Home Community.....	50
6. Interactions with Family/Friends from Home.....	51
7. Have you ever considered leaving GVSU?.....	52
8. Considering Leaving GVSU.....	53
9. Perceptions of Faculty and Staff .....	53



## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Problem Statement**

All individuals within the United States should have the opportunity to complete a college education. However, many obstacles often stand in the way for students who identify as African American (Mauk & Jones, 2006). These obstructions can include, but are not limited to, an increased likelihood of being a first-generation student (Choy, 2001), not being academically prepared (ACT, 2011), low socioeconomic status (Smith, 2009), and a lack of family support (Thayer, 2000). DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor and Tran (2011) found that only 46.3% of African American students who attend public universities attain a degree within six years of their initial enrollment compared to 66.9% of students who identify as White and 76.4% of students who identify as Asian/Pacific Islander. As suggested by Tinto (2006/07), “most institutions have not yet been able to translate what we know about student retention into forms of action that have led to substantial gains in student persistence and graduation” (p. 5).

The problem with current retention theories is that research has been inconclusive on important aspects of this phenomenon, especially as they relate to African American students. Studies have shown student involvement can be beneficial to student success (Astin, 1984; Harper, 2005; Littleton, 2002; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001), has no relationship with student achievement (Ishitani & DesJardins, 2002/03) and can hinder academic accomplishment (Guiffrida, 2004b). Research has also suggested that living on-campus is likely to increase persistence to

graduation and contribute to a positive college experience (Astin, 1984; Chickering, 1974; Gellin 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). However, a recent climate survey at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) found there to be no relationship between the number of African Americans living on-campus and those living off-campus who have “seriously considered leaving GVSU” (GVSU, 2012a), suggesting no relationship to on-campus housing and a more positive college experience. Guiffrida (2004a) found that some students who identify as African American benefit from frequent contact with friends from home, but others might be negatively affected by such connections, frequently leading to departure. Since the research on student retention is inconclusive, additional studies should be conducted to determine the unique benefits and hindrances for students attending GVSU who identify as African American.

### **Importance of the Problem**

According to the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) (2012), individuals who identify as African American comprised 14.8% of the total undergraduate student population within the United States during 2010. The Chronicle of Higher Education (2012) also reports that during 2010 the following percentages of African American students were enrolled in each of the following institutional types: Public 2-year institutions 15%; Public master’s level institutions 14%; Not-for-profit 2-year institutions 23%; Private not-for-profit master’s institutions 13%; For-profit four-year institutions 29%; and For-profit two-year colleges 27%. With the lowest percentage of African American student populations attending public 4-year colleges, retention

and college completion are particularly important considerations in order to correct historical injustices within society.

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), without proper support the obstacles faced by African American students can prove to be overwhelming and may cause some individuals to leave an institution prior to degree completion. Leaving an institution without a degree can be devastating for the future success of those who leave by placing unjustified financial burdens and emotional stress on individuals who are already more likely to be of lower socio-economic status. Earning a degree also improves the quality of life for many individuals (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). These individuals are often healthier, more likely to volunteer, and one's children are more likely to possess greater academic abilities compared to individuals who have not obtained a college degree (Wiles, 2004).

Inequities in degree attainment can also cause many lasting effects within society. For example, African Americans who obtain a bachelor's degree earn an average of \$41,329 per year compared to \$23,582 for individuals who have completed high school as one's highest level of education (Ryan & Siebens, 2012). This difference in economic status perpetuates historical injustices and can lead to greater divides within American society. This disparity also leads to lower tax revenues to provide for the public good; both are factors that could increase college access for future generations.

Research by Astin (1993) has shown that students from all racial backgrounds benefit intellectually and socially in regards to developing leadership skills,

increasing cultural awareness, and fostering cognitive development when exposed to cross-racial interactions. Chang, Astin and Kim (2004) also found that cross-racial interactions within the classroom can have a significant impact on positive student development. In regards to cognitive development, Loes, Pascarella and Umbach (2012) found that students who enter college with “relatively low levels of tested academic preparation,” (p. 19) ACT scores and SAT scores, benefit most from diverse experiences.

### **Background of the Problem**

According to Lattuca and Stark (2011), beginning with the founding of Harvard by the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1636, American colonial higher education was established to serve White students who possessed wealth. These students were educated to become the leaders of one’s church or colony. Later, some of these individuals would become the leaders of the American Revolution and help form the United States of America. For the first one hundred years of history in the United States, minority students did not have access to a higher education.

According to Thelin and Gasman (2011), some small Black colleges existed in the North prior to the Civil War while others were established throughout the South following the war’s conclusion with support from private organizations, such as the Peabody Foundation. The Land-Grant Act of 1890 further expanded access for African Americans by providing funding for Black colleges throughout the South. During the early years, such Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) primarily educated students through agricultural training programs. It is important to

note that the federal government refused to provide funding to states that denied higher education for African Americans.

Thelin and Gasman (2011) also describe that the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, commonly known as the GI Bill, and the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) further expanded access to higher education. The GI Bill established scholarships for veterans who enrolled in colleges and universities. These scholarships provided the necessary financial resources for many African Americans who were returning veterans to obtain a degree. The landmark decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education* established that racial segregation in education was unconstitutional. This ruling eventually allowed African Americans to enroll at public institutions throughout the United States.

The establishment of Title VI in 1964 significantly increased access to higher education for African American students. According to Kaplin and Lee (2007), this law prohibited discrimination "on the basis of race, color, or national origin" (p. 626) within all institutions that receive federal funding. Legislation of this type was much needed because it forced private institutions to address issues of discrimination or risk the loss of federal funding. 48 years later, this law is still instrumental in preventing racial discrimination against students of color by establishing strict rules that colleges and universities must follow if such acts occur.

President Lyndon Johnson (1966) first presented the idea of affirmative action in the workplace during a commencement address at Howard University. This

concept was adapted by institutions of higher education that were willing to correct historical injustices based on race within society.

Prior to 1975, research regarding student retention focused on the different reasons dropout occurs, claiming it was the fault of the individual. However, Vincent Tinto (1975) changed the way we think about retention by offering a model that incorporated the individual and institution in fostering success or promoting attrition. His model views dropout as a “longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college... which lead to persistence and/or to varying forms of dropout” (p. 94). Tinto’s work has taken on increasing significance as a result of the accountability movement and a focus on student learning and success.

The United States Supreme Court ruled, in *University of Regents v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265 (1978), that using a quota system within the admissions process favoring students of color violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Following this decision, some institutions moved to a system where additional points would be awarded for race. This system was challenged during *Gratz v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 244 (2003) when the Supreme Court ruled that awarding additional points to all “underrepresented minority” students during the admissions process was unconstitutional because the process is not narrowly tailored. However, in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306 (2003), the court ruled 5-4 supporting the concept of affirmative action because of “the law school's narrowly tailored use of race in admissions decisions to further a

compelling interest in obtaining the educational benefits that flow from a diverse student body” (p. 31). This concept is currently being challenged within the Supreme Court in *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, 645 F. Supp. 2d 587, 590 (W.D. Tex., 2011).

Despite advancements in student retention, the need for studies regarding the experiences of African American students have gained little attention from researchers. Research on the subject continues to focus primarily on White students who possess middle to upper-class socioeconomic status, due to higher education being more accessible to these individuals. Recently, researchers such as Douglas Guiffrida (2004a) and Shaun Harper (2005) have begun exploring issues related to the successes and failures of high-achieving African American students. Guiffrida (2006) also argued for modifications to Tinto’s theory to account for today’s diversity within higher education, but expressed a need for research in relation to this new model. Therefore, additional research is needed within this area to rectify historical injustices.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to investigate characteristics of undergraduate academically high-achieving African American students attending a Midwestern predominantly white institution (PWI). Based on an analysis of prior research on the retention of African-American students being inconclusive, the researcher will develop, administer, and interpret a survey for undergraduate students who identify as African American that possess sophomore status or higher, and are considered high-

achieving in order to better understand this phenomenon. This survey will address multiple areas where existing research on student retention is unclear in regards to this student population. The areas under investigation which may impact retention include student involvement, friendships from home, faculty relationships, employment, first-generation status, and family support.

### **Research Questions**

In order to address the current gap in the graduation rate for African American students, the researcher will attempt to identify the factors that best influence high academic achievement during higher education for those who identify as African American. The primary questions guiding the research are: 1) Does student involvement influence high academic achievement for African American students? 2) Does support, including family support and friendships from home, influence high academic achievement for African American students? 3) Does one's perception of GVSU influence high academic achievement for African American students?

### **Hypotheses**

The researcher hypothesizes:

1. There is a significant relationship between student involvement and high academic achievement for African American students;
2. There is a significant relationship between support from friends and family and academic achievement for high-achieving African American students; and
3. There is a significant relationship between perceptions of one's institution and academic achievement for high-achieving African American students.



## **Design, Data Collection and Analysis**

This study will be conducted at a large sized, Master's level institution in the Midwestern United States. According to GVSU (2012b), the institution currently enrolls approximately 21,300 undergraduate students and African Americans comprise 6.6% of this population. The researcher will be the sole individual responsible for collecting and analyzing data. An invitation to participate in the study will be sent by GVSU's Office of Information Technology to 353 undergraduate students who self-identify as African American in the Banner system and possess a GPA of 3.0 or greater.

The researcher will develop a survey consisting of 19 quantitative questions and one qualitative question using Survey Monkey, an online tool utilized by GVSU's Statistical Consulting Center. The questions will be constructed to address areas where current research is unclear. Individuals will not be required to provide any identifying information in order to protect the identity of participants in the study. An invitation to voluntarily participate in the study will be distributed through the Office of Information Technology to respect the privacy of students who elect to participate in the study. Data will be collected during the first two weeks of January 2013.

