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ASSESSING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT INVOLVEMENT:
A CLOSER LOOK AT THE AFRICAN AMERICAN PATTERN

by

Adam M. Jordan

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts in Higher Education Administration
of
The Graduate School
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Approved by _____
Dr. Burton R. Sisco

Date Approved May 28, 2009

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ABSTRACT

Adam M. Jordan

ASSESSING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT INVOLVEMENT: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE AFRICAN AMERICAN PATTERN

2008/09

Dr. Burton R. Sisco

Master of Arts in Higher Education Administration

The purpose of this study was to investigate the involvement patterns of selected African American undergraduate students and explore the reasoning as to why they choose to participate in certain groups and abstain from others. Data were collected through a three part survey with 60 Likert-type items used, and through a series of interviews. The population used was a convenience sample of 178 students at Rowan University's main campus in Glassboro, NJ. Eight students of that sample were purposely selected to participate in interviews. Data analysis of the surveys showed positive relationships between students who worked with classmates outside of class and worked on projects during class. There were no disparities between gender and class rank when compared to importance and satisfaction of academic involvement. The results of the surveys showed that most of the selected students participated in intramural athletics and social clubs while abstaining from university publication and independent study. Data from the interviews revealed that students felt connected to one another in ethnic and multicultural clubs and organizations, though they believed there is a lack of options on campus to engage in activities with students from other races.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

College campuses consist of a wide variety of students whose backgrounds and interests differ tremendously. In order to keep these different groups of students involved and entertained, many clubs and organizations have been created. One specific group of students, African American undergraduates, is prevalent among many college campuses today. This growing population of students has the option of joining clubs and organizations they choose, yet tend to have involvement patterns specific to their race. This study investigates the involvement patterns of African American undergraduate students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) using Astin's Student Involvement Theory of 1984.

Statement of the Problem

Recent research has shown that African American undergraduate students involve themselves in specific clubs and organizations based on their race and comfort level and have limited relationships with faculty. According to Davis (1994), a large number of African American students at PWIs (Pre-dominantly White Institutions) state that they do not have a healthy relationship with faculty members and peers and avoid interaction with them outside of the classroom. This suggests that black students are separating themselves because of a lack of comfort they feel and the absence of a teacher-student connection, which results in distancing themselves from other students and activities available on campus.

This issue of student connection is important among undergraduate students because it weighs heavily in getting involved on campus. African American students also face certain stereotypes especially at PWIs. Fries-Britt (2007) states Black students describe how some peers and faculty see their Blackness and begin to attribute negative characteristics based on assumptions and stereotypes about the Black community. Struggling to acclimate to the university setting is difficult for students and with the pressure of negative, preconceived assumptions placed on them purely because of race and appearance increases the struggle. This reaction may explain why many black students tend to involve themselves in certain groups or abstain from them completely.

When black students feel the pressure from their professors and advisors to overcome this stigma, the question of whether the school cares remains. Furr (2002) writes that historically, predominantly white institutions have not fully addressed the issues related to the retention of African American students. Institutions must commit to designing interventions to meet the needs of diverse populations. Feeling as though no help is available to combat these issues may deter black students from becoming involved or relating closely in groups where their white classmates are actually receiving non-discriminatory attention.

Astin's (1984) Theory of Student Involvement focuses on how involvement is affected by living on campus, being an athlete, an honor student and how certain aspects of college life, such as time and work, impact student retention. What is omitted is how involvement relates to specific races, in this case black students, and how it affects their patterns and involvement choices. The involvement patterns among African American

students are different than any other group of students, therefore the focus of Student Involvement theory should be inclusive as well.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand the involvement patterns of selected African American undergraduate students. Of related interest was to study the decision-making process of regarding who and what organization or group to join. The study also investigated attitudes of black students in relation to involvement and how they differed from other racial groups.

Significance of the Study

Gathering first hand information of the views of black students was helpful in adding information to the knowledge base. This study helped to link the attitudes of black students to their involvement patterns to expand the scope of the student involvement theory. The findings of this study may help to develop plans to address the issues that black undergraduate students face at PWIs. It may also enlighten other groups of students, as well as faculty members and administrators, to enrich involvement patterns of black students.

