A Survey of Black Student Perceptions and Attitudes on the Utilization of Academic Retention Programs

Beora Williams
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A SURVEY OF BLACK STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES ON THE UTILIZATION OF ACADEMIC RETENTION PROGRAMS.

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Psychology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Educational Specialist

by
Beora Edmund Williams
December 1996
A SURVEY OF BLACK STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES ON THE
UTILIZATION OF ACADEMIC RETENTION PROGRAMS

Date Recommended 9-10-96

Director of Thesis

Director of Graduate Studies and Research  Date
Acknowledgments

I must first give thanks to God, for He makes all things possible. He took this kid from the projects and allowed him to achieve a dream. I would like to thank my mother, Lois Williams-Noble, for without her wisdom, support, encouragement, guidance, and her belief in me I would not have been able to achieve any of my goals. I would also like to thank Dr. Pope-Tarrance for her guidance, patience, and not allowing mediocrity in my performance. She pushed me to do my best and it paid off.

I especially want to thank Phyllis Gatewood and the office of Minority Student Support Services for their invaluable assistance during this project. Ms. Gatewood was there for me at the beginning of my college career, and it is only fitting and pleasantly ironic that she be there at the end. Phyllis, thanks for the couch. I also want to extend a special thank you to Mark Graves, who not only gave me a lesson in data analysis but also taught me lessons on what it means to be a great person. For that he always stands taller than us ordinary people. Thanks to the rest of my committee for their taking the time from already busy schedules to assist me in my project. I wish to express my gratitude to my soulmate/wife and family who have had to deal with me over the course of this endeavor. I also want to thank the people I worked with for their help and support. Believe and nothing seems too impossible.

Thank you all.
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A SURVEY OF BLACK STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES ON THE UTILIZATION OF ACADEMIC RETENTION PROGRAMS

Beora Edmund Williams       December 1996       51 Pages
Directed by: Jacqueline Pope-Tarrence, John O'Connor, and Leroy Metze
Department of Psychology       Western Kentucky University

In this study I examine the perceptions and attitudes of black students attending a predominantly white institution (PWI) concerning student support services designed to assist them in achieving social and academic success. PWIs have established minority retention programs with an overall mission of recruiting and retaining black students; however, program use is minimal and black students continue to depart college prematurely. This research seeks to assess the perceptions and attitudes of black students to determine if program ambiguity, lack of faculty involvement or available mentoring, campus affiliation, racism, or time taken away from academic pursuits has a role in whether or not students will utilize minority retention programs. The data analysis revealed that students felt there was a need for better marketing of minority retention programs. A large number of students were working 20 or more hours per week limiting the amount of time for academic activities. Perceptions of the racial climate indicate the existence of discrimination, but it was not viewed as adversely affecting black students' educational experience. However, black students perceived the university as not fulfilling its social and cultural needs as the majority of respondents tended to socialize among themselves. Perceptions about faculty involvement indicate that most of the respondents had limited contact and interactions with minority faculty, and the majority indicated the need for more accessibility to minority faculty.
Chapter 1

Introduction

On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court handed down a major ruling (Brown v. Topeka) that opened the doors of previously all white public educational institutions to black students. At the same time, the Supreme Court ruling closed a chapter of separatism of education in American society. Unfortunately, it would take the National Guard, under a Presidential order, to literally unblock the entrance of a white school to symbolize that the wave of educational opportunity would not be subverted by discriminative forces. Behind this opening to formerly all white institutions flowed the tens of thousands of young black minds eager to take up the American dream of getting a good education and graduating from college. It has now been over 40 years since the Brown v. Topeka decision, and the number of black undergraduate students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) has swelled from approximately 45,000 in 1940 to 866,315 in 1978 (Berry's study as cited in Love, 1995). Today, of the more than 1 million blacks attending college, 80% are enrolled in PWIs (Chronicle on Higher Education, [CHE], 1995). However, instead of realizing the goal of graduating from college, there has been a disappointing trend in black students dropping out of undergraduate programs at a disproportionately higher rate than their non-minority cohorts (Giles-Gee, 1989; Wilson & Melendez, 1986).

By 1991, barely 25% of all successfully recruited minority students were graduating six years after entering college, compared to approximately 50% of white college students (Kobrak, 1992). Research indicates a multitude of variables that may contribute to black students not finishing college. A number of studies point to poor academic preparation as well as nonacademic factors such as interpersonal relationships,
social and academic integration, ability to deal with racism, and faculty involvement as predictive indicators of academic achievement (Astin, 1971; Giles-Gee, 1989; Sedlacek & Brooks as cited in Hood, 1992; Williams & Leonard, 1988).

Statement of the Problem

The problem faced by PWIs is how to keep its black students from dropping out of school and have them achieve the same academic success as their white counterparts. The principal institutional response to the problems of black student retention in predominantly white institutions has been the establishment of student support services designed to increase minority and low income students enrollment and to assist these students once they are in classes. However, despite many of the PWIs' commitments to funding interventions that should enable black students to achieve collegiate success, many black students are still not graduating. This investigator seeks to examine the perceptions and attitudes of black students concerning the student support services programs that are designed to assist them.
Chapter 2
Review of the Literature

Black student retention and the associated issues and problems faced in predominantly white institutions of higher education have been the focus of several research studies (e.g., Levin & Levin, 1993; Love, 1995; Tinto, 1987, 1993). The reason black student retention has been covered at all is testimony to the fact that, while blacks have moved rapidly into higher education, the number of baccalaureate degrees actually being awarded to black students has dropped during the period 1966 to 1991 (Kobrak, 1992; Love, 1995; Orfield & Ashkinaze's study as cited in Kobrak, 1992). According to graduation statistics for all students at the 298 colleges and universities that are members of Division I of the NCAA, only 32% of black students are graduating compared to 56% of white students (Love, 1995). This figure is supported by a similar analysis conducted by the American Council on Education, which found that 44% of black students complete their degrees compared to 54% of white students, 61% of Asian American, and 54% of American Indian students (Carter & Wilson, 1991; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993). Stewart (as cited in Kobrak, 1992) wrote that while approximately half of white college students were graduating six years after entering college, barely 25% of all successfully recruited minority students were doing so. These sobering statistics are attributed to a number of factors including educational underpreparedness, personal problems, feelings of dissonance, socio-economic background, and isolation (Giles-Gee, 1989; Levin & Levin, 1991). Studies of educational departure that have for the most part focused on black students (e.g., Hood, 1992; Tinto, 1987; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987) support the contention that social contact/congruence, academic performance, and noncognitive components of academic integration that affect black student persistence or retention.
One of the most comprehensive accounts of why students leave college is given by Noel, Levitz, Saluri, and Associates (1985). Their research has produced a list of both external and internal forces that have either pushed students out of college or made the college experience more difficult. The list of external forces included:

1. lack of money to meet their needs,
2. housing/roommate problems,
3. transportation problems,
4. work demands,
5. social demands,
6. rejection by family and friends who do not value a college education,
7. discrimination factors,
8. family obligations that take up the students' time and energy.