Following data collection, the researcher will utilize Survey Monkey and SPSS software to analyze quantitative questions using cross tabulation and Chi Square Test of Independence. The raw number of responses for each answer will also be reported. Open-ended questions will be analyzed by the researcher using a coding

method to identify themes within the responses. This method will allow the researcher to compare data to explore the degree to which relationships exist in regards to each question.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, *African American* refers to individuals who self-identify as “African American” and those identified by institutions as “Black” or “African American” within official reports, such as GVSU’s Degrees Granted 2010-2011 (2011). The *graduation rate* is based on completing a degree within six years of one’s initial enrollment (DeAngelo et al., 2011). *Gender*, including male, female, and transgender, is defined as how one self-identifies. *High-achieving* is defined as possessing a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale (Harper, 2006). The terms *involvement* and *engagement* are used interchangeably to describe “the amount of physical and psychological energy” (Astin, 1999, p. 518) one dedicates to activities relating to the college experience. The current graduation rate at GVSU is based on students who initially enrolled at the institution during 2004 and completed a degree by 2010. *Retention* and *persistence* are used interchangeably to refer to continuous enrollment at one’s college or university (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The researcher chose to focus on a limited number of variables—involvement, academic achievement, and distance to one’s home community—due to inconsistencies in the literature within these areas in regards to students who identify as African

American. External validity may be limited because the research will be conducted at one PWI within the Midwest and a target population of 353 students will be invited to participate in the study. Additionally, only students with a 3.0 GPA or higher will be invited to participate in this study to explore possible relationships relating to increasing academic success.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of the study is that only high-achieving African American students will be invited to participate in the study. Due to this design, the researcher is unable to compare the results with all African American students, other minority students, or all members of the student population. Additionally, some participants may not be comfortable answering all questions honestly because students may respond with what they assume to be the correct answer and not what one actually experiences. However, the researcher has attempted to encourage honest responses by ensuring anonymity and describing potential benefits to future students within the request for informed consent. Lastly, the validity and reliability of the instrument have not been tested due to the instrument being created by the researcher. However, the Statistical Consulting Center offered support to increase content related validity and the instrument was adapted from other existing instruments.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

This introductory chapter is the first of five chapters describing the study. Chapter Two provides a detailed review of current literature and provides the theoretical framework for the study. Chapter Three outlines the methodology

employed in the research. Chapter Four provides an overview of the results of the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the survey and analysis of the data. Chapter Five discusses the findings, provides recommendations for future research, and offers implications for practice. Institutional Review Board Approval, approval by the Office of Institutional Analysis to send an invitation for voluntary participation, approval of the Thesis Committee Membership by the Office of Graduate Studies, and the survey instrument can be found within the Appendices.

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

### Introduction

While traditional theories of student retention and involvement have been useful in providing a foundation for the study of persistence, they need to be taken further, as much more work needs to be done to uncover race, class, and gender issues (among others) that impact retention for diverse students in diverse institutions (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2011, p. 244).

This quote illustrates that utilizing Tinto's (1975) retention theory as a foundation for collegiate programs to encourage academic success and student persistence for all student populations is problematic due to limited participation in early studies by students of color. This is evidenced by the recent gap in graduation rates between White students and students of color identified by DeAngelo et al. (2011). Tinto (2006/07) suggests this gap exists because "most institutions have not yet been able to translate what we know about student retention into forms of action that have led to substantial gains in student persistence and graduation" (p. 5). However, results from recent studies involving greater numbers of African American students question some aspects of Tinto's theory (Griffin, 2006; Guiffrida, 2004a; Harper, 2006).

To better comprehend these issues, a comprehensive review of the literature relating to student success and persistence will follow a description of the theoretical framework upon which this research is based. Existing literature will be organized as follows: 1) Demographics, 2) Academic Performance, 3) Faculty Involvement, 4)

Student Involvement, 5) Employment and Financial Aid, 6) Living On-Campus, and 7) Home Support Networks. Also included is a summary of important research and a conclusion that identifies the gaps in current research addressed during this study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is based on Guiffrida's (2006) cultural interpretation of Tinto's (1975) model of dropout from college and Astin's (1984, 1999) Student Involvement Theory.

A key aspect of Tinto's (1975) model is the assumption that one must become socially and academically integrated within an institution of higher education in order to persist to graduation. The author relates the following with student attrition: Family Background, Individual Attributes, Precollege Schooling, Goal Commitment, Institutional Commitment, Academic System Integration, and Social System Integration. Tinto argues that intellectual development and grade performance are the best indicators of academic integration. He also concludes that peer-group and faculty interactions are the most essential aspects of social integration to encourage student persistence.

**Attributes, Precollege Experiences, and Family Background.** Tinto (1975) asserts that attributes, precollege experiences and family background contribute to one's persistence to graduation. Tinto suggests that one's race, gender, mental ability, and commitment to succeed are important factors in relation to persistence to graduation. The theorist also argues that students whose parents possess higher levels of education, socioeconomic status, and expectations for their children positively

influence persistence to graduation. Tinto states that prior academic performance is the best predictor for academic success during college.

**Goal Commitment.** Tinto (1975) believes that one's commitment to college completion is the second best predictor for persistence to graduation. The author includes one's educational plan and future career aspirations as important factors for goal commitment. Tinto suggests that voluntary withdrawal is more frequent among females than their male peers, who are often forced to leave an institution due to academic dismissal. He places goal commitment directly behind attributes, family background, and prior educational experiences because he believes these factors play an important role in one's commitment to college completion.

**Academic Systems Integration.** According to Tinto (1975), academic integration involves both grade performance and intellectual development. The author contends that grades are the most explicit form of rewards one can receive during college. Next, Tinto describes many studies that point to grade performance being the most prominent factor relating to degree completion. He asserts that grade performance is more important for male students compared to female students, but intellectual development is a better predictor of persistence to graduation for females.

**Social Systems Integration.** Tinto (1975) asserts that social interactions primarily occur during "informal peer group associations, semi-formal extracurricular activities, and interaction with faculty and administrative personnel within the college" (p. 107). The author believes that social integration increases the likelihood that one will persist to graduation. Specifically, the development of supportive

friendships and interactions with faculty are crucial to degree completion. Tinto also suggests that involvement in extracurricular activities is directly related to persistence to degree completion. However, the author states that involvement in fraternities and sororities may hinder one's ability to persist to degree completion because members of these groups are likely to be less academically inclined.

**Institutional Commitment.** According to Tinto (1975), one's "behaviors in the social system most directly relate to a person's institutional commitment" (p. 110). The author also believes that extracurricular activities and interaction with faculty are the most crucial avenues of social involvement to increase persistence to graduation. Tinto describes that if one possesses a high level of institutional commitment, one is more likely to persist through many situations. However, individuals with low institutional commitment are more likely to leave their college if other factors arise, such as academic underachievement.

### **Guiffrida's Suggestions for Cultural Improvement**

Guiffrida (2006), however, argues that the experiences of students of color differ from those addressed in Tinto's work. He reforms Tinto's model to include academic performance and faculty/staff interactions as the focus of academic systems. Guiffrida then groups the categories of extracurricular activities and peer group interaction within university social systems. The researcher also incorporates home social systems, including family and friends, as a third aspect with which students of color must become connected in order to be successful during college, an



aspect Tinto fails to address. Lastly, Guiffrida prefers to utilize the term “connection” in place of “integration” stating that:

integration implies that students must become socialized into the dominant culture of the institution while abandoning their former cultures, but connection recognizes students’ subjective sense of relatedness without implying the need to break ties with one’s former community. This subtle yet important change allows the theory to recognize that students can become comfortable in the college environment without abandoning supportive relationships at home or rejecting the values and norms of their home communities (p. 457).

### **Astin’s Theory of Involvement**

Relating to involvement, Astin’s (1984, 1999) theory may be the most-utilized work relating to involvement within higher education. The theorist describes involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). Astin concludes living on-campus, participation in honors programs, academic involvement, athletic involvement, and membership in student government as beneficial to various aspects of one’s college experience. Additionally, Astin found student-faculty interactions to be the most beneficial factor regarding one’s satisfaction with college. Lastly, he places importance on the quality of one’s involvement during college as opposed to the quantity of time one is engaged within the various avenues for involvement.

## Synthesis of Research Literature

A review of current literature is contained within this section. The section is arranged as follows: Cross and Fhagen-Smith's Model of Black Identity Development; Demographics of African American Students in Higher Education; Factors that Influence Academic Performance for African Americans; Role of Faculty in African American Persistence to Graduation; African American College Student Involvement; How Employment and Financial Aid Influence Persistence to Graduation; Living On-Campus and Persistence to Graduation; and How Home Support Networks Influence One's College Experience. The chapter concludes with a summary of the review of the literature. Figure 1, which is continued on page 20, displays many of the research studies that are utilized throughout the chapter.

Figure 1  
Research Utilized Throughout Literature Review

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Participants(N)</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Sampling</b>	<b>Location</b>
Allen et al.	541,824	Quantitative	Purposive	1,112 Institutions
Booker, K. C.	54	Qualitative	Purposive	Southern, PWI
Cole, D.	460	Quantitative	Purposive	96 PWIs
Dennis, J. M, Phinney, J. S., & Chuateco, L. I.	100	Quantitative	Purposive	West Coast, Predominantly Ethnic
Ellington, R. E. & Frederick, R.	8	Qualitative	Purposive	Two PWIs, One HBCU
Fischer, M. J.	3,924	Quantitative	Random	28 Institutions
Griffin, K.	9	Qualitative	Purposive	East

---

Guiffrida, G. A.	99	Qualitative	Purposive	Northeastern, PWI
Guiffrida, G. A.	84	Qualitative	Purposive	Northeastern, PWI
Harper, S. R.	32, Male	Qualitative	Purposive	Six Institutions
Harper, S. R. & Quaye, S. J.	32, Male	Qualitative	Purposive	Six Midwest PWIs
Hu, S. & St. John, E. P.	Unspecified	Quantitative	Random	Multiple, Indiana
Ishitani, T. T. & DesJardins, S. L.	3,450	Quantitative	Random	Multiple, Unspecified
Littleton, R. A.	29	Qualitative	Purposive	Four Southern, PWIs
Oseguera, L.	63,640	Quantitative	Purposive	303 Institutions
Strayhorn, T. L.	231	Quantitative	Purposive	National
Sutton, E. M. & Kimbrough, W. M.	405	Quantitative	Purposive	Seven States, Multiple Institutions
Thomas et al.	22	Qualitative	Random	Southern, PWI
Thornton, C.	304	Quantitative	Purposive	One HBCU
Winkle-Wagner, R.	30, Female	Qualitative	Purposive	Midwestern PWI

---

### **Cross and Fhagen-Smith's Model of Black Identity Development**

Although Cross and Fhagen-Smith's Model of Black Identity Development is not the theoretical framework for this study, their model assists in understanding how members of this population develop psychosocially. According to Evans et al. (2010), "Cross's theory of psychological nigrescence is the best known" (p. 256) model of Black identity development. However, Cross and Fhagen-Smith developed an approach to address Black Identity development across the lifespan. The model

asserts that individuals experience six sectors of development during one's process of identity development; with Sector One beginning at birth and some individuals achieving Sector Six during adulthood. A basic understanding of these six sectors is described within this section.