Assumptions and Limitations

This study was completed at Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ and was limited to selected African American undergraduate students. A convenience sample of 34 students was created to participate in a survey with four students participating in a three-part interview. It was assumed that each subject was being truthful and thorough in his or her responses. The time to conduct this research study was limited to three months.

Finally, researcher perspectives and relationships to the subjects being interviewed may have presented bias in the findings.

Operational Definitions

1. Club: “An association of persons for some common object usually jointly supported and meeting periodically ;*also* : a group identified by some common characteristic.” (Merriam-webster.com, 2008, p. 1).
2. Connectedness: “Having the parts or elements logically linked together.” (Merriam-webster.com, 2008, p. 1). “More black students at HBCUs felt an increased sense of connectedness, power, and affiliation at HBCUs than at PWIs” (Watkins, 2007, p. 1).
3. Involvement: “To engage as a participant.” (Merriam-webster.com, 2008, p. 1)
4. Organization: A group of students that meets regularly on Rowan University’s campus for academic or leisurely reasons that may also be for profit during the 2008/09 academic year.
5. PWI: “Predominantly White Institution” (Watkins, p. 1). “Discussions at the PWI were dominated by conversations about acceptance, or ‘fitting in’” (Watkins, p. 3).
6. Student: African American undergraduate student at Rowan University pursuing their Bachelor’s degree.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the involvement patterns among selected African American undergraduate students?

2. What are the attitudes of selected African American students towards getting involved at Rowan University?
3. Is there any correlation between the relationships of the selected African American students with students of the same or different race and their involvement in social or academic programs?
4. What do the results of the interviews say about involvement levels of African American students at Rowan University?

Overview of the Study

Chapter two provides a review of scholarly literature in relation to this study. It includes a brief history of African Americans in education, their acceptance into college, student involvement in connection with Astin's Student Involvement Theory and a summary of the review.

Chapter three discusses the methods and procedures used to gather information for this study. This chapter includes a description of the context of the study, the population and sample selection, demographics, data collection instruments, the data collection process and how the data were analyzed.

Chapter four provides the findings and results of the study. This chapter focuses on answering the research questions with the use of SPSS for statistical analysis and content analysis.

Chapter five presents the complete findings of the study and summarizes the information. It also concludes with discussion, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and further research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Brief History of African Americans in Education

The decade of the 1960s marked an epic period for African Americans in the United States. These years gave birth to the Civil Rights Movement which helped give African American people equal rights they had long deserved. Among these rights was a fair education within non-segregated schools. Before schools were desegregated, black students attended classes with poor quality materials as compared to white students and were taught by teachers who lacked teaching knowledge and skills as compared to the teachers of white students.

One of the most pivotal court cases that helped black youth slowly gain acceptance into the white school system was the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education*. In 1954, the ruling of this case to outlaw racial segregation within the classroom served as a landmark for black students. This gave African American students an opportunity for a fair education. However, this was not the first attempt at challenging racial segregation in schools. According to “*Brown v. Board of Education*,” “As early as 1849, African Americans filed suit against an educational system that mandated racial segregation in the case of *Roberts v. City of Boston*” (p. 1, 2004).

After the ruling of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case, black students were able to attend previously segregated schools, but many problems persisted. Many caucasian students and parents did not want to study with black students and protested

despite the court case ruling. This conflict weighed heavily on African Americans in the United States. Could it be that the results of these acts of discrimination and racism had an affect on the black youth of today? Have past events impacted the involvement patterns among African American undergraduate students?

Historical events, prior to and leading through, the Civil Rights Movement caused blacks to struggle ultimately joining together and fighting for one another. The 1960s saw an uprising of connectedness, non-violence and self-pride among the African American people. When comparing the actions of African Americans during the 1960s and the actions of black students today, the idea of connectedness is still very prevalent within the school system. According to Watkins (2007):

Black students at HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) felt an increased sense of connectedness, power and affiliation at HBCUs than at PWI (Predominantly White Institutions). Black students at HBCUs devoted more effort to academic activities; experienced more significant gains in intellectual development, critical thinking, and cultural awareness; and enjoyed greater personal and social benefits than those at PWIs. (p. 1)

It may be possible that the events of the past have impacted the present actions of black students. The knowledge base focuses on the involvement of college students in general, and does not elaborate on the patterns of involvement pertaining to undergraduate African American students and the reasons behind them.