The list of internal forces included:

1. self-management problems like procrastination,
2. loneliness,
3. inability to assert needs and seek help for problems,
4. self-doubt,
5. fear of failure,
6. fear of success,
7. fear of rejection, usually by family or friends,
8. value conflicts,
9. career indecision,
10. boredom. (Noel, Levitz, Saluri, & Associates, 1985, pp.47-50)

A study conducted by Sailes (1993) investigated the factors influencing black student attrition at large, predominantly white universities. His analysis of over 100 studies delineated from the most frequent determiners of attrition for all students at colleges and universities those factors that most affected minority students. These factors included academic difficulties (e.g., academic underpreparedness), financial aid difficulties, university environment (e.g., racial tension, isolation), and the pursuit of full-time employment (Hood, 1992; Pantages & Creedon, 1978; Rice & Alford, 1989). A study conducted by Clewell and Ficklen (1986) identified finances as one of the issues affecting the retention of black students. When black students have to worry about having enough money to complete a college education, it hinders their academic performance as well as stunts both intellectual and psychological growth (Sherman, Giles, & Williams-Green, 1994). Financial problems may lead individuals to taking part-time jobs while also attending school. However, the time taken away from studying or engaging in campus
activities, namely interacting with peers and faculty, increases the likelihood of permanent
departure or transfer to a less expensive institution (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992).
Black students are particularly hard pressed to follow in this series of work and college
lifestyle events due in part to their disadvantaged backgrounds and limited financial
resources. However, it should be noted that, although financial factors are commonly
given as a reason for attrition of black students, it is more likely that finances plays only a
secondary role to dropping out of college (Tinto, 1987). In fact, research on student
retention over the last 10 years consistently indicates that it is not necessarily financial
problems, but individual and institutional variables acting upon one another that lead to the
failed retention of black students (Terenzini, 1986). This concept is referred to by many
names, most notably academic and social integration.

Tinto (1987) posits that the failure of black students to integrate themselves into
the social or academic system of the university is correlated to attrition. It is the sense of
separation that permeates black students' perceptions of predominantly white institutions
which subsequently leads to dissatisfaction leading to the increased departure of black
students. A number of related studies point to interpersonal relationships and academic
and social integration as contributing to the success or failure of black students at
predominantly white institutions (Tinto, 1975; Williams & Leonard, 1988). Social
integration is defined as the degree to which a student perceives that he/she is making a
positive adjustment to the social life at the university (Griffin & Earvin, 1990). This
adjustment includes student peer relationships, non-classroom interactions with faculty,
and the ability to socialize informally on campus. Research on the college environment
suggests that it is the student's perception of the academic and social environment that
directly effects his or her integration and persistence in college (Pascarella, 1983; Tinto,
1975; Williams & Leonard, 1988). According to Astin (1987), students have an easier
time becoming involved in college life when the environment seems comfortable and
familiar. When minority students perceived their campus interactions as favorable, this
perception tended to positively influence their study habits which in turn raised grades and GPAs, thus facilitating student retention. Consequently, these students tended to matriculate further towards graduation. Similar research demonstrates that the degree and quality of personal interaction with students and members of the institution are critical elements in the process of student persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993).

Tracey and Sedlacek's (1985, 1987) research focused attention beyond previous studies by attributing attrition and retention variables to non-cognitive components of academic integration as more important to black students' persistence in higher education. They developed the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (1984) then later revised their instrument to obtain more reliable subscales to better reflect the desired construct (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1989). The Non-Cognitive Questionnaire-Revised (NCQ-R) was designed to assess eight noncognitive dimensions found to be related to academic success of minority students (Hood, 1992; Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987). These dimensions include positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, familiarity with the academic requirements, understanding and ability to deal with racism, successful leadership experience, community service, and demands of the institution. Overall results are supportive of the validity of the NCQ-R as the eight non-cognitive dimensions were found to be predictive of persistence and graduation of black students. The internal consistency of the revised scales had estimated alphas for each subscale ranging from .55 to .84 (with the mean being .66) indicating adequate definition of the construct of interest.

A different approach to the retention issue comes from Kobrak (1992), who suggests that faculty involvement greatly influenced retention efforts of disadvantaged black students at PWIs. Previous research indicates that on-campus black students often feel alienated. That experience in itself frequently leads to academic failure (Williams & Leonard, 1988). The generally limited interpersonal contact between faculty and students further exacerbates the feelings of isolation felt by so many black college students on
predominantly white campuses. Indeed, much of the literature advocating comprehensive approaches to black student retention also emphasizes the need for faculty involvement as an integral part of any retention program (Kobrak, 1992; Lang & Ford, 1988). Closer relationships with faculty was associated with improved grades, with improved feelings about the campus, with less feelings of alienation and with better performance in students' academic major (Fleming (as cited in D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Hughes, Winston, & Rogers, 1987; Nettles, Gosman, Theony, & Dandridge, 1985). Because the complexion of college campuses has changed so dramatically over a relatively short period of time, college faculty and staff now deal with a greatly diversified student population. Unfortunately, black students at predominantly white institutions report poor communication with white faculty resulting from a perception of insensitivity to cultural difference (Love, 1995).

Often, white faculty impressions of black students are based on relatively limited information that is usually stereotypical in nature (Rowser, 1990). These stereotypic impressions (e.g., lower academic ability, less diligence, poor home conditions) influence the way black students' academic performance is evaluated by instructors, even when these instructors make an effort not to display their negative attitudes towards these students (Rowser, 1990). Researchers studying retention of at-risk students agree that the major needs are: (1) well trained and concerned faculty who truly believe students can learn, (2) faculty who will take the time to learn about minority culture and family, (3) faculty who will include minority perspectives in the classroom, and (4) faculty who set high expectations and help students reach them (Rendon's study as cited in Kobrak, 1992).

Not to be excluded from the list of mitigating factors for the disparity in academic achievement of black college students is the ever present atmosphere of racism and discrimination that is still prevalent on many of our nations college campuses (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Love, 1995; Williams & Leonard, 1988). Since most of these institutions were established during a time when blacks were being excluded from
attending, many of its policies and practices were likewise exclusionary in nature (Love, 1995). Consequently, blacks at predominantly white colleges and universities often perceive these institutions as hostile places and often see their relationship with white faculty and students as demoralizing (Smith's study as cited in Griffin, 1991). According to Allen (1992), these settings combined with cultural adjustment dilemmas, isolation from other black students, and problems associated with racism compromise the academic success of black undergraduate students.