**Sectors One and Two.** Evans et al. (2010) describe that Sector One and Sector Two occur during childhood, and parents have a substantial influence on one's development. During Sector Two, Preadolescence, children will likely begin to develop low race salience, high race salience, or internalized racism. Children will develop low race salience if they experience no significance with being Black. Those with high race salience will understand the importance of their race and culture. Children who possess internalized racism experience "patterns of negativity toward being black" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 257).

**Sector Three.** According to Evans et al. (2010), during Adolescence individuals "reach an achieved identity status by determining that their black self-concept is truly based on their own beliefs" (p. 257). During this stage, African Americans are likely to reaffirm, sometimes strengthen, their previously developed understanding of being Black. Reaffirming one's understanding of being Black leads adolescents to "possess some awareness of a black self" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 257). This stage is particularly important for educators within higher education because individuals may be experiencing this stage of development during the college experience.

**Sector Four.** Evans et al. (2010) describe Early Adulthood as a time when adults continue to experience one of the three previously developed identity types. The authors state that the majority of African Americans experience high race salience during this stage of development because many individuals value their race and culture. However, some individuals who were never forced to acknowledge the importance of race may continue to experience low race salience. Likewise, some individuals who possessed internalized racism during early sectors of development may continue to experience this identity sector during early adulthood. Evans et al. state that individuals possessing low race salience or internalized racism during this stage of development may never achieve nigrescence because identity often “remains unchanged in adulthood” (p. 258).

**Sector Five.** According to Evans et al. (2010), nigrescence, or the process of developing a Black identity, involves four stages of development. First, the preencounter stage involves those who possess low race salience or internalized racism and have yet to question their understanding of being Black. Next, the encounter stage begins when an unexpected event, or events, occur that cause an individual to evaluate their racial identity. During the immersion-emersion stage, individuals immerse themselves in Black culture but then “adopt a more altruistic and authentic understanding of black identity” (p. 259). Internalization/internalization commitment occurs by developing a black nationalist, bicultural, or multicultural identity. Black nationalists commit themselves to advancing the black community, individuals with bicultural perspectives seek to incorporate the black community and

the dominate culture, and those with multicultural perspectives incorporate many cultures and are likely to become social justice advocates.

**Sector Six.** When one's self-concept becomes questioned, nigrescence recycling occurs (Evens et al., 2010). During nigrescence recycling an individual reflects on the challenge at-hand and comes to a resolution about their identity. The goal within this stage is to obtain wisdom, described by the authors as "a complex and multidimensional understanding of black identity" (p. 260). Cross and Phagen-Smith's model is important in that it describes the identity development process which is common for African American students during the college years.

### **Demographics of African American Students in Higher Education**

According to the DOE (2012), individuals who identify as African American comprised 14.8% of the total undergraduate student population within the United States during 2010, compared to 11.9% in 2002 (Mauk & Jones, 2006). However, the DOE (2009) concludes that African Americans account for 27% of the total undergraduate population at for-profit institutions and graduation rates at such institutions are only 28% (DOE, 2011). Additionally, Allen, Jayakumar, Griffin, Korn, and Hurtado (2005) found that African American females tend to enroll in institutions of higher education at far greater rates than their male peers, with females accounting for approximately 60% of total enrollment. Further, African American males complete college within six years at a rate of only 38.1% compared to 46.1% of their female peers (DeAngelo et al., 2011). Mauk and Jones (2006) describe this

gender gap as problematic because the gap “is larger for African Americans than all other ethnic groups by a significant margin” (p. 70).

Today’s students often possess higher socioeconomic status than previous generations, but African American students remain far more economically disadvantaged compared to their White peers (Allen et al., 2005). According to Allen et al. (2005), African Americans from low-income families account for larger percentages of students attending HBCUs, 34%, as opposed to PWIs, in which 28% of students are from low-income families. Persisting to degree completion is crucial for this population to overcome historical injustices because those who obtain a bachelor’s degree earn an average of \$41,329 per year compared to \$23,582 for individuals who have completed high school as one’s highest level of education (Ryan & Siebens, 2012).

According to Choy (2001), African Americans are more likely than any other population to be first-generation college students. In fact, Fischer (2007) found 30% of all students who identify as African American possess first-generation status. This is problematic because Choy found that first-generation students are twice as likely to leave college, less academically prepared, more likely to be employed for longer hours, and less likely to receive family support compared to those whose parents have attended college.

Research by Allen et al. (2005) also suggests that African American students are more conservative regarding political issues than previous generations. The authors found that students have become more conservative on many political issues,

including abortion rights and same-sex marriage. This may be explained by Thornton's (2004) finding that African American students rank religion as the most important aspect in their lives.

### **Factors that Influence Academic Performance for African Americans**

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) suggest that "the more the student is psychologically engaged in activities and tasks that reinforce and extend the formal academic experience, the more he or she will learn" (p. 119). According to multiple researchers (Astin, 1984; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Witt, & Associates, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), the amount of time and effort students place on activities that encourage academic success matters during college.

Research relating to African American students' persistence to degree completion and GPA is also consistent. Researchers (Hu & St. John, 2001; Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2005) have found for the general undergraduate student population persistence to graduation is directly related to GPA. Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, and Pascarella (1996) also found that the likelihood that students of color persistence to graduation increases with one's GPA. This is problematic for students identifying as African American because this population possesses the lowest average GPA (Fischer, 2007) among other student populations.

Researchers (ACT, 2011; Thomas, Thompson, Pollio, Greenberg, Conwill, Sall, Klukken, Davis, & Dias-Bowie, 2007) suggest that possessing a low GPA may be a consequence of being underprepared for the academic rigor of college. Research by Guiffrida (2004a) and Fischer (2007) suggests that relationships with members



outside of the college community may result in a lower overall GPA. Guiffrida (2004a) also found that many African American students cite over-involvement in social organizations as a reason for possessing a low GPA.

### **Role of Faculty in African American Persistence to Graduation**

Research shows that faculty involvement positively affects the general student population (Astin, 1984; Astin 1993; Chickering & Gamson, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1975; Tinto 2006/07). Studies regarding the experiences of African Americans affirm this notion (Booker, 2007; Cole, 2011; Fischer, 2007; Littleton, 2002; Thomas et al., 2007). Littleton (2002) describes faculty involvement as the most important factor for student persistence. Fischer (2007) found that African Americans have closer ties to professors than students who identify as Hispanic, Asian, or White. Cole (2011) also states that faculty support and encouragement leads to increased academic success. Lastly, Booker (2007) describes faculty involvement as important for the formation of a positive perception of one's institution.

### **Student Involvement for African American College Students**

In terms of the general student population, research suggests that student involvement is critical to college completion (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2006/07). While research demonstrates that African American students are highly involved in religious organizations (Guiffrida, 2004b) and intercollegiate athletics (Littleton, 2002), these are not the primary avenues of involvement. Many researchers (Guiffrida, 2004b; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Littleton, 2002; Sutton &

Kimbrough, 2001) have determined that involvement primarily occurs through African American and cultural student organizations. This may be explained by findings that members of this population are more comfortable interacting with fellow students who identify as African American than other student populations (Fischer, 2007; Thomas et al., 2007), especially in the context of attending a PWI. An increased level of peer group interaction may also be explained by Fischer's (2007) finding that African Americans on predominantly white campuses are three and a half times more likely to experience a negative campus climate compared to White students.

Research relating student involvement and persistence to graduation for African American students is mixed. For instance, Littleton (2002) found student involvement to be the second most noted factor in persistence by students who identify as African American while attending PWIs. Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) also demonstrate that African American students attending PWIs average higher GPAs when involved in Greek organizations. Other researchers (Harper & Harris, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Kimbrough, 2003) have also found involvement in Greek organizations to be beneficial for African American students. These results may be explained by the finding that peer support plays a critical role in academic high-achievement for students of color (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Harper, 2006). Similarly, Booker (2007) reports that peer support is critical for the success of all students identifying as African American. However, Cole (2011) states that involvement in cultural organizations is more likely to decrease one's GPA, which is

problematic since some researchers (Hu & St. John, 2001; Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2005) have demonstrated that GPA is directly related to student persistence.

According to Harper (2006), African American males may be more reluctant than other members of the student body to be involved in social activities while attending PWIs. This is problematic due to Guiffrida's (2004b) finding that many African American students cite their lack of involvement as a reason for low academic achievement and failure to persist to graduation. A lack of involvement during college illustrates a disconnect from K-12 education because many high-achieving African Americans are involved in extracurricular activities during high school (Wiggan, 2008).

### **How Employment and Financial Aid Influence Persistence to Graduation**

Research relating to employment and financial aid are also closely related to persistence to graduation. Allen et al. (2005) found that 47% of African American students require employment during college to assist with tuition. This is problematic because off-campus employment negatively influences minority students from persisting to graduation (Choy, 2001; Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996; Oseguera, 2005/06). Financial aid is also beneficial for persistence to graduation (Hu & St. John, 2001) and access to college for high-achieving high school students (Harper & Griffin, 2011). However, Choy (2001) warns, "If leavers have borrowed to finance their education, they may be burdened with substantial loans to repay without the benefit of higher salaries that often come with a degree" (p. 19).

## **Living On-Campus and Persistence to Graduation**

Research regarding the general student population consistently suggests that living on-campus is beneficial for persistence to graduation and one's overall college experience (Astin, 1984; Chickering, 1974; Gellin, 2003; Lopez-Turley & Wodtke, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Supporting this assumption, Lopez-Turley and Wadtko (2010) found that African American students living on-campus possess higher GPAs compared to their peers who reside off-campus; specifically, living at home with family was found to be most negatively associated with academic performance. However, a recent climate study at GVSU found there to be no relationship between those living on-campus and those living off-campus who have considered leaving the institution (GVSU, 2012).