Acceptance Into College

Acceptance into a college or university is based upon factors such as GPA (Grade Point Average), extracurricular activities, SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) scores and also

desire. Black students are often deterred from attending college for these reasons as well as others.

One of the factors that contribute to the lowered rates of acceptance into college for black students is financial need. Lang (1992) writes:

Higher attrition rates of Black students are largely attributable to their socioeconomic background and to the peculiar characteristics of higher education institutions. When socioeconomic factors are controlled, the attrition rate of Blacks after enrolling in college is not strikingly different from that of Whites. (p. 513)

Also, the availability of resources is decreasing. “The decrease of federal support for minority student financial-aid programs has certainly hurt the access of minority students” (Lang, 1992, p. 516). The lack of financial aid support deters black students from applying to college.

Along with the decrease in federal support, an increase in tuition forces black students to search for alternatives to college. Lang states, “Minority families in general earn substantially less than White families in the United States. Thus, fewer family resources are available to provide exposure to as many learning and enrichment experiences for minority children outside of school” (1992, p. 516), therefore “rapid increases in college tuition undoubtedly reduce the access of minority students to college entrance” (1992, p. 516). The absence of financial support programs make it more difficult for black students to attend college. Despite these hardships, African American students are making efforts to attend college. “Though the number of Black students who

enroll in college has increased over the past decade, the number who drop out before graduation because of financial reasons has almost doubled” (1992, p. 517).

Another factor that causes a decline in blacks attending college is the lack of preparation and academic resources in secondary schools. Lang (1992) compared minority schools to White schools and found that “the minority schools had more crowded classes, teachers with fewer advanced degrees, less resources for counseling those students who relied more on counselors for course decisions and for making college choices and wider differences in scores on achievement tests” (p. 518). Black students are forced to suffer these inferior methods of learning and may possibly develop a mentality of not feeling prepared enough to apply to school. Knowing that many other students are much better prepared can cause the feeling of inadequacy which, unfortunately, is empirically supported. Furthermore, for the black students that attend college, this feeling of under-preparedness translates into low self-efficacy.

In order to improve involvement rates among black students, the lack of preparation and academic resources must be corrected early in their education. Each of these factors directly relates to how African Americans get involved while in college and ultimately, how it affects their personal development. One of the most disappointing factors that contributes to the lack of acceptance among black students deals with racism and discrimination. Davis (1994) writes:

Black students at predominantly White colleges have lower grade point averages than their peers at historically Black colleges. While the latter perform better academically, they are often dissatisfied with facilities and organizational structures of their colleges. Two salient factors differentially affect Black college

student performance vis-à-vis that of White college students: (1) a perceived lack of positive social support; and (2) perceived discrimination on the part of professors, administrators, and peers. (p. 621)

Student Involvement

In order to fully understand the involvement patterns of African American students, the theory of student involvement must be discussed. Student Involvement Theory was developed by Alexander Astin in 1984. He developed this theory to focus on active concepts that aid in student development. Astin (1999) writes:

Student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. Thus, a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. (p. 1)

The theory focuses heavily on behavior and the actions of the students as individuals. He writes, "It is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement" (p. 2).

The importance of this theory lies within the actions of the students. Astin (1999) writes, "The theory of student involvement encourages educators to focus less on what they do and more on what the student does: how motivated the student is and how much time and energy the student devotes to the learning process" (p. 5). Too much focus on academics and teaching methods can turn students away from the classroom and force them to find other activities to fill their study time. Furthermore, this concept is meant to motivate students in and out-of-the classroom. Once students develop a desire to become

active in the subject matter, they are more likely to do so, resulting in better grades. Also, the concept of student action is not limited to the classroom. It can be applied to extracurricular activities as well as clubs and sports.

Another important factor to fully understanding student involvement is the concept of time. The idea of how much time a student spends can be beneficial or detrimental. Astin (1999) states, "The most precious institutional resource may be student time. The extent to which students can achieve particular developmental goals is a direct function of time and effort they devote to activities designed to produce these gains" (p. 5). In terms of a classroom, the more time students spend preparing for exams, the better they will perform.

Conversely, too much time away from school can slow the developmental process. Astin (1999) states:

Retention suffers, however, if the student works off campus at a full-time job.