A study by Love (1995) suggests that the presence of institutional racism has been approached with a blind eye as there continues to be only inconsequential attention and discussion by PWIs as to how the manifestation of racism affects black students. However, the same study included several documented reports of vandalism and physical violence against black students at PWIs. A 1990 report on ethnoviolence on college campuses also revealed some disturbing reports of racism on campuses of higher education (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Ehrlich, 1990). The study cited pervasive reports of discrimination and harassment (i.e., racial slurs) perpetrated against blacks on predominantly white campuses. A series of studies conducted at the University of Maryland has demonstrated the persistence of negative attitudes on the part of white students towards blacks in a wide variety of situations (White & Sedlacek, 1987). Despite having such a large body of literature on why black students leave or persist through college the only real conclusion one can come up with is that there is no one way to accurately determine which students are most likely to leave college. The literature also states that it is most likely a combination of factors and not just one that influences individual student's decision to leave school prematurely.

In an effort to provide equal educational opportunities to all students, the Council on Higher Education of Kentucky devised a plan composed of a set of objectives which serves to ensure that African Americans receive higher education in the state's educational
institutions (Council on Higher Education [CHE], 1995). This plan specifically targets minority students of black descent enrolled at predominately white institutions.

What has been dubbed the *Kentucky Plan* is a set of educational objectives established to increase the proportion of black Kentucky resident undergraduate students; increase the retention of black undergraduate students to the same level of white undergraduate students; and increase the number of black graduate students. Primarily, the program was to target those who were considered to be at-risk students. At-risk students are minority students, usually from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who are often academically underprepared and are falling behind in their studies making them at risk of attrition (Levin & Levin, 1991). According to Levin (1991), attrition in the context of at-risk minority students refers to students who permanently exit a college program or transfer to another campus. Attrition also pertains to students who drop out of school due to inadequate grades. High rates of attrition and low levels of attainment convinced college administrators that some form of academic intervention was necessary (Cross, 1983; Levin & Levin, 1991).

In response to the problem of minority retention, predominantly white institutions have developed and implemented academic support services that encompass minority recruitment, retention, and related services directed at facilitating minority students' matriculation. As universities across the country seek ways to increase the number of black students who are able to matriculate through college, they must likewise seek new and improved ways to create and enhance a retention-conducive environment (Williams & Wilson, 1993). Retention programs have become a priority for many colleges and universities with the overall mission of getting students and keeping them. Unfortunately, Kentucky's PWIs have been struggling to meet the objectives set forth in the Kentucky Plan. The areas of enrollment of black students, graduation rates of black undergraduates, enrollment of graduate students, and employment of black faculty have lacked in the type of progress that the universities had hoped for (CHE, 1995). The lack of progress on the
part of PWIs to successfully retain its black students, even when these universities allocate funds and other resources for programs, is puzzling to those interested in retention studies. The answers may lie in the attitudes and perceptions black students have toward retention programs.

To summarize, research suggests that there is a multitude of variables contributing to the high attrition rates of black students at predominantly white institutions including feelings of isolation, lack of faculty involvement, dissonance, and racism (Giles-Gee, 1989; Kobrak, 1992; Levin & Levin, 1991). Similar research points to external and internal forces which push students out of the university (Noel et al., 1985). An analysis of a large body of studies conducted on the attrition of minority students lists academic difficulties, financial aid difficulties, and racial tension as some of the most mitigating variables (Hood, 1992; Pantages & Creedon, 1978; and Rice & Alford, 1989). However, the truth in all of the research is that no one study can decisively predict just which of these factors will actually cause a student to drop out of college. So why then, if PWIs are funding programs that specifically target black students who are at-risk of attrition, are black students continuing the trend of dropping out before attaining a degree? The reality is that even though many of the PWIs around the country have established support programs for black students, many students never use these services (Hughes, Winston, & Rogers, 1987). The question is why do minority students fail to make use of such programs? This researcher intends to assess the opinions and attitudes of black students [on a predominantly white southeastern campus] towards the retention programs that have been designed to help them matriculate through college.

Specifically, it is hypothesized that

1. the lack of awareness or ambiguity about the existence of the various types of retention programs that are available to black students decreases the likelihood that students who are at-risk of attrition will utilize established programs;
2. the lack of informed academic advisement and mentorship available to black students also contribute to high levels of alienation among black students and their subsequent attrition.

It is further hypothesized that campus affiliation, inadequate faculty involvement, racism, time taken away from classes, and related variables are associated with these two main issues and stand out as being significant to the success or lack of success of minority retention programs.
Chapter 3

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 96 participants who were minority (black or biracial) male and female students seeking an undergraduate degree at a predominately white southeastern university. Of this sample of minority students, 61 (63.5%) were females and 35 (36.5%) were males. Ninety-three percent of the students indicated that their racial origin was Black or African American with the remaining 7.4% listing other and indicating black and white as their racial origin. The age range of the total number of subjects was between 18 and 43 years of age with an overall mean of 21.31 years of age. The majority of these men and women were juniors and seniors (upperclassmen) 52.1%, with sophomores and third semester freshmen representing a combined 46.3%. A more detailed breakdown of the demographic characteristics of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Participants were invited to participate via a cover letter (see Appendixes A and B) outlining the purpose of the study. Participation in the study was voluntary, and subjects were assured that their responses to the questionnaire would remain anonymous. First year freshmen students were excluded from this study because of their lack of collegial experiences. Graduate students were likewise not targeted for this study due to the fact that their achieved level of educational status demonstrates more than adequate academic ability and little need for the services provided by the office of the Minority Student Support Services.
Procedure

With the cooperation and assistance of the Minority Student Support Services (MSSS) office information was gathered from students in one of three ways. Students were sent a self-addressed mail in questionnaire (see Appendix C) designed to assess their perceptions and attitudes on the utilization of academic retention programs being offered at their university. An attached cover letter explaining the purpose of the study was also included. Students were also distributed surveys in their dorm mailboxes along with instructions to deposit the questionnaires inside a drop-box provided by the examiner and placed behind the front desk. Finally, students who came into the Minority Student Support Services office were asked to participate in the study by filling out a questionnaire and turning it in to the office secretary. These questionnaires would be picked up in the MSSS office by the designated due date. Use of an incentive in the form of a $25 raffle to ensure maximum return on the survey was also employed. To control for the filling out duplicate surveys, students were asked to write in their first and last initials, as well as the last four digits of their social security number. A second mailing of the survey was sent to additional students due to the low response rate of the initial pool of subjects. All surveys received from the first and second mailings were analyzed.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections: Section I consisted of demographic information; Section II consisted of questions dealing with some aspect of minority retention programs. Section II of the survey was further divided to include a part that was to be answered only by those students who have utilized any of the academic programs (e.g., mentoring, computer assisted instruction, financial aid follow-up, and freshman support programs). On the last page of the survey space was provided to allow respondents the opportunity to include their own statements concerning academic retention programs.
Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Survey Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>63.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 - 20</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 - 22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31.3</td>
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<td>23 - 25</td>
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<td>Black</td>
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<td>92.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (black/white mixed)</td>
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<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
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<td>86.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single with Children</td>
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<td>8.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married with Children</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4

Results

Return Rate

The return rate percentage was calculated based upon the number of surveys mailed or handed out and the number returned by both deadline periods. Out of a total of 225 surveys, 101 surveys (45%) were completed and returned. Five of the returned surveys were not usable for this study due to the fact the subjects did not meet the criteria for participation (i.e., 4 were graduate students; 1 was a first semester freshman) making the total number of usable surveys 96 (43%).