## **How Home Support Networks Influence One's College Experience**

Research relating to the need for maintaining home support networks is limited, but many studies involving African American students suggest a need to balance former relationships and one's college environment in order to persist to graduation. Tinto (1993) asserts that while attempting to persist to graduation, students of color:

“may frequently be forced to at least partially reject membership in communities that have been part of their upbringing... Individuals who seek to retain past friendships while attending college may find the transition to college especially problematic” (p. 62).

However, as a result of recent research, Tinto (2006/07) himself recognizes the need for some student populations to remain connected to home communities in order to increase persistence to graduation.

Fischer (2007) found that students who identify as African American are more likely than their Hispanic, Asian, and White peers to interact with family and friends outside of the college environment. According to Griffin (2006), parents are an important source of motivation for African American students. This is consistent with Ellington and Frederick's (2010) finding that home communities often support high-achieving African Americans. Guiffrida (2004a) found that many high-achieving students viewed family and friends from home primarily as assets to success, but some saw these relationships as liabilities. Similarly, Winkle-Wagner (2009) found that African American women consistently struggle with maintaining past relationships or breaking such ties during college. Surprisingly, Strayhorn (2008) found no association between supportive relationships and one's GPA. These results may be due to Thornton's (2004) finding that African Americans rank family as their second highest value in life, closely following religion.

### **Summary**

Understanding the needs of African American students is often difficult because much research (Astin, 1984; Chickering & Gamson, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1975) utilized by administrators in establishing campus programs are based on studies with limited participation by members of this student population. Many researchers (Booker, 2007; Cole, 2011; Fischer, 2007; Harper,

2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Littleton, 2002; Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996; Thomas et al., 2007) have affirmed portions of the previously mentioned research regarding the experiences of African American students, but others (Cole, 2011; Ellington & Frederick, 2010; Griffin, 2006; Guiffrida, 2004a) have found conflicting results. Despite mixed results, faculty involvement is one aspect that has remained constant in relation to the general student population (Astin, 1984; Astin 1993; Chickering & Gamson, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1975; Tinto 2006/07) and those who identify as African American (Booker, 2007; Cole, 2011; Fischer, 2007; Littleton, 2002; Thomas et al., 2007).

### **Conclusion**

Understanding the factors that relate to persistence to graduation and academic high-achievement for students identifying as African American is crucial within higher education. Often, current research is inconclusive. This may be a result of many studies involving participants from limited numbers of institutions, as well as qualitative research containing purposive sampling and limited participants. While such studies allow individual institutions to understand their respective student populations, the external validity of such studies may be questioned.

Understanding the unique needs of high-achieving African American students at GVSU will allow professional staff members, administrators, and faculty to shape institutional services to increase academic success for members of this student population. Additionally, the implications of this research will allow administrators to best allocate resources in order to achieve various objectives within the university's

Strategic Plan 2010-2015 (GVSU, 2009). Since the needs of student populations vary, research should be conducted to identify the unique factors that foster academic success and persistence to graduation for African American students at GVSU.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to investigate characteristics of undergraduate academically high-achieving African American students attending a Midwestern PWI. The three primary questions addressed by this research were:

- 1.) Does student involvement influence high academic achievement for African American students?
- 2.) Does support, including family support and friendships from home, influence high academic achievement for African American students?
- 3.) Does one's perception of GVSU influence high academic achievement for African American students?

The chapter will begin with an overview of the research design. A description of the sampling procedure and individuals participating in the study will follow. Next, the development of the survey instrument is explained. Then, the process of data collection is detailed, followed by a description of how the data were analyzed. A summary of the research design will conclude the chapter.

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a cross-sectional survey research design to investigate the factors that influence high-achievement among African American college students attending a PWI. Utilizing this method, along with one open ended question, allowed the researcher to better understand the factors that impact academic achievement and



persistence to graduation by allowing students to identify attributes the researcher may have failed to incorporate while developing the instrument.

### **Participants**

A target population of 353 undergraduate students identifying as African American attending a large sized, Master's level PWI in the Midwestern United States were invited to voluntarily participate in this study. The participants self-identified as "African American" within the Banner System at GVSU, held sophomore or higher status, and possessed a GPA of greater than or equal to 3.0 at the time the survey was distributed.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument was developed by the researcher to address areas of research that are limited, remain unclear, or may be unique to individual institutions. The instrument was developed with the assistance of the GVSU Statistical Consulting Center to increase content-related validity and was administered through SurveyMonkey. The instrument is primarily quantitative; 17 out of 20 questions were purely quantitative. Two additional questions, numbers two and seventeen, were quantitative in nature but provided one open-ended response to account for any categories that may have been omitted as possible answers. One question was qualitative and allows students to share any possible issues not addressed within the survey that they believed may have contributed to their academic success during college. The 20 questions were categorized within four themes: Involvement,

Friends/Family from Home, Perceptions of GVSU, and Demographics. Each of these themes were derived from the existing literature on this population of students.

### **Rationale for Developing the Survey Instrument**

The survey instrument was designed to evaluate factors the researcher believed may be unique to the institutional setting, where research is limited, or to clarify conflicting findings of previous research. The following section contains a rationale for developing each of the the survey questions within the four themes. A copy of the survey instrument can be found in Appendix A.

**Involvement.** Question one was developed to measure the average amount of time one is socially involved and the average amount of time one studies; aspects researchers (Astin, 1984; Kuh et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) have found to be important during college for the general student population. Question two tests the assertion of many researchers (Guiffrida, 2004a; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Littleton, 2002; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001) that African American students are primarily involved in cultural student organizations. Due to limited literature in this area, this question also attempts to determine what type of involvement might increase academic success. Question three was designed to assess Astin's (1984) assertion that living on-campus is beneficial for students.

Questions four and five were designed to assess the amount of time high-achieving African American students interact with faculty outside of the classroom; an aspect reported to be beneficial by many researchers (Astin, 1984; Booker, 2007; Cole, 2011; Fischer, 2007; Littleton, 2002; Thomas et al., 2007; Tinto, 1975).

Question six quantifies participation in some of the high-impact practices outlined by Kuh (2008). Questions seven and eight were designed due to findings (Choy, 2001; Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996; Oseguera, 2005/06) that students of color are negatively influenced by off-campus employment and are more likely to require employment to assist in paying tuition (Allen et al., 2005).

**Friends/Family from Home.** Questions nine, ten, and eleven were designed to evaluate how one's family and previously-established friendships might influence academic achievement, an area where Guiffrida (2004b) found mixed results. Question 12 is designed to measure the degree to which parental attendance at a college or university relates to increased academic success. Question 13 is designed to measure Ellington and Frederick's (2010) finding that home communities often support high-achieving students.

**Perceptions of GVSU.** Questions 14, 15, 16, and 17 were designed to gauge one's perception of the GVSU community. These questions were developed in part from existing questions on GVSU's My GVSU Survey in order to improve validity and allow for comparison of responses between high-achieving African American students and all African American students; such comparisons may lead to suggestions for future research.

**Demographics.** Question 18 addresses gender and will allow the researcher to determine whether variables differ among individuals who identify as male, female, and transgender. Question 19 allows individuals to self-identify their current GPA in increments of .25 from 3.0 to 4.0 for cross tabulation.

**Open-Ended.** Question 20 allowed individuals to identify additional factors that they believed may have impacted their academic achievement while attending college that may not have been identified within the previous questions.

### **Data Collection**

Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from GVSU's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B). Permission to distribute the survey by email was also obtained from GVSU's Office of Institutional Analysis (see Appendix C). The survey was developed with assistance from the Statistical Consulting Center utilizing Survey Monkey. Survey Monkey is an online system for securely creating instruments, distributing surveys, and collecting results (SurveyMonkey, 2009).

An invitation to participate (see Appendix D) was sent to the entire target population by Information Technology on January 11, 2013 and a reminder to participate was sent four days after the initial invitation. The link remained active for ten days to allow students adequate time for participation. The invitation to participate informed students about the anonymous nature of the survey, how to contact the researcher, that GPAs would not be disclosed to the researcher, and that participation is voluntary and may be ceased at any time. Once participants began, there was no time limit to complete the survey; a copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

## **Data Analysis**

Responses to each of the quantitative questions on the survey were cross tabulated using Survey Monkey to investigate factors that might lead to academic success for high-achieving African American students. Additionally, a Chi Square Test for Independence using SPSS analysis software, where applicable, was conducted to determine significant and non-significant relationships.

## **Summary**

This study utilized a cross-sectional survey research design to investigate the factors that influence high academic achievement for African American college students attending a PWI. The survey instrument was developed with assistance from GVSU's Statistical Consulting Center to increase content-related validity in addressing areas of research that are unclear or limited, and factors that may be unique to African American students attending GVSU. GVSU's Office of Information Technology distributed the instrument after the researcher obtained IRB permission to conduct the study. Cross tabulation using Survey Monkey and Chi Square Test for Independence were utilized to determine if significant relationships exist and ultimately addressed the research questions outlined in chapter one.

## **Chapter Four: Results**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The chapter begins with a description of the demographic characteristics of the participants. Next, the findings of the research are presented in relationship to the research questions outlined in chapter one. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

### **Context**

This study utilized a survey instrument designed by the researcher with assistance from the Statistical Consulting Center in order to investigate student involvement, family support, and perceptions of GVSU for high-achieving African American students at one Master's level institution in the Midwest. A census target population of 353 African American undergraduate students that possessed sophomore or higher status and a GPA of 3.00 or greater were invited to participate in the study. The target population represented 26.6% of the total undergraduate African American population of 1329 students. Due to the nature of Survey Monkey's reporting software, responses to individual questions that were determined to be invalid were not included in the final analysis.