Because the student is spending considerable time and energy on nonacademic activities that are usually unrelated to student life, full-time work off campus decreases the time and energy that the student can devote to studies and other campus activities. (p. 6)

The amount of time students spend out of the classroom for off campus work takes time away from their academic commitments. It is not the professor's responsibility to help students balance their time, so students may suffer. More time spent off campus leaves less time for academics and even less for on campus activities.

Identity is an area associated with student involvement. Student identification is directly related to how students involve themselves, with whom and how often. Astin (1999) writes:

Students are more likely to persist at religious colleges if their own religious backgrounds are similar; Blacks are more likely to persist at Black colleges than at White colleges; and students from small towns are more likely to persist in small than in large colleges. (p. 7)

Depending on the environment and the groups of people students associate with, they are more likely to become involved if they feel comfortable in areas they are familiar.

Astin also covers the area of student drop outs and how this can be prevented. There are differences between men and women that drop out. “For men the most common reason is boredom with courses, clearly implying a lack of involvement. The most common reason for women is marriage, pregnancy, or other responsibilities” (Astin, 1999, p. 7). Astin sees dropping out as the ultimate form of noninvolvement. In order to change these patterns, he suggests students live on campus during undergraduate years. “Living in a dormitory is positively associated with several forms of involvement: interaction with faculty, involvement in student government, and participation in social fraternities and sororities” (Astin, 1999, p. 7). While living on campus, students are immersed in the college environment and often urged to participate in campus sponsored activities. Those who commute have a much harder time participating in campus activities. Also, they may have trouble finding a group of friends to interact with because the groups of students that stay on campus have already developed a social network or circle of friends.

In order to help with these issues, Astin writes about specific methods that can be used to increase involvement. One of the methods that can aid in increasing involvement is encouraging students to participate in Honors Programs. According to Astin (1999), honor students are “more likely than other students to persist in college and to aspire to graduate and professional degrees” (p. 7.)

Establishing an ethnic and racial identity is a necessity, especially for non-white students. During the adolescent years, African American students are actively exploring the aspects of their identity, which include dress, music, language and social group. According to Sparks (2004), while white youth are also actively exploring their identity, they usually don't explore the racial aspects of that identity. This often occurs in the presence of white teachers who don't have a personal history with that specific type of identity exploration. Furthermore, this carries over into the higher education system. When white professors at PWIs cannot directly relate to the African American experiences, this leaves greater room for miscommunication and misunderstanding. For a black student who is misunderstood at a PWI, the desire to become involved may not exist.

With understanding identity comes the responsibility to make changes and eliminate preconceived notions about African American college students. According to Cuyjet (1997), it is up to campus administrators to abolish the common stigma conveyed on African American students, that black students, particularly males, are an endangered species, expected to drop out, and destined to be unemployed. Programs should be developed in order to combat these accusations and inform faculty and staff that they should be supportive and sympathetic to these situations. However, it is imperative not to

belittle the black population and treat them as if they are incapable of succeeding just as well as their white counterparts. It is particularly important to focus on awareness.

Another area students can greatly increase their involvement patterns is within sports. Student athletes are very active on campus and also, being a part of a team, can help develop a feeling of camaraderie. According to Astin (1999), “Students who become intensely involved in athletic activities show smaller than average increases in political liberalism, religious apostasy, and artistic interests and a smaller than average decrease in business interests” (p. 8).

In order for students to remain heavily involved, they also need help from their superiors including professors, advisors, administrators and counselors. The roles of the faculty are just as important as the student’s activities. As for professors, Astin states that their roles are to teach less and encourage activities more. Too much of a lesson can bore the students and cause them to turn away from the classroom. As for the counselors, they should focus on the time spent and interactions students have with one another.

Student Development Theory focuses heavily on how students are motivated and its causes. Aside from faculty involvement, there are support programs that focus heavily on retention such as the EOF/MAP (Educational Opportunity Fund/Maximizing Academic Potential) program along with mentoring programs. It is important to fully understand the involvement patterns of African Americans because through that, their interests and motivations can be determined and focus can be shifted to the correct area in order to help improve personal development.