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

To gather information on the residential living situation of the survey sample, respondents were asked to estimate the average distance, in miles, between the college campus and their family homes. A majority of the respondents (N=58) indicated that they lived approximately 51 to 300 miles from school. Of the survey sample, 69.8% of the respondents indicated that they currently live on campus, 18% live off campus in an apartment, and 10.4% live with their parents.

To collect information on the working status of the survey pool, respondents were asked to indicate whether they were working while attending school -- with 74% indicating that they were indeed working. Of that seventy-four percent, 29.2% indicated that they were working up to 15 hours per week -- while 44.8% indicated that they worked 20 or more hours per week. As seen in Table 2, the majority of the students (N=74) reported that they depended on some degree of financial assistance from outside sources -- with a smaller portion (N=20) indicating that they were financially independent.

Students listed major sources of funding to be in the form of grants/scholarships
(71.9%), assistance from parents/spouse (53.1%), employment wages (50%), loans (53.1%), and veterans' benefits (2.1%). For many of these students, there were multiple sources of funding with a majority (54%) receiving financial assistance from more than one source. Respondents were also asked to give an estimate of their yearly family income; their responses ranged from less than $9,000 per year to as high as $60,000 or more per year. The median estimated annual family income was determined to be between $30,000 to $39,999 per year (see Table 2).

The survey also included questions that required respondents to report the educational level of their parents (see Table 3). The largest portion of the respondents (N=70) indicated that their parents had some high school education or had graduated from high school (65.6%). There was a significant difference between fathers and mothers in terms of college experience as there was almost twice as many mothers (33.3%) with at least some college experience in comparison to fathers (15.6%). However, there were 20 missing cases in the area of fathers' education level.

When asked about the average course load they were taking per semester, an overwhelming majority (N=71) of respondents indicated that they were taking between 9 and 15 hours per semester (see Table 4). Approximately 94% of these students were taking classes during the day. The vast majority of respondents (87.5%) reported that for each class, they studied from less than 3 hours to 9 hours outside class. When asked to respond to a statement regarding academic preparation prior to coming to college, over two-thirds of those responding indicated that they were academically prepared in high school to be successful at the college level.

To assess whether a relationship existed between students who had utilized retention programs and the number of semester hours taken, students who indicated that they used retention programs in the past (N=48) were compared to students (N=39) who reported that they had not used retention programs or minority services.
Table 2

Students' Financial Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Independence/Dependency*</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financially Independent</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financially Dependent</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financially Independent/Dependent</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source of Educational Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Educational Funding</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loans</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran's Benefits</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants/Scholarships</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>71.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/Spouse</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Estimated Annual Household Income*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated Annual Household Income*</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $9,999</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 to $19,999</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 to $29,999</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000 to $39,999</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000 to $49,999</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 to $59,999</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than $60,000</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 2 cases were missing out of 96
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level of Respondents' Mothers*</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some Elementary School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School Graduate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some High School Experience</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College or Technical School Training</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical School Graduate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* 3 cases missing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level of Respondents' Fathers*</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some Elementary School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School Graduate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some High School</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College or Technical School Training</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Graduate</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical School Graduate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduate</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* 20 cases missing
Table 4

Respondent's Academic Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Standing*</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>46.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Status</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-Time</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>94.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-Time</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Number of Hours/Courses per Semester</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 to 6 Hours</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 to 12 Hours</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 to 15 hours</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 18 Hours</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Reported GPA's</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.9 and Below</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0 - 2.9</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0 - 3.5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 - 3.9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 1 case missing out of 96
The results of this analysis indicated no significant deviations from random distribution were obtained, $X^2(3, n=87) = 6.06, p < .05$.

**Social and Racial Climate At the University**

Because of the importance of students' perceptions on the academic and social environment at their university, the survey asked respondents questions concerning student peer relationships, non-classroom interactions with faculty, and their ability to socialize informally on campus. As part of the survey inquiry, respondents were given an opportunity to answer a statement about the racial composition of their high school. The intent of this statement was to obtain an indication of the amount of contact black students at this university have had with white students in the past. The results suggest that an overwhelming majority (77%) of the respondents attended predominantly white high schools. However, when asked about the circle of friends they are most likely to interact with and whether there were opportunities to socialize on campus, 73.7% reported socializing with predominantly black friends, spending an average of 19 hours per week socializing with members of their own race. When asked if they would prefer to have a roommate of a different race, close to half (45.8%) of the respondents indicated that they would prefer to have a roommate of the same race. Slightly more than 32% disagreed with this statement with the remaining respondents being undecided. Only 26% of the respondents felt there were adequate opportunities to participate in campus sponsored social events, while over 91% believed that WKU should offer more social and cultural events.

To answer the question of whether or not students felt an identification with the campus they were affiliated with, students were asked to respond to the statement "I feel that I really belong at WKU." Survey results indicated that over 59% of the respondents were in agreement with this statement. A chi-square was performed to investigate whether students who utilized the minority retention programs ($N=48$) differed significantly from those who had not ($N=37$) in terms of campus affiliation. The results of
this analysis indicated that no significant differences were obtained using program utilization and whether they felt that they belonged at WKU, $X^2_{(3, n=85)} = 7.52, p < .05$.

The survey also included questions that were designed to obtain the perceptions of black students on issues surrounding discrimination on campus. Students were asked if they had experienced any forms of discrimination at the university, and 32.3% reported that they have never experienced discrimination on any level at the university. However, an overwhelming majority of respondents (67.7%) indicated that they were discriminated against (see Table 5). Of those indicating that they experienced some level of discrimination, 35.4% experienced discrimination from students, 20.8% indicated faculty/professors, and 10.4% checked other (5 of 10 students experienced discrimination from public safety) (see Table 6). Some of the respondents indicated multiple sources of racial discrimination. However, while many students had experienced some level of discrimination, 80.2% felt that discrimination had not hampered their educational experience.

**Faculty/Student Interactions**

To address the questions on black students' perceptions concerning minority faculty and mentoring involvement, students were asked if they believed that minority faculty should be more accessible to the students. An overwhelming majority of respondents (88.3%) indicated that minority faculty should be more accessible to the students. Thirty-eight (40%) respondents indicated that they rarely or never interacted with minority faculty (see Table 7). Because the majority of faculty members at the university are white, a related statement concerning contact with professors, but without distinguishing the color of the professors, was included in the survey. The statement was designed to determine the amount of contact minority students have with professors outside of class. As shown in Table 7, approximately 58% of the students reported that they do not make contact with professors outside of the classroom.
The survey also asked respondents their perceptions on whether they would be more comfortable interacting with a minority advisor. Of those students who had utilized retention programs in the past (N=48), 55% of the responses indicated that they would feel more comfortable interacting with a minority advisor, while 31% of the respondents indicated that they were undecided concerning this question.