### **Findings**

101 students completed the survey resulting in a response rate of 28.6% and the margin of error was calculated as  $\pm 7.15\%$  at a 95% confidence level. This section details the research findings and highlights questions where a Chi Square Test of Independence was applicable. For such tests, an Alpha level of  $p = .05$  was utilized

to determine the existence of significant relationships. A Chi Square Test of Independence was invalid for many questions because more than 20% of expected counts generated within SPSS analysis software were less than five; the Chi Square Test for Independence requires no expected values to be less than one, and no more than 20% of expected values to be less than five.

### **Demographics**

Table 1 displays the demographic data for participants within the study. 75 (75.8%) participants identified as female, 24 (24.2%) male, 0 (0%) transgender, and two individuals did not respond to the question. Additionally, 25 (24.8%) of the participants reported first-generation status. Participants reported the following GPAs: 41 (41%) 3.00 to 3.25; 24 (24%) 3.26 to 3.50; 19 (19%) 3.51 to 3.75; and 16 (16%) 3.76 to 4.00.

Table 1

## Participant Characteristics

Variable	Frequency
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	75 <sup>a</sup> (75.8) <sup>b</sup>
Male	24 (24.2)
<i>First-Generation</i>	
Yes	25 (24.8)
No	76 (75.2)
<i>GPA</i>	
3.00 to 3.25	41 (41.0)
3.26 to 3.50	24 (24.0)
3.51 to 3.75	19 (19.0)
3.76 to 4.00	16 (16.0)

Note. <sup>a</sup>N. <sup>b</sup>Rate per 100.

## Involvement

Table 2 displays the hours per week high-achieving African American students were involved in social and academic activities. From the table, high-achieving African American students at GVSU were most likely to spend six to ten hours studying alone per week, but five or less hours studying with friends. Members of this student population were also most likely to spend five or less hours involved in student organizations per week. High-achieving African American students most frequently reported working five or less hours per week. However, those who were employed most frequently reported working 16 or more hours per week.



Table 2

Hours per Week

Variable	5 and below	6 to 10	11 to 15	16 and above	Total
Studying Alone	13 <sup>a</sup> (13.1) <sup>b</sup>	49 (49.5)	28 (28.3)	9 (9.1)	99 (100)
Studying with Friends	85 (87.6)	9 (9.3)	2 (2.1)	1 (1.0)	97 (100)
Student Organizations	75 (77.3)	14 (14.4)	2 (1.9)	6 (5.8)	97 (100)
Employment	49 <sup>c</sup> (48.5)	3 (3.0)	14 (13.9)	35 (34.7)	101 (100)

Note. <sup>a</sup>N. <sup>b</sup>Rate per 100. <sup>c</sup>44 of these students were not employed.

Table 3 displays the types of student organization involvement and participation in high-impact practices (Kuh, 2008) for high-achieving African American students at GVSU. From the table, it appears that high-achieving African American students were more likely to be involved in cultural student organizations and participated in the high-impact practices of service learning and internships. In relation to student organizations, high-achieving African American students were least likely to be involved within a varsity sport. In regards to high-impact practices, high-achieving African American students least frequently reported involvement within learning communities/cohort programs and undergraduate research.

Table 3

## Student Involvement

Variable	Frequency
<i>Student Organizations</i>	
Residence Hall Association	5 <sup>a</sup> (5.0) <sup>b</sup>
Cultural Student Organization	28 (27.7)
Non-Cultural Student Organization	19 (18.8)
Fraternity/Sorority	11 (10.9)
Varsity Sport	1 (1.0)
Religious Organization	10 (9.9)
<i>High-Impact Practices</i>	
Service Learning	36 (35.6)
Internships	30 (29.7)
Learning Community/ Cohort programs	10 (9.9)
First Year Seminars/Experiences	15 (14.9)
Undergraduate Research	10 (9.9)

Note. <sup>a</sup>N. <sup>b</sup>Rate per 100. Rate per 100 may not equal 100 because participants could select more than one response.

Table 4 summarizes interactions with faculty per semester and faculty/staff mentorship. Based on the table, only 40% of high-achieving African American students at GVSU identified a faculty or staff mentor, where 60% did not. Despite this finding, 90.1% of high-achieving African American students reported interacting with faculty at least 1 to 3 times per semester outside of the classroom.

Table 4

## Mentorship and Interactions with Faculty

Variable	Frequency
<i>Identify a faculty/staff mentor</i>	
Yes	40 <sup>a</sup> (40.0) <sup>b</sup>
No	60 (60.0)
<i>Interactions with faculty outside of the classroom</i>	
I do not interact with faculty	10 (9.9)
1 to 3 times per semester	36 (35.6)
4 to 6 times per semester	30 (29.7)
7 to 9 times per semester	10 (9.9)
10 or more times per semester	15 (14.9)

Note. <sup>a</sup>N. <sup>b</sup>Rate per 100.

### Friends from Home

Table 5 displays data relating to distance to one's home community from GVSU for high-achieving African American students. A Chi Square Test of Independence suggests that there is a statistically significant relationship between distance to one's home community and employment for high-achieving African American students attending GVSU,  $\chi^2(2, N = 101) = 7.352, p = .025$ . From the table, it appears that students whose home communities were within one hour of GVSU were more likely to be employed off-campus. A Chi Square Test of Independence also suggests that there is a statistically significant relationship between distance to one's home community and the amount of times one returns home per

semester,  $\chi^2(2, N = 100) = 40.742, p < .001$ . From the table, it appears that high-achieving African American students whose home towns were within one hour of GVSU were more likely to return home more frequently than those whose home towns were one or more hours from campus. Additionally, A Chi Square Test for Independence suggests that there is a statistically significant relationship between distance to one's home community and GPA,  $\chi^2(2, N = 100) = 7.069, p = .029$ . From the table, it appears individuals whose home communities were one or more hours from GVSU were less likely to possess a GPA of 3.76 to 4.00.

Table 5  
Distance to One's Home Community

Variable	Less than 1 hour	1 or more hours
<i>Employment<sup>c</sup></i>		
Yes, on-campus	4 <sup>a</sup> (16.7) <sup>b</sup>	21 (27.3)
Yes, off-campus	13 (54.2)	19 (24.7)
Not employed	7 (29.2)	37 (48.1)
<i>Times returning home per semester<sup>d</sup></i>		
3 or less	2 (8.7)	50 (65.0)
4 to 6	3 (13.0)	18 (23.4)
7 or more	18 (78.2)	9 (11.7)
<i>GPA<sup>c</sup></i>		
3.00 to 3.25	8 (33.3)	33 (43.4)
3.26 to 3.75	8 (33.3)	35 (46.1)
3.76 to 4.00	8 (33.3)	8 (10.5)

Note. <sup>a</sup>N. <sup>b</sup>Rate per 100. <sup>c</sup>p < .05. <sup>d</sup>p < .001.

Table 6 displays information relating to interactions with friends from high school/home and family support for high-achieving African American students attending GVSU. From the table, interactions with friends from high school did not appear to influence one's academic achievement for high-achieving African American students during college. From the table, it also appears that the families of high-achieving African American students overwhelmingly supported their student's decision to attend college.

Table 6  
Interactions with Family/Friends from Home

Variable	Frequency
<i>How do you feel your interactions with friends from high school affect your success at GVSU?</i>	
Increase	15 <sup>a</sup> (15.0) <sup>b</sup>
Neither increase or decrease	77 (77.0)
Decrease	8 (8.0)
<i>Does your family support your choice to pursue a college education?</i>	
Yes	100 <sup>a</sup> (99.0) <sup>b</sup>
Somewhat	1 (1.0)
No	0 (0.0)

Note. <sup>a</sup>N. <sup>b</sup>Rate per 100.

## Perceptions of GVSU

Table 7 displays information relating to students who have considered leaving GVSU. A Chi Square Test of Independence suggests that there is a statistically significant relationship between GPA and considering leaving GVSU,  $\chi^2(3, N = 100) = 10.837, p = .013$ . From the table, it appears that as GPA increases participants were less likely to consider leaving the institution.

Table 7

Have you ever considered leaving GVSU?

Variable	Yes	No
<i>GPA</i> <sup>c</sup>		
3.00 to 3.25	22 (53.7)	19 (46.3)
3.26 to 3.50	9 (37.5)	15 (62.5)
3.51 to 3.75	3 (15.8)	16 (84.2)
3.76 to 4.00	3 (18.8)	13 (81.3)

Note. <sup>a</sup>N. <sup>b</sup>Rate per 100. <sup>c</sup>p <.05

Table 8 displays why high-achieving African American students have considered leaving GVSU. From the table, it appears that high-achieving African American students were more likely to consider leaving because they did not feel connected to the institution, possessed a lack of friendships at GSVU, and experienced financial difficulty. Lack of support from family/friends and difficulty meeting academic expectations did not appear to have much influence on one's decision to consider leaving GVSU.

Table 8

Considering Leaving GVSU

Why did you consider leaving GVSU?	Frequency
Financial Reasons	16 <sup>a</sup> (43.2) <sup>b</sup>
Lack of support from family/friends	2 (5.4)
Did not feel connected to GVSU	25 (67.6)
Lack of friendships at GVSU	19 (51.4)
Difficulty meeting academic expectations	3 (8.1)
Total students who considered leaving	37 (100)

Note. <sup>a</sup>N. <sup>b</sup>Rate per 100. Rate per 100 may not equal 100 because participants could select more than one response.

Table 9 displays perceptions of faculty and staff at GVSU by high-achieving African American students. From the table, it appears that high-achieving African American students were more likely to believe that both faculty and staff care about their academic success.

Table 9

Perceptions of Faculty and Staff

Do you believe faculty/staff members at GVSU care about your academic success?	Frequency
Only faculty members	9 <sup>a</sup> (9.0) <sup>b</sup>
Only staff members	2 (2.0)
Faculty and staff members	87 (87.0)
Neither faculty or staff	2 (2.0)

Note. <sup>a</sup>N. <sup>b</sup>Rate per 100.

## Summary

This study utilized data collected through a survey developed by the researcher with assistance from the Statistical Consulting Center to investigate involvement, family and friends from home, and one's perception of GVSU for high-achieving undergraduate African American students. The primary questions guiding the research were: 1) Does student involvement influence high academic achievement for African American students? 2) Does support, including family support and friendships from home, influence high academic achievement for African American students? 3) Does one's perception of GVSU influence high academic achievement for African American students?