African American Student Involvement

The theory of student development was created to showcase the ideal student. This represents a model for all types of students. However, African American students usually do not represent the typical student. They come from a wide range of backgrounds, economic statuses and secondary school systems. There are many different factors that can influence the involvement patterns of African American students.

What causes the patterns of involvement among African American students may be attributed to several areas such as culture, family and/or location, and ethnic identity. Phinney (2004) writes, “As ethnic minorities, they belong to groups that are lower in status and power in society, are less well represented in society, are subject to prejudice and discrimination, and may hold values different from those of the larger society” (p.1). As African American students face this stigma and these adversities, discovering their sense of belonging or becoming more involved may be troublesome.

In order to combat this stigma, Phinney discusses how understanding more about one’s ethnicity leads to greater personal acceptance. Phinney refers to this as exploration and writes that it “refers to the process of examining the meaning and implications of one’s ethnic group membership, including its history, culture, and current status in society” (p. 6, 2004). This theory coincides with studies that have shown tendencies for African American students to join clubs and participate in activities that pertain to their ethnicity.

As mentioned earlier, students who feel comfortable in their environment are more prone to become involved on campus. This includes African American students as well. Furr (2002) states, “African-American students have reported that the environment

of predominantly-White institutions can be more alienating than the environment at historically-Black institutions while attending a historically-Black institution is related to satisfaction with the overall college experience” (p. 1). The feeling of connectedness allows black students to feel comfortable, gain confidence and become more involved. During the Civil Rights Movement, this idea of connectedness was very prevalent among blacks.

In relation to the feeling of connectedness lies the issue students have of mattering and marginality. Schlossberg (1989) defines mattering as “A motive: the feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate or experience as an ego-extension of themselves” (p.8). It is important for black students to experience this especially at a PWI. In a study conducted by Durham (2008) at Rowan University on mattering and marginality, the results showed that more than half of the black students tested felt marginalized in relation to classroom climate and that they had to represent their entire race within discussions while not being able to respond as a unique individual. As for involvement, over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the students surveyed felt that there were services geared to specifically help their race succeed, though 19% less than that number agreed that Rowan was a place where African American students could feel “at home.”

Another study done at Rowan University was completed by Piper (2008) who examined the impact of student involvement and engagement on African American success in college. Research discussed how student success and engagement is directly associated with active and collaborative learning. Many of the African American students surveyed in the study agreed with previous research in how instructors had lower expectations for minority students and this served as a distraction in the classroom. The

lack of involvement among black students is directly related to the learning patterns in the classroom.

An issue that many African American students face is the problem of high cost of college and absence of financial help. Blacks generally earn less money than whites. The students of these low income families that attend college are placed in a difficult situation, especially if they attend a PWI. Besides feeling alienated and having trouble fitting in, Black students may also struggle financially. The students who have a desire to finish college may have to find other means of paying for their education. This causes many black students to work off campus jobs and devote more hours to their job than their studies.

According to Astin (1999), more time spent away from the school environment equals less time for student involvement. This phenomenon occurs more often at PWIs than HBCUs. Palmer (2008) writes, “Despite limited resources, HBCUs manage to create an environment in which African Americans are educated regardless of academic preparation, test scores, socioeconomic status, or environmental circumstances” (p. 1). HBCUs may have a better understanding of the hardships black students face so they are better at creating an environment that encourages involvement by developing programs and support groups that improve development.

In terms of spending time away from the classroom setting, Black students have been known to learn just as well in these situations. According to Sutton and Kimbrough (2001), “Black students seek active out of class learning experiences, and gain as much, if not more, than White students engaged in similar types of activities” (p. 32). This does not coincide with Astin’s theory behind time spent away from the school environment

that states too much time spent away from the classroom may be detrimental to student development and growth.

A problem that African American students often face at an early age is the idea that they are not qualified to succeed in college when compared to their white counterparts. Black students often face the stigma of not being as smart as other students. For students that work past these stereotypes and struggle to become involved, this idea of not being good enough can produce low self-efficacy. Students can dismiss studying, devote more time to socializing, leave campus regularly or ultimately drop out.

Conversely, this can have a positive impact on some black students, causing them to study harder and obtain higher grades. Some black students in this situation work as if they have something to prove and are often called Black high achievers. According to Fries-Britt (2007), "Despite their participation in their campus's honors program, Black high-achievers are still judged based on prevalent social stereotypes regarding the academic abilities of Blacks" (p. 1). Even with high grades they often face discriminatory judgments.