The issue of the need for mentoring students was presented to the survey respondents. Students were asked if they agreed with the statement, "I feel that there is no need for a mentorship program for minority students." Responses indicated that the majority (84.6%) of students did not agree with this statement. It should be noted that 37 cases are missing from this group since only those respondents who had utilized any of the academic retention programs could respond to this statement.

**Retention Programs Awareness**

When respondents were asked if they were aware of the programs and services provided by the Minority Student Support Services office (MSSS), over 64% indicated that they were aware of such programs. Fifty percent of the respondents indicated that they have utilized MSSS in the past and 43.8% indicated that they found the assistance helpful. Respondents who had utilized retention programs in the past (N = 48) were asked if there was a need for better marketing of the available programs to assist minority students. Results indicate that 88.1% of the respondents were in agreement with this statement about the need for better marketing of retention programs.

To determine the consistency of the author's notion about program use being directly influenced by students' knowledge of available retention programs, students were also asked to respond to a statement about the likelihood that they would participate and utilize programs sponsored by MSSS. Approximately 63% of the respondents agreed that they would use retention programs. However, students' responses were inconsistent regarding the utilization of specific retention programs (e.g., "I would use the academic counseling and advising center if I were experiencing problems either personal or
academic.") since approximately one third of the respondents indicated that they were undecided about this statement.

When the statement involved whether those who had utilized retention programs in the past would use retention programs to improve their grades (e.g., computer assisted tutorial programs), over 74% of these respondents indicated that they would utilize such a program. The results of a chi-square analysis indicated no significant deviations from random distribution were obtained using those who have (N=48) or have not (N=37) utilized retention programs in the past and respondents' perceptions that they would not receive a passing grade without educational assistance, $X^2 \ (4, n = 85) = 7.54, p < .05$.

Respondents who indicated that they had utilized minority student support services in the past were given an opportunity to include their own comments concerning the following question: "What might WKU do to get more black students involved in using academic retention programs?" Of the students (N=48) who indicated that they had utilized support services in the past, twenty-four respondents took the time to fill out the space provided at the end of survey to answer the target question. The question was asked in an open-ended question format, and approximately half of the respondents' comments revealed relevant information for the purposes of this study.

Samples of excerpts from respondents whose comments were concerned with program awareness included: "The need for better advertisement."; to have "Flyers passed in other buildings for those who do not visit the student center."; to "Make the information more accessible."; and to "Advertise more in the student center and dorms."

Samples of excerpts from respondents whose comments were concerned with mentoring programs, faculty involvement, and better social programs to meet minority needs included, "Mentoring programs, visibility of more minority faculty, and involvement of African-American faculty."; "More faculty/staff mentors for all incoming freshman students."; "Have a better network of faculty and student mentors to help freshman mentorees."; "They need to get more involved African-American teachers. "Many of the
teachers just teach (and) not talk and interact with the students."; "Providing advisors that really help students take classes that would assist them in preparing for a degree."; and "Black alumni involved in mentoring perhaps on a specific date where black students can ask questions on making it through college and the real world."

Also included in the samples of excerpts from respondents were comments concerned with providing better programs that address minority student needs. These comments included some of the following suggestions: "Cater to our social, academic, and spiritual needs more successfully. Take time to understand our problems and propose actual solutions and plans to deliver solutions."; "Have more up-to-date programs that are not repetitive from year to year."; "(We need) nationally known and sought after black speakers, inspirational black entrepreneurs; to emphasize the importance of using these programs; convenient times; making programs fun as well as educational. Social and cultural events should have famous black entertainers."

Finally, students were asked to respond to a statement designed to determine whether program accessibility played a role in whether or not they utilized retention programs. Students were asked, if given the choice of several locations, to indicate the location(s) they believed would increase the likelihood of their utilizing minority assistance programs. From the various campus sites they had to choose from, 83% of the respondents indicated that they would use retention programs if the location were the student center. Approximately 57% of the respondents indicated that they would utilize retention programs located at both the Helms-Cravens library and at Grise Hall. Forty percent of the respondents would use programs if the programs were located in the Educational Technology Center (ETC) and Potter Hall.
Table 5

Racial Climate at WKU

Statement: I have experienced discrimination at WKU;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6

Students Reported Discrimination from One of the Following Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reported Discrimination Sources*</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Experienced Discrimination</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisors</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preston Center Staff</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Personnel</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty/Professors</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid Office</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential Assistants (RA)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration Personnel</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other**</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* There were 12 missing cases

**Students indicating "other" listed one of the following: bookstore, campus police (5x), city police, dorm director, cafeteria staff, and football staff.
Table 7

**Faculty/Student Interactions, Advisement, Mentoring, and Assistance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interactions with Minority Faculty/Professors*</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Minority Faculty be More Accessible**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreed</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Do You Make Contact with Your Professor(s) Outside of the Classroom?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** 2 of the cases missing

* 1 of the cases missing
Chapter 5

Discussion

This study was exploratory in nature; its purpose was to gather information on some aspects of minority retention programs at a predominantly white institution and on the associated perceptions minority (black) students have towards such programs. The goal for this study was to determine whether some of the perceptions and attitudes that black students have concerning minority retention programs are being influenced by aspects of the campus environment (e.g., does discrimination occur and by whom, social life on campus, and student/faculty interaction), program awareness, faculty involvement, etc. This study evolved as a result of questions involving whether black students actually utilized retention programs at this particular university and from the desire to gain an understanding of the reasons why black students do not fully utilize student support services. Of concern was the fact that, despite the university's funding of a variety of minority based programs and educational services, black students continued to have difficulty achieving the same level of academic success as their white counterparts.

Results of this study indicate that the majority of the respondents are black females, with an average age of twenty-one, most of whom are working while attending day classes, and who depend on employment wages as well as other forms of financial assistance to help finance their college education. This finding is consistent with a similar study on undergraduate perceptions of retention at a predominantly white university (Rice & Alford, 1989).

Frequency and percentage analysis of the working status of black students revealed that a significant portion of the respondents (74%) were working 20 or more hours per
week to either pay for their education or to help them to continue taking classes. The average number of hours respondents reported that they spent studying for each of their classes was between 3 and 9 hours per week. The number of course hours and time of classes in itself would suggest nothing unusual; however, when one looks at the respondents' number of course hours taken per semester, average number of hours worked per week, and time spent studying outside of class there was little time left to participate in many of the available minority retention programs or social activities. Retention researchers Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1992) believed that time taken away from studying or engaging in campus activities increases the likelihood of permanent departure (dropping-out) or transfer to a less costly school.

Also included in the survey were a series of statements designed to obtain respondents' perceptions of the racial climate on campus as well as black students' attitudes about the ability to participate in social events at the university. The purpose of these statements served to gauge the racial interactions at the university. According to Tinto (1982), acts of overt or blatant racism increased black students' feelings of alienation are reflected in their perceptions of racism. It was believed that black students' perceptions of their institution as discriminatory in nature, or other problems associated with racism would have a deleterious affect on black students' academic performance.