**Involvement.** The data suggest that the majority of respondents spend the following amounts of time per week participating in each activity: six to ten hours studying alone, five or less hours studying with friends, five or less hours involved in a student organization, and five or less hours working per week. However, students who were employed ( $n = 57$ ) most frequently reported working 16 or more hours per week ( $n = 35$ ). No themes emerged relating to involvement through the open-ended responses to question 20.

**Friends from Home.** High-achieving African American students at GVSU were more likely to believe that friends from home have no influence on one's success at GVSU. Families of high-achieving African American students overwhelmingly supported their student's choice to enroll in higher education. Data suggest that students whose home communities were within one hour of GVSU were



more likely to be employed off-campus, more frequently reported GPAs of 3.75 to 4.00, and returned home more often compared to students whose home communities were one or more hours from GVSU. No themes relating to friends/family from home immersed through the open-ended responses to question 20.

**Perceptions of GVSU.** A Chi Square Test of Independence suggests that there is a statistically significant relationship between GPA and considering leaving GVSU,  $\chi^2(3, N = 100) = 10.837, p = .013$ . From table 7, it appears that as GPA increases participants were less likely to consider leaving the institution. Table 8 shows that high-achieving African American students were most likely to consider leaving GVSU because they did not feel connected to the university. No themes immersed relating to perceptions of GVSU through the open-ended responses to question 20.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

### **Summary of the Study**

Many obstacles often stand in the way for students who identify as African American (Mauk & Jones, 2006). These obstructions can include, but are not limited to, an increased likelihood of being a first-generation student (Choy, 2001), not being academically prepared (ACT, 2011), low socioeconomic status (Smith, 2009), and a lack of family support (Thayer, 2000). As suggested by Tinto (2006/07), “most institutions have not yet been able to translate what we know about student retention into forms of action that have led to substantial gains in student persistence and graduation” (p. 5). However, the researcher believes that institutions may not fully understand the nuanced characteristics of their student populations. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate characteristics of academically high-achieving African American undergraduate students attending a Midwestern PWI.

The three primary questions guiding this research were:

- 1.) Does student involvement influence high academic achievement for African American students?
- 2.) Does support, including family support and friendships from home, influence high academic achievement for African American students?
- 3.) Does one’s perception of GVSU influence high academic achievement for African American students?

In order to answer these questions, the researcher developed a cross-sectional survey research design to investigate the factors that influence academic high-

achievement for African American college students attending a Master's level PWI. 101 individuals out of a total target population of 353 undergraduate African American students who possessed a GPA of at least 3.00 and held sophomore or higher status completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 28.6%. Descriptive statistics, and Cross Tabulation and a Chi Square Test for Independence were utilized to analyze the data for significant or non-significant relationships.

### **Findings**

Findings related to involvement suggest that academically high-achieving African American students at GVSU were more likely to spend six to ten hours per week studying alone. Data also suggest that members of this student population were most likely to spend five or less hours studying with friends per week, and most likely to be involved in student organizations five or less hours per week. The majority of students ( $n = 49$ ) were working five or less hours per week, but participants who were employed were most likely ( $n = 35$ ) to work 16 or more hours per week. Descriptive analysis suggests that high-achieving African American students were more likely to be involved in cultural student organizations, service-learning, and internships compared to other types of involvement and high-impact practices. In terms of faculty involvement, the majority of academically high-achieving African American students at GVSU did not identify a specific faculty/staff mentor, but 90% of respondents did interact with faculty at least one to three times outside of class per semester.

Findings related to friends and family from home suggest ( $p < .001$ ) that academically high-achieving African American students were less likely to return home as distance increases to one's home town. Descriptive statistics suggest that families were overwhelmingly supportive of the decision of academically high-achieving African American students to pursue a college degree. Data also suggest that members of this student population believed friends from home were not likely to have an impact on one's success at GVSU.

Findings related to perceptions of GVSU suggest ( $p = .013$ ) that as GPA increases for academically high-achieving African American students, one is less likely to consider leaving GVSU. Descriptive statistics suggest that members of this student population were most likely to consider leaving GVSU because they did not feel connected to the university. However, data also suggest that the majority of academically high-achieving African American students at GVSU believed that faculty and staff care about their academic success.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate characteristics of undergraduate academically high-achieving African American students at one PWI. Findings from this study suggest several important conclusions.

In regards to involvement, high-achieving African American students were most frequently involved for the following amounts of time during each activity per week: six to ten hours studying alone, five or less hours studying with friends, and five or less hours within student organizations. The majority of students were

working five or less hours per week, but students who were employed were most frequently working 16 or more hours per week. High-achieving African American students reported most frequently participating in cultural student organizations and the high-impact areas of service learning and internships. An overwhelming majority of high-achieving African American students were interacting with faculty outside of the classroom at least one to three times per semester.

Despite suggestions that types of involvement and the amount one is engaged per week matter for high-achieving African American students, limitations of this study did not allow for statistical comparisons between involvement and academic high achievement. Therefore, the data can neither support nor reject the first hypothesis. Future research should be conducted to determine if statistical differences exist relating involvement to academic high achievement for African American students.

Data relating to friends and family from home suggest that there is a statistically significant relationship between distance to one's home community and the amount of times one returns home per semester,  $\chi^2(2, N = 100) = 40.742, p < .001$ . Students whose home communities were within one hour of GVSU most frequently reported returning home seven or more times per semester while students whose home communities were one or more hours from GVSU most frequently reported returning home one to three times per semester. Further, data suggests that African American students whose home communities were within one hour of GVSU were more than three times more likely to possess a GPA of 3.75 to 4.00,  $\chi^2(2, N =$

100) = 7.069,  $p = .029$ . Additionally, academically high-achieving African American students overwhelmingly reported that their families support their decision to pursue a college education and that prior friendships from high school did not appear to influence one's academic achievement. Based on these results, the data supports the second hypothesis; there is a statistically significant relationship between support from friends and family and academic achievement for high-achieving African American students.

Data relating to one's perception of one's institution suggests that a statistically significant relationship exists relating GPA to considering leaving GVSU,  $\chi^2(3, N = 100) = 10.837, p = .013$ . Specifically, as GPA increases participants were less likely to consider leaving the institution. Those who did consider leaving reported not feeling connected to GVSU and a lack of friendships at GVSU as the two primary reasons for considering leaving the institution. Based on these results, the data supports the third hypothesis; there is a significant relationship between perceptions of one's institution and academic achievement for high-achieving African American students.

## **Discussion**

In regards to the first research question, the data suggest that high-achieving African American students engage in differing amounts of studying alone, studying with friends, participating in student organizations, and being employed. While high-achieving African American students who were employed may be more likely to work 16 or more hours per week, members of this student population were also more

likely to study alone for longer periods than they were involved within student organizations or studying with friends. This finding supports existing literature (Astin, 1984; Kuh et al., 2010; Terenzini, 2005) stating that the quality of involvement matters during college and a focus on academics should remain primary. The findings affirm previous qualitative research regarding African American students (Guiffrida, 2004b; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Littleton, 2002) suggesting that cultural student organizations serve as the primary avenue for student involvement for high-achieving African American students. However, the findings of this study are not consistent with Littleton's (2002) finding that many African American students are involved within intercollegiate athletics. This study also suggests that academically high-achieving African American students spend more time studying or completing coursework alone than studying or completing coursework with friends. This finding may be explained by Steele's (2010) assumption that African American students spend more time studying alone due to stereotype threat. Expanding upon existing research, this study suggests that high-achieving African American students are more likely to participate in the high-impact practices of service learning and internships.

Addressing the second research question, an overwhelming majority of high-achieving African American students reported believing that their families support their pursuit of a college degree. The findings of this study expand upon existing research by illustrating that students whose home communities were within one hour of GVSU were over three times more likely to possess a GPA of 3.75 to 4.00

compared to students whose home communities were one or more hours from campus. Additionally, this study suggests that students whose home communities were within one hour of GVSU were returning home more frequently than those whose home communities were one or more hours from campus. Collectively, these findings affirm and expand upon prior qualitative research (Ellington & Frederick, 2010; Griffin, 2006; Guiffrida, 2004a) conducted across differing institutional types that found family support and relationships with one's home community to be important factors influencing collegiate success for African American students. However, these findings are not consistent with other research (Fischer, 2007) suggesting that relationships with individuals outside of a higher education institution may result in a lower overall GPA. The data also seems to contradict Tinto's (1975) assertion that students must break ties with their home communities in order to be successful during college.

In regards to the third research question, the data suggest that one's GPA is statistically related to considering leaving GVSU for high-achieving African American students. This finding affirms prior research (Hu & St. John, 2001; Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996; Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2005) stating that GPA is directly related to student retention. The finding that many students have considered leaving GVSU due to a lack of friendships affirms previous research (Booker, 2007; Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Harper, 2006) stating that peer support is critical during college.



## **Recommendations for Practice**

As suggested by prior research (Ellington & Frederick, 2010; Griffin, 2006; Guiffrida, 2004b) and affirmed by the findings of this study, family support and relationships with one's home community are important factors influencing collegiate success for African American students. These findings suggest that the Office of Admissions may wish to place emphasis on recruiting African American students whose home communities are within one hour of GVSU (i.e., Kalamazoo, Holland, Muskegon). Recruiting students from within one hour of campus may increase retention and graduation rates, satisfaction with GVSU, and academic success for African American students. At a minimum, admissions representatives should share this data with African American students to help them become more successful during college.