The results of responses on the issue of perceived racism at the university indicate that many of the respondents (67.7%) felt that there was some level of discrimination manifested on campus. Also, of those respondents who reported experiencing some form of discrimination at the university, the perpetrators of the discrimination were most often reported to be students -- followed faculty/staff (i.e., professors), residential assistants, activity center staff, and public safety (campus police). This finding is supported by other researchers who found that black students had problems most often in residence halls, in fraternities, and with campus police (Patterson, Sedlacek, & Perry, 1984). However, contrary to what was expected, very few of these respondents (N=9) felt that these
incidences of discrimination were hampering their educational experience. It had been expected that a higher percentage of students would indicate that discrimination had a negative impact on their feelings of collegial assimilation and academic success. It is felt black students do not always recognize racism when it occurs nor do they fully understand social and academic difficulties that institutional discrimination (e.g., not receiving faculty assistance, or not being socially integrated on campus, or etc.) may have on their persistence towards graduation from college. This belief is supported by similar research conducted by Rice (1989).

Despite the fact that over 77% of the black respondents attended predominantly white high schools, at the college level these students tended to associate primarily with other black-- students socializing approximately 11 to 15 hours per week with members of their own race. It is believed that this pattern of self-segregation by socializing with members of their own race was also the same socialization behaviors that these black students may have exhibited at the high schools where they attended prior to coming to the university. Therefore, it was of interest for this writer to look at why this socialization pattern also holds at the college level. Based upon the responses received it was determined that black students' unwillingness to socially interact with nonblack students is partly attributed to black students' perceptions that events designed to encourage social interactions at predominantly white institutions seldom include activities that cater to their interests (e.g., concerts, music, culture, etc.). There is also the disproportionate ratio of black males to black females, thus making it difficult for black females to date or socially interact among their own group. Finally, black students often find themselves isolated in the classroom where they are excluded from the informal witticisms and banter among white students, which further discourages them from intermingling (Berry, 1983). The focus on black/white interactions is of considerable importance since; when black students perceived their campus interactions as favorable, it tended to positively influence their study (Astin, 1987) and to possibly increase retention
program use. If favorable interactions positively influence study habits the opposite could be said of negative interactions between black students and white members of the campus environment. The result of negative interactions may have an adverse affect on respondents' perception of minority retention programs (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Kobrak, 1992). This information is important because it focuses attention on black students' preference to socialize in homogenous groups and should apprise retention program developers of the need to design facilities and to sponsor social events which meet black students' needs. Based on the results of this study, it would appear that students are failing to integrate themselves into the social system of the university and/or the university's is failing to unalienate black students by sponsoring programs that encourage more social interactions between black and white faculty and students.

Another area of interest in this study concerned supplemental data on student perceptions on providing programs that address minority students' needs in terms of social and cultural events. Over 90% of the respondents in this study reported that the university needed to offer more social and cultural events for minorities and to offer more programs that promoted cultural diversity. When asked to respond to a statement designed to determine black students' perceptions on campus affiliation, many of the respondents reported having feelings that they did not belong at WKU. This response was of interest because of the significant positive influence that institutional affiliation has on students' academic performance (Tinto, 1987). Survey results indicate that the perception of the majority of survey respondents is that the university fails to offer black students the type of programs they can relate to if indeed they are to feel that they are a part of the university. However, analysis of program utilization and feelings of belonging at the university indicate no significant results.

Students were asked to respond to statements regarding the utilization of minority retention programs were these programs located at certain campus facilities. For black students, the use of a particular academic facility (e.g., Educational Technology Center)
related positively to retention (Griffin, 1990). Based on this premise, black students were asked to select locations that they felt would be more conducive to their utilization of minority programs. The vast majority of respondents selected locations that are historically frequented by the majority of black students on this particular campus. Unfortunately, these locations do not house any of the available retention programs (e.g., computer assisted instruction, academic counseling, career exploration, etc.) offered by the university. The majority of respondents (83%) reported that, if given the opportunity, they would prefer the minority assistance programs to be located at the Downing University Center (DUC), while approximately 57% indicated that they would utilize programs located at both the Helms-Craven library and Grise Hall. Forty percent of the respondents indicated that they would use programs in the Educational Technology Center (ETC) and Potter Hall. This information is of importance since the latter two choices are the only location sites where retention programs currently exist.

Another focus of this study was to determine whether there was a lack of faculty involvement in the form of advising and mentorship available to black students and how it might be related to minority student retention. Astin's (1987) research over the course of two decades determined faculty involvement as perhaps the single most significant determinant of minority persistence in college. It is through academic advisement and mentoring that many at-risk students are exposed to the first meaningful contact they may have with university faculty. A primary responsibility of the advisors and mentors is to help students make responsible academic decisions (i.e., helping the student design a degree program, give academic assistance outside of the classroom) during their college careers. Black students' (academic) survival depends on establishing a close and sensitive relationship between advisor and student (Kobrak, 1992). A close relationship with faculty was associated with better grades, with better feelings about the campus, with less feelings of alienation, and with better performance in students' majors (Fleming, 1984; Hughes, 1984). Therefore, several statements were designed to answer the question of
whether there was some connection between retention programs and minority student/faculty interactions. Research (Donovan, 1984) indicates that it is the amount, kind, and quality of faculty-student interactions that heavily influences academic success and social satisfaction. Responses to the statement concerning the level of interaction black students felt they had with minority faculty indicated that while many students have some contact with minority faculty, many others still do not. The vast majority of respondents indicated that minority faculty should be more accessible to the students and that many in this group would feel more comfortable interacting with a minority staff person. The author expected this outcome, and it supports the idea that black students at this university were in need of more faculty involvement and that they look towards black faculty as role models for achieving academic success and leadership.

Relative to the issue of program awareness, the majority of students felt that they were aware of the types of programs being offered by the university to help assist minority students achieve academically. However, when students were asked to respond to a statement about the need for better marketing of the available programs designed to assist minority students, over eighty-eight of the respondents agreed that there was the need for better marketing of the various minority retention programs. This outcome contradicts the former statement about being aware of programs, yet supports the author's position of the need for better marketing of the types of retention programs that are available to black students. It is believed that respondents tended to answer the way they did because they are not truly aware of the types of programs that are available to them or when they may have utilized one of the retention services. For example, when the survey asked students if they would utilize specific retention programs (e.g., academic counseling and advising, computer assistance) if they were experiencing either academic or personal problems, approximately one-third were undecided about using academic counseling. However, more than 74% indicated that they would use the computer assistance program to improve their grades. In reality, the number of students who have made contact with MSSS for
some form of academic advising or assistance far outnumber those students who would benefit (based on self-reported GPA's) from academic help via computer assisted tutoring. It was also through the students' own comments at the end of the survey, concerning the need for better advertisement of retention programs, which helped buttress the hypothesis that the lack of program awareness contributed to the underutilization of retention programs by black students. Students' comments also tended to focus on the need for meaningful faculty involvement, thus reinforcing the idea of the impact faculty advising and mentoring has on the retention of black students.