The Divisions of Inclusion and Equity and Student Services may wish to collaborate in establishing an early move-in program for African American students to better support individuals from this student population. Results of this study suggest that nearly 68% of high-achieving African American students who have considered leaving GVSU did so due to not feeling connected with the university and 51% reported a lack of friendships. Additionally, only 40% of high-achieving African American students reported a faculty or staff mentor. These results are extremely troubling because a great deal of literature (Astin, 1984; Astin 1993; Chickering & Gamson, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1975; Tinto 2006/07) suggests that faculty involvement positively benefits the general student

population and the African American student population in particular (Booker, 2007; Cole, 2011; Fischer, 2007; Littleton, 2002; Thomas et al., 2007). These results are also problematic because research has shown that peer support is critical for African American students (Booker, 2007; Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Harper, 2006). Therefore, the researcher suggests that African American students have the option to participate in an early move-in program consisting of building peer relationships and establishing faculty/staff connections so members of this student population have others to be supported by if challenging situations arise during college. The researcher also suggests the implementation of a formal mentoring program for African American students to assist this population throughout the college experience.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the research design and the results of this study, the researcher has several recommendations for future research regarding the experiences of high-achieving undergraduate African American students enrolled within institutions of higher education. First, the researcher recommends replicating this study across multiple institutions and across institutional types to increase participation and provide more generalizable findings. Second, comparable quantitative studies should be conducted investigating the experiences of high-achieving students across differing variables (i.e., African American and White students, PWIs and HBCUs, etc.). Third, this study provided interesting findings in regards to distance to one's home community and high academic achievement. Future studies might examine this

variable in detail to provide a more thorough explanation of how distance to one's home community influences academic achievement for African American students. Fourth, when compared to results from a recent climate study, analysis determined that high-achieving students are considering leaving at higher rates than all African American students, therefore research should be conducted to examine this in greater detail. Is this finding due to institutional classification? Is this a result of high-achieving students receiving less support from campus resources? Future research may provide answers to these questions. Fifth, based on the finding that respondents were unlikely to participate in athletics ( $n = 1$ ), research should be conducted to determine how athletic involvement influences GPA for African American students. Finally, the researcher recommends that GVSU conduct qualitative research to better understand the complex needs of academically high-achieving African American students.

## References

- ACT. (2011). The condition of college & career readiness: 2011. Retrieved from [www.act.org/readiness/2011](http://www.act.org/readiness/2011)
- Allen, W. R., Jayakumar, U. M., Griffin, K.A., Korn, W. S., & Hurtado, S. (2005). *Black undergraduates from Bakke to Grutter: Freshman status, trends and prospects, 1971-2004*. Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute, University of California Los Angeles.
- Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory of higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25, 297-308.
- Astin, A. W. (1993). Diversity and multiculturalism on the campus: How are students affected? *Change*, 23, 44-49.
- Astin, A. W. (1999). Student involvement: A developmental theory of higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 518-529.
- Booker, K. C. (2007). Perceptions of classroom belongingness among African American college students. *College Student Journal*, 41(1), 179-186.
- Brown v. the Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).
- Chang, M. J., Astin, A. W., & Kim, D. (2004). Cross-racial interaction among undergraduates: Some consequences, causes, and patterns. *Research in Higher Education*, 45(5), 529-553.
- Chickering, A. W. (1974). *Commuting versus resident students*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Chickering, A. W. & Gamson, Z. F. (1999). Development and adaptations of the seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 80, 75-81.
- Chronicle of Higher Education (2012). Access & Equity. *Almanac: 2012-2013* 59(1). Washington, DC: Chronicle of Higher Education.
- Choy, S.P. (2001). *Students whose parents did not go to college: Postsecondary access, persistence, and attainment*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Cole, D. (2011). Debunking anti-intellectualism: An examination of African American college students' intellectual self-concepts. *The Review of Higher Education*, 34(2), 259-282.
- DeAngelo, L., Franke, R., Hurtado, S., Pryor, J. H., & Tran, S. (2011). *Completing college: Assessing graduation rates at four-year institutions*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, University of California Los Angeles.
- Dennis, J. M., Phinney, J. S., & Chuateco, L. I. (2005). The role of motivation, parental support, and peer support in the academic success of ethnic minority first-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(3), 223-236.
- Ellington, R. M. & Frederick, R. (2010). Black high achieving undergraduate mathematics majors discuss success and persistence in mathematics. *The Negro Educational Review*, 61(1-4), 61-80.

- Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., Guido, F. Patton, L. & Renn, K. (2010). *Student development in college: Theory, research and practice (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Fischer, M. J. (2007). Settling into campus life: Differences by race/ethnicity in college involvement and outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 78(2), 125-156.
- Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin, 645 F. Supp. 2d 587, 590 (W.D. Tex. 2011)
- Gellin, A. (2003). The effect of undergraduate student involvement on critical thinking: A meta-analysis of the literature 1991-2000. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44, 746-762.
- Grand Valley State University, (2009). *Strategic Plan 2010-2015*. Allendale, MI: Grand Valley State University.
- Grand Valley State University. (2011). Degrees granted 2010-2011. Retrieved from <http://www.gvsu.edu/ia/degrees-granted-2010-2011-48.htm>
- Grand Valley State University. (2012a). GVSU climate survey: African American students vs. white students. Unpublished.
- Grand Valley State University. (2012b). Quick-facts: 2012-2013. Retrieved from <http://www.gvsu.edu/ia/quick-facts-2012-2013-54.htm>
- Gratz v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 244 (2003)
- Griffin, K. (2006). Striving for success: A qualitative exploration of competing theories of high-achieving Black college students' academic motivation. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(4), 384-400.

- Grutter v. Bollinger, 539 U.S. 306 (2003)
- Guiffrida, D. A. (2004a). Friends from home: Asset and liability to African American students attending a predominately White institution. *NASPA Journal*, 41(3), 693-708.
- Guiffrida, D. A. (2004b). How involvement in African American student organizations supports and hinders academic achievement. *NACADA Journal*, 24(1&2), 88-98.
- Guiffrida, D. A. (2006). Toward a cultural advancement of Tinto's model. *The Review of Higher Education*, 29(4), 451-472.
- Harper, S. R. (2005). Leading the way: Inside the experiences of high-achieving African American male students. *About Campus*, 10(1), 8-15.
- Harper, S. R. (2006). Peer support for African-American male college achievement: Beyond internalized racism and the burden of "acting white," *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 14(3), 337-358.
- Harper, S. R., & Harris III, F. (2006). The role of Black fraternities in the African American male undergraduate experience. In M. J. Cuyjet (Ed.), *African American men in college* (pp. 128-153). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Harper, S. R. & Quaye, S. J. (2007). Student organizations as venues for Black identity expression and development among African American male student leaders. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(2), 127-144.

- Harper, S. R. & Griffin, K. (2011). Opportunity beyond affirmative action: How low-income and working-class Black male achievers access highly selective, high-cost colleges and universities. *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy*, 17, 43-60.
- Hu, S. & St. John, E. P. (2001). Student persistence in a public higher education system: Understanding racial and ethnic differences. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 72(3), 265-286.
- Ishitani, T. T. & DesJardins, S. L. (2002/03). A longitudinal investigation of dropout from college in the United States. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 4(2), 173-201.
- Johnson, L. B. (1966). *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965* (Vol. II). Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office  
Retrieved from <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/ppotpus/4730960.1965.002?view=toc>
- Kaplin, W. A., & Lee, B. A. (2007). *The law of higher education: Student version* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kimbrough, W. M. (2003). *Black Greek 101: The culture, customs, and challenges of Black fraternities and sororities*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- Kuh, G. (2008). *High-impact practices: What they are, who has access to them, and they matter*. American Association of Colleges and Universities.



- Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J., & Associates (2010). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lattuca, L. R. & Stark, J. S. (2011). External influences on curriculum: Sociocultural context. In S. R. Harper and J. F. L. Jackson (Eds.) *Introduction to American higher education* (pp. 93-128). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Littleton, R. A. (2002). Campus involvement among African American students at small, predominately white colleges. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 21(2), 53-67.
- Loes, C. & Pascarella, E. & Umbach, P.(2012). Effects of Diversity Experiences on Critical Thinking Skills: Who Benefits? *The Journal of Higher Education* 83(1), 1-25.
- Lopez-Turley, R. N. & Wodtke, G. (2010). College residence and academic performance: Who benefits from living on campus? *Urban Education*, 45(4), 506-532.
- Mauk, A. J., & Jones, W. A. (2006). African American Students. In L. A. Gohn & G.R. Albin (Eds.), *Understanding College Student Subpopulations: A guide for student affairs professionals* (pp. 69-90). National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

- Nora, A., Cabrera, A., Hagedorn, L. S., & Pascarella, E. (1996). Differential impacts of academic and social experiences of college-related behavioral outcomes across different ethnic and gender groups at four-year institutions. *Research in Higher Education, 37*(4), 427-451.
- Nora, A., Barlow, E., & Crisp, G. (2005). Student persistence and degree attainment beyond the first year in college: The need for research. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *College student retention: Formula for success* (pp. 129-154). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Oseguera, L. (2005/06). Four and six-year baccalaureate degree completion by institutional characteristics and racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of College Student Retention, 71*(1-2), 19-59.
- Pascarella, E. T. & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Rendon, L. I., Jalomo, R. E., & Nora, A. (2011). Theoretical considerations in the study of minority student retention in higher education. In S. R. Harper & J. F. L. Jackson (Eds.), *Introduction to American education* (pp. 229-248). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ryan, C. L., & Siebens, J. (February, 2012). *Educational attainment in the United States: 2009*. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

- Smith, M. J. (2009). Right directions, wrong maps: Understanding the involvement of low-SES African American parents to enlist them as partners in college choice. *Education and Urban Society, 41*(2), 171-196. doi: 10.1177/0013124508324028.
- Steele, C. M. (2010). *Whistling vivaldi: And other clues to how stereotypes affect us*. Ney York, NY: W. W. Norton.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2008). The role of supportive relationships in facilitating African American males' success in college. *NASPA Journal, 45*(1), 26-48.
- Survey Monkey. (2009). *Everything you wanted to know, but were afraid to ask*. Retrieved from <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/aboutus/>
- Sutton, E. M., & Kimbrough, W. M. (2001). Trends in Black student involvement. *NASPA Journal, 39*, 30-40.
- Thayer, P.B. (2000). Retention of students from first-generation and low-income backgrounds. *The Journal of the Council of Opportunity in Education, 2*-8.
- Thelin, J. R. & Gasman, M. R. (2011). Historical overview of American higher education. In Schuh, J. H., Jones, S. R., Harper, S. H., & Associates. (Eds.). *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Thomas, S. P., Thompson, C., Pollio, H. R., Greenberg, K., Conwill, W., Sall, A., Klukken, G., Davis, M. W., & Dias-Bowie, Y. (2007). Experiences of struggling African American students at a predominantly white institution. *Research in Schools, 14*(2), 1-17.