**Future Implications**

The results of this study are believed to provide some valuable information and hopefully some insight into the perceptions a representative sample of black students have about retention programs at this university. However, the perceptions of this sample of respondents should not be viewed as representative of the black population of students at every predominantly white institution across the nation. Future research should focus on designing a measure of students' feelings and perceptions that could be used across settings in order to obtain a more reliable and valid measure of perceptions related to black student retention. A comprehensive and normed survey would be a valuable tool in evaluating the effectiveness of minority retention programs and to allow decision makers a better means for deciding the allocation of funds to assist black students' educational parity. There are already assessment devices that have been designed to measure noncognitive dimensions of academic success of minority students (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976). Modifications to this survey's methodology may provide more reliable information. Changes should include more relevant statements about specific retention programs. The question of better marketing to increase program awareness could easily be measured by simply increasing the advertising of retention programs and measuring whether there was an increase in program use. Also the university could promote faculty support through the establishment of diversity workshops geared toward increasing their understanding of
minority student needs and then encouraging their increased involvement with black students. Such changes should result in an increase in student grades, positive feelings about the university, and overall academic outlook. An appropriate next step would also be to redistribute the survey to black students returning for the fall and spring semesters to obtain a larger, possibly more representative sample of minority students and to improve the rate of return of the surveys. A follow-up study performed at a later date would be extremely beneficial to determine whether the perceptions of the students who utilized retention programs have changed over time (e.g., if students' felt there were carry-over effects from the retention service they used, or if the intervention was perceived as inconsequential). This follow-up study should include determining the number of students who utilized retention program services and graduation rates of former recipients of retention services. It is hoped that information from this study will be used to help retention program administrators improve their decisions for future retention program expenditures.

**Limitations of This Study**

This study must first be considered in terms of its generalizability, for it should be noted that the demographic characteristics of the population of black students and their related personal perceptions are unique to the university where this study was conducted. Also, the response rate of the study was severely limited and hampered by the time in which the survey was sent out (during the summer session), resulting in a depleted subject pool and poor return rate. The reliability of the survey items should be considered in terms of whether the respondents fully understood what was being asked of them. Several of the respondents answered questions that were not designated for them (e.g., students who indicated that they had not utilized programs in the past, yet still answered questions designated to be answered by students who had utilized retention programs.). Students' lack of awareness about the type of retention programs offered at the university lead to their ambiguity in whether they had actually come into contact with a retention service.
Not until some aspect of the retention programs were described did black students realize that they had indeed used a retention program.
References


Appendix A

Survey Cover letter For Students in Dorms
Dear WKU Student;

My name is Beora Williams. I am an African-American graduate student under the supervision of Dr. Jacqueline Pope, a minority professor in the Psychology Department, and we are conducting a study on academic retention that will assist black students in achieving collegial success. This is a survey to obtain your perceptions and attitudes on the various programs/services being offered by the university. The study is being conducted by the Psychology Department (Dr. John O'Connor, Department Head of Psychology) in conjunction with the Educational Technology Center (ETC) in Tate Page Hall (headed by Dr. Leroy Metze). ETC is part of the Academic Retention Programs which are under the umbrella of Minority Student Support Services (MSSS), Phyllis Gatewood Director. This study is important not only to me, but also to you and other black students who know exactly how difficult college life can be at times. That is why it is very crucial that you return this questionnaire to the drop box at the front desk so that your input will become part of the effort to keep black student's needs and concerns a priority at WKU.

The survey will take only 5 to 10 minutes of your time, and because your time is important, there will be a raffle of $25 to provide an incentive for maximum number of returned responses. The winner will be posted in the Minority Student Support Services Office at Potter Hall.

We hope that the information you provide will be used by administrators at this university to better utilize the funding for programs to assist you the student. Please, make a difference in the continued education of black students by filling out the survey and sending it in by the deadline listed on the last page.

Sincerely;

Beora E. Williams
Psychology Department Minority Graduate Student
Appendix B

Survey Mailing Cover Letter
Dear WKU Student;

My name is Beora Williams. I am an African-American graduate student under the supervision of Dr. Jacqueline Pope, a minority professor in the Psychology Department, and we are conducting a study on academic retention that will assist black students in achieving collegial success. This is a survey to obtain your perceptions and attitudes on the various programs/services being offered by the university. The study is being conducted by the Psychology Department (Dr. John O'Connor, Department Head of Psychology) in conjunction with the Educational Technology Center (ETC) in Tate Page Hall (headed by Dr. Leroy Metze). ETC is part of the Academic Retention Programs which are under the umbrella of Minority Student Support Services (MSSS), Phyllis Gatewood Director. This study is important not only to me, but also to you and other black students who know exactly how difficult college life can be at times. That is why it is very crucial that you return this questionnaire in the self-addressed stamped envelope so that your input will become part of the effort to keep black student's needs and concerns a priority at WKU. The survey will take only 5 to 10 minutes of your time, and because your time is important, there will be a raffle of $25 to provide an incentive for maximum number of returned responses. The winner will be posted in the Minority Student Support Services Office at Potter Hall.

We hope that the information you provide will be used by administrators at this university to better utilize the funding for programs to assist you the student. Please, make a difference in the continued education of black students by filling out the survey and sending it in by the deadline listed on the last page.

Sincerely;

Beora E. Williams

Psychology Department Minority Graduate Student
Appendix C

Survey
SURVEY OF ACADEMIC RETENTION PROGRAMS

First Initial ________ Last Initial ________ Last four digits of SS # ________

This is a survey to obtain your perceptions and attitudes on the various programs and services being offered by the university to assist minority students in achieving academic success. Your responses will remain ANONYMOUS. The first initial, last initial, and last four digits of social security number are requested in order to keep an accurate count of students and to determine recipient of monetary incentive.

The survey is divided into (2) sections: Please read carefully the brief instructions above each section and respond to all items.

SECTION I - General Information
Items 1 through 21 ask for information that will be useful in interpreting your responses and will help in establishing the demographic characteristics of persons filling out this survey. YOUR ANONYMITY IS ASSURED REGARDING ALL RESPONSES TO THE ITEMS OF THIS SECTION! Please complete ALL items.

1. **Gender**
   - Male
   - Female

2. **Age**

3. **Marital Status**
   - Single
   - Single, with children
   - Married
   - Married, with children
   - Divorced/Widowed
   - Divorced/Widowed, with children
   - Separated
   - Other

4. **Student Status**
   - Full-Time
   - Part-Time

5. **How do you describe your racial origin?**
   - Native American or Alaskan Native
   - Asian, Pacific Islander or Filipino
   - Black or African-American
   - Hispanic-American (Chicano, Latino, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, etc.)
   - Other

6. **Educational Level of Parents (choose one)**
   - Father
   - Mother
   - Some elementary school
   - Elementary school graduate
   - Some high school (no diploma)
   - High school graduate
   - Some college or technical school
   - Graduate of college
   - Graduate of technical school
   - Post Graduate work

7. **Estimated Total Annual Household Income**
   - Less than $9,999
   - About $10,000 to $19,999
   - About $20,000 to $29,999
   - About $30,000 to $39,999
   - About $40,000 to $49,000
   - About $50,000 to $59,999
   - About $70,000 or above

8. **Are you financially independent or do you depend on your family (i.e., your parents) for assistance?**
   - Yes, I am financially independent.
   - No, I depend on some form of assistance from my parents.
   - I am financially independent, but also depend on some form of assistance from my parents.

9. **Class Standing**
   - Freshman
   - Sophomore
   - Junior
   - Senior
   - Graduate Student
   - Special (non-degree) student
   - Other

10. **Are you working while attending school?**
    - Yes
    - No
    - If Yes, how many hours per week do you work?
    - 0 to 10 Hours per Week
    - 11 to 15 Hours per Week
    - 16 to 20 Hours per Week
    - 20 or More Hours per Week
11. Matriculation Status  
   __ Entered as a Freshman  
   __ Entered as Student Transfer  

12. Housing  
   __ Live on Campus  
   __ Live off Campus in Apartment  
   __ Parents' or relatives' home  
   __ Fraternity or Sorority House  

13. Distance between my college and my family home (i.e., parents', relatives', spouse):  
   __ less than 10 miles  
   __ 10 to 50 miles  
   __ 51 to 100 miles  
   __ 101 to 300 miles  
   __ 301 to 600 miles  
   __ more than 600 miles  

14. Time of Classes (check all that apply) that you typically take.  
   __ Day classes  
   __ Evening classes  

15. I have interacted with minority faculty/professors at WKU  
   a. Often  
   b. Sometimes  
   c. Rarely  
   d. Never  

16. I would be interested in joining a fraternity/sorority at this university.  
   a. Strongly agree  
   b. Agree  
   c. Undecided  
   d. Disagree  
   e. Strongly disagree  

17. Average number of course hours per semester  
   __ 3 to 6 Hours  
   __ 9 to 12 Hours  
   __ 13 to 15 Hours  
   __ 16 to 18 Hours  
   __ More than 18 Hours  

18. For each class, the number of hours you expect to spend on studying outside of class is approximately:  
   __ 3 hours or less per week  
   __ 6 hours per week  
   __ 9 hours per week  
   __ 12 hours per week  
   __ 15 hours per week  
   __ 18 hours per week  
   __ 21 hours or more per week  

19. Self-reported Grade Point Average in College  
   __ 1.9 and below  
   __ 2.0 - 2.9  
   __ 3.0 - 3.5  
   __ 3.6 - 3.9  
   __ 4.0  

20. The Racial Composition of Your High School was:  
   __ Predominantly White  
   __ Predominantly Black  
   __ Approximately Equal Number of Black and White  
   __ Predominantly Another Racial Make-up  

21. Your Major Source of Funding Higher Education (check all that apply)  
   __ Loans  
   __ Veteran's benefits  
   __ Grants/Scholarships  
   __ Parents/Spouse  
   __ Employment  

22. Number of papers and magazines that you or your family subscribes to per month.  
   __ 0 to 5  
   __ 6 to 10  
   __ 11 to 15  
   __ 16 or more  

23. Number of hours per day that you watch television  
   __ 0 to 5  
   __ 6 to 10  
   __ 11 to 15  
   __ 16 or more  

24. Number of hours that you spend socializing with members of your own race (per week).  
   __ 0 to 5  
   __ 6 to 10  
   __ 11 to 15  
   __ 16 to 20  
   __ 20 or more  

SECTION II - Perceptions and Attitudes  
Each statement below represents a point of view on some aspect of minority retention programs. Please read each statement carefully and show the extent to which you STRONGLY AGREE or STRONGLY DISAGREE by circling the letter to the left.
1. I was academically prepared in high school to be successful at the college level.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

2. The Admissions literature I received about minorities and the types of programs that are offered to assist minorities at this university was excellent:
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

3. I feel the information I received regarding WKU was:
   a. Excellent
   b. Good
   c. Fair
   d. Poor
   e. No information received

4. I know about available financial aid at this university.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

5. I have difficulty meeting with my advisor.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

6. I have experienced discrimination at WKU.
   a. Often
   b. Sometimes
   c. Rarely
   d. Never

7. I have experienced discrimination at WKU from: (check all that apply):
   ___ I have never experienced discrimination
   ___ Advisor
   ___ Faculty/Professors
   ___ Students
   ___ Financial Aid Office
   ___ Preston Center Staff
   ___ Residential Assistants (RA)
   ___ Library Personnel
   ___ Registration Personnel
   ___ Other

8. If you have experienced discrimination, do you feel this has hampered your educational experience?
   Yes    No

9. I would use the academic counseling and advising center if I were experiencing problems either personal or academic.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

10. My circle of friends at the university have been:
    a. Predominantly Black
    b. Predominantly White
    c. Of another ethnic group.

11. Do you make contact with your professor(s) outside of the classroom?
    Yes    No

12. Opportunities for minority students to socialize and to have a social life on this campus are excellent:
    a. Strongly agree
    b. Agree
    c. Undecided
    d. Disagree
    e. Strongly disagree

13. I have utilized minority student support services in the past.
    a. Strongly agree
    b. Agree
    c. Undecided
    d. Disagree
    e. Strongly disagree
14. I would prefer not to have a roommate of a different race.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

15. This university does not need special programs for its minority students.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

16. I have considered dropping out of the university.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

17. I am aware of the programs and services provided by the Minority Student Support Office (MSSS).
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

18. I am not likely to participate and utilize the programs and services sponsored by the Minority Student Support Services at this university.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

19. There should be a separate facility on campus for minority student programs and activities.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

20. I would use programs that assist minority students if they were at the following location(s) (circle all that apply):
   a. Educational Technology Center in Tate Page Hall
   b. Downing University Center
   c. Helm-Cravens Library
   d. Potter Hall
   e. Grise Hall

21. I believe the Minority Retention program should be renamed the African-American Retention program.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

22. I believe that minority faculty should be more accessible to the students.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

23. I feel that I really belong at WKU.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

24. I feel that if I do not receive educational assistance (tutoring, advising, etc.) for some of my classes, I may not receive a passing grade.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

Answer questions 25 through 32 only if you have used any of the academic retention programs (mentoring, computer assisted instruction, academic counseling and advising, career exploration, social and cultural events, financial aid follow-up, freshmen support programs):
25. I found the program(s) that I have used to be very helpful.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

26. I feel that there is no need for a Mentorship program for minority students.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

27. I believe there is a need for better marketing of the available programs to assist minority students.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

28. I would use a computer assisted program for minority students if it would help me improve my grades.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

29. I would feel more comfortable interacting with a minority advisor.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

30. I believe WKU should offer more social and cultural events for minorities.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

31. I believe the university should offer more programs that promote cultural diversity.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Undecided
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

32. What might WKU do to get more black students involved in using academic retention programs?


Please Return Your Survey by July 12, 1996