- Thornton, C. H. (2004). Value orientations: A study of Black college students. *College Student Journal*, 38(1), 103-111.
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45(1), 89-125.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago.
- Tinto, V. (2006/7). Research and practice of student retention: What's next? *Journal of College Student Retention*, 8(1), 1-19.
- University of Regents v. Bakke, 438 U.S. 265 (1978)
- U.S. Department of Education. (2011). Figure 45-1: *Percentage of students seeking a bachelor's degree at 4-year institutions who completed a bachelor's degree within 6 years, by control of institution and cohort year: Starting cohort years 1996 and 200*. Retrieved from [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_pgr.asp#info](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_pgr.asp#info)
- U.S. Department of Education. (2012). *Total fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by level of student, sex, attendance status, and race/ethnicity: Selected years, 1976 through 2010*. Retrieved from [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11\\_237.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_237.asp)
- Wiggin, G. (2008). From opposition to engagement: Lessons from high achieving African American students. *Urban Review*, 40(4), 317-349.

- Wiles, R. (2004, October 19). College degree pays off big – not just in income, study finds. *The Arizona Republic*. Retrieved from <http://www.azcentral.com/families/education/articles/1019collegebenefits19-ON.html>
- Winkle-Wagner, R. (2009). The perpetual homelessness of college experiences: Tensions between home and campus for African American women. *The Review of Higher Education*, 33(1), 1-36.

## Appendix A

1. Outside of the classroom, how many hours per week:

	5 and below	6 to 10	11 to 15	More than 15
Do you spend studying or completing coursework alone?				
Do you spend studying or completing coursework with friends/classmates?				
Are you involved in student organizations?				

2. What type(s) of organization(s) are you involved in? (Select all that apply)

- a. Student Senate
- b. Residence Hall Association
- c. Cultural Student Organization
- d. Non-Cultural Student Organization
- e. Fraternity/Sorority
- f. Varsity Sport
- g. Religious Organization
- h. Other (Open Ended)

3. Which year(s), if any, have you lived on-campus?

- a. Freshman Year
- b. Sophomore Year
- c. Junior Year
- d. Senior Year
- e. I have never lived on-campus

4. How many times per semester do you interact with faculty outside of the classroom?

- a. 1 to 3 times
- b. 4 to 6 times
- c. 7 to 9 times
- d. 10 or more times
- e. I do not interact with faculty outside of class

5. Do you have a faculty or staff member who you consider a mentor?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
6. Have you ever participated in any of the following (Select all that apply)
  - a. Service Learning
  - b. Internships
  - c. Learning Communities/Cohort Programs
  - d. First Year Experiences
  - e. Undergraduate Research
  
7. Are you currently employed?
  - a. Yes, I am a student employee of GVSU
  - b. Yes, I am employed off-campus
  - c. No, I am not currently employed
  
8. If you are employed, how many hours do you work per week?
  - a. 5 and below
  - b. 6 to 10
  - c. 11 to 15
  - d. 16 and above
  
9. How many times per semester do you return to the town where you graduated high school?
  - a. 1 to 3 times
  - b. 4 to 6 times
  - c. 7 to 9 times
  - d. 10 or more times
  - e. I do not return home during the semester
  
10. How do you feel your interactions with friends from high school affect your success at GVSU?
  - a. Increase
  - b. Neither Increase nor Decrease
  - c. Decrease
  
11. How far away from campus is the town where you graduated from high school located?
  - a. Less than 1 hour
  - b. 1 to 2 hours
  - c. More than 2 hours

12. Have your parents/guardians ever attended, for any length of time, a college or university?

- a. Both of my parents/guardians attended a college or university
- b. One of my parents/guardians attended a college or university
- c. Neither of my parents/guardians attended a college or university

13. Does your family support your choice to pursue a college education?

- a. Yes
- b. Somewhat
- c. No

14. Do you believe faculty/staff members at GVSU care about your academic success?

- a. Only faculty members care about my success
- b. Only staff members care about my success
- c. Both faculty and staff members care about my success
- d. Neither faculty or staff members care about my success

15. Have you ever seriously considered leaving GVSU?

- a. Yes
- b. No

16. When did you seriously consider leaving GVSU?

- a. Freshman Year
- b. Sophomore Year
- c. Junior Year
- d. Senior Year

17. Why did you consider leaving GVSU? (Select all that apply)

- a. Financial Reasons
- b. Lack of support from family/friends
- c. Did not feel connected to University
- d. Lack of friendships at GVSU
- e. Difficulty meeting academic expectations
- f. Other (open ended)

18. What is your gender?

- a. Female
- b. Male
- c. Transgender



19. What is your current GPA?

- a. 3.00 to 3.25
- b. 3.26 to 3.50
- c. 3.51 to 3.75
- d. 3.76 to 4.00

20. Are there any other experiences at Grand Valley that have contributed to your academic success? (open ended)

## Appendix B



### **Individual Investigator Agreement** **For non-GVSU affiliated research personnel**

**Grand Valley State University**

**Applicable FWA #: 00002829**

**Expiration Date: November 8, 2013**

**Individual Investigator's Name: John A. Gipson Jr.**

**All research protocols submitted to the HRRC for review and approval will be covered by this Agreement during Winter 2013 in which John A. Gipson Jr. is listed as the principal or participating study personnel.**

---

1. The above-named Individual Investigator has reviewed:
  1. *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research* (or other internationally recognized equivalent; see section B.1. of the Terms of the Federal wide Assurance (FWA) for International (Non-U.S.) Institutions);
  2. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations for the protection of human subjects at 45 CFR part 46 (or other procedural standards; see section B.3. of the Terms of the FWA for International (Non-U.S.) Institutions);
  3. The FWA and applicable Terms of the FWA for the institution referenced above; and
  4. The relevant institutional policies and procedures for the protection of human subjects.
2. The Investigator understands and hereby accepts the responsibility to comply with the standards and requirements stipulated in the above documents and to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in research conducted under this Agreement.
3. The Investigator will comply with all other applicable federal, international, state, and local laws, regulations, and policies that may provide additional protection for human subjects participating in research conducted under this agreement.
4. The Investigator will abide by all determinations of the GVSU Human Research Review Committee (HRRC) designated under the above FWA and will accept the

final authority and decisions of the HRRC, including but not limited to directives to suspend or terminate participation in designated research activities.

5. The Investigator will complete any educational training required by the Institution and/or the HRRC prior to initiating research covered under this Agreement.
6. The Investigator will report promptly to the HRRC any proposed changes in the research conducted under this Agreement. The investigator will not initiate changes in the research without prior HRRC review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects.
7. The Investigator will report immediately to the HRRC any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others in research covered under this Agreement.
8. The Investigator, when responsible for enrolling subjects, will obtain, document, and maintain records of informed consent for each such subject or each subject's legally authorized representative as required under HHS regulations at 45 CFR part 46 (or any other international or national procedural standards selected on the FWA for the institution referenced above) and stipulated by the HRRC.
9. The Investigator acknowledges and agrees to cooperate in the HRRC's responsibility for initial and continuing review, record keeping, reporting, and certification for the research referenced above. The Investigator will provide all information requested by the HRRC in a timely fashion.
10. The Investigator will not enroll subjects in research under this Agreement prior to its review and approval by the HRRC.
11. Emergency medical care may be delivered to research subjects enrolled in a HRRC approved research protocol without HRRC review and approval to the extent permitted under applicable federal regulations and state law.
12. This Agreement does not preclude the Investigator from taking part in research not covered by this Agreement.
13. The Investigator acknowledges that he/she is primarily responsible for safeguarding the rights and welfare of each research subject, and that the subject's rights and welfare must take precedence over the goals and requirements of the research.

PI Name: John A. Gipson Jr.  
Degree(s): B.S., M.Ed. candidate in Higher Education

Address (*City, State/Province, Zip/Country*): 304 Manzana Ct. Apt. 3D, Walker, MI  
49534

Phone #: 269-362-4670

Date:11/19/12

**FWA Institutional Official (or Designee):** *Paul J. Reitemeier, Ph.D.*

**Institutional Title:** **Chair, Human Research Review Committee (HRRC)**

Address: 301-C DeVos, GVSU 401 Fulton St phone #: (616) 331-3197  
Grand Rapids, MI 49504-6431 fax #: (616) 331-6040

## Appendix C



You are being invited to participate in a survey because you have self-identified as African American within the Banner system and possess a GPA of greater than or equal to 3.0; your identity and GPA have not been disclosed to the researcher. The survey investigates your perceptions in regards to various factors that relate to student achievement. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may choose to stop the survey at any time. The electronic survey consists of 20 questions that will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

Any information that you share will remain anonymous. Your name will not appear on any of the material and there will be no way to identify your answers. Printed results will be kept in the researcher's office for three years, after which time they will be destroyed.

Your participation in this research is important in that it will help further our understanding of factors that influence academic success for students who identify as African American. If you should have any questions about this project, you may contact me at the address listed below, or you may call the chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at 616-331-3197 or [hrrc@gvsu.edu](mailto:hrrc@gvsu.edu). If you would like to receive the results of this research, please email the researcher and he will provide a link to the completed thesis in April.

I appreciate your participation.

Sincerely,

John Gipson  
Graduate Assistant  
Grand Valley State University  
[gipsonjo@gvsu.edu](mailto:gipsonjo@gvsu.edu)  
616-331-6208

## Appendix D



November 16, 2012

John Gipson  
College of Education  
Grand Valley State University

John,

I will provide means for email communication for the following research project:

*Understanding High-Achieving African American Students: A Quantitative Study at Grand Valley State University*

Principal investigator(s) – John Gipson

Invitee population – Black or African American undergraduate students enrolled in Winter 2013 with cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher

Nature and timing of contact – One invitation and one reminder message per invitee, both sent via email during the winter 2013 academic year. Content of messages must be exactly as approved by HRRC, and must clearly state that GVSU has not disclosed GPA information to you.

The e-mail addresses will not be released directly to you, but will be used to distribute your messages from a GVSU mail server.

This use of the data is in compliance with both FERPA and GVSU policies.

Philip Batty  
Director, Office of Institutional Analysis