There are also circumstances where black students believe what teachers and administrators say about their potential. Such attitudes lead to a feeling of alienation where more time is spent with friends instead of attending classes. Also, Fries-Britt (2007) writes, "In the classroom, Black students who have positive attitudes toward working with (cooperating) rather than against (completing) or away from their peer group may desire the opportunity for others to learn about them as individuals" (p. 10).

Astin (1999) mentions how time is very important when studying student involvement and that it is directly related to improved student development. However,

studies have not shown if time can have any negative impacts on academics or development. Can too much involvement in activities cause a student to struggle in the classroom? In terms of black students who may have to study more in order to maintain high grades like their white classmates, is too much time spent studying detrimental to a black student's growth and development?

Another issue that relates to how African American students involve themselves is the amount and types of programs that are personally appealing. Many black students are not involved because of the "lack of cultural curricula and activities at Predominantly White institutions" (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001, p. 31). At HBCUs, the majority of the programs are developed for the majority type of the student, therefore more cultural programs are available. Sutton and Kimbrough write:

Because African American students are constantly exposed to real and perceived injustice, they often perceive the actions of their White counterparts as perfunctory rather than as those demonstrating genuine commitment. Based on this assumption, minority students perceive that membership within multicultural organizations provides them greater opportunities to share their skills and talents with the African American community. (p. 32)

Black students feel more inclined to use these programs for social gathering as opposed to a means to discuss campus activities. Sutton and Kimbrough state, "It is imperative that Black students not perceive these organizations exclusively as social entities but rather see them as quintessential elements that promote learning and development" (p. 38). This can also lead to issues with university officials. If the

program lead by African American students is used more for the social aspect than that of a learning environment, the school has a right to eliminate it.

Summary of the Literature Review

The involvement patterns of African American students vary from college-to-college. The types of activities they participate in, clubs they join, or majors they select are selected for certain reasons. Studies have shown that black students are more inclined to participate in campus events and clubs where they are the majority. Research also shows that black undergraduate students are attending college with a lack of academic support and racial stigmas attached to them.

A critical question is how do the involvement patterns impact academic performance? Involvement is directly related to GPA, study time and extracurricular time, though it is unknown whether the effects of being overly involved are negative or positive for African American students. Also, whether these patterns differ from white students or other races is unknown. The majority of the studies researched black students at PWIs. In order to better understand the student involvement patterns among African American undergraduate students and how it relates to Astin's Student Involvement Theory, more research must be conducted to close the gap within the knowledge base.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Context of the Study

According to the Rowan University website, Rowan was founded in 1923. It was developed as an institution to train elementary teachers and has now grown to a top rated, regional institution. The university enrolls over 10,000 full time and part time students and offers 58 undergraduate majors that are divided between six academic colleges. There are also 40 different graduate programs offered. Rowan offers over 100 clubs and organizations such as the Asian Cultural Association, Pre-Professional Society, Biology Club, and Residential Student Counsel. Within the residence halls are learning communities for freshman students. This gives underclassmen the opportunity to cohabitate with fellow students of the same interests and majors. In terms of graduation rates and employment rates, 95% of recent Rowan graduates were employed or attended graduate school within one year of graduation.

This university was chosen for its convenience and population of African American students. According to the 2008 Rowan University Research Brief, Rowan enrolled 10,271 undergraduate students within the last year. The African American population of this total only represented 8.6% which roughly equated 880 students. The white population equals 7,933 students. The lack of African American enrollment at Rowan created ideal data collection situation.

Population and Sample Selection

This study focused on African American undergraduate students at Rowan University during the 2008/09 academic year. A convenience sample of 200 black students was selected to participate in the survey. Social networking, resident assistants, and a minority student assistance office on campus were used to identify survey subjects. In order to gather information of involved student behavior and attitudes, each participant was a student who lived on campus and participated in at least one club, sport, job, or organization on campus. It was important that each class year was represented in order to gain a wide perspective on the student's thoughts. This also helped to note any similarities and or differences among the current year.

A total of eight subjects who completed the survey were recruited to participate in an interview. Two freshman, two sophomores, two juniors, and two seniors were chosen and one male and one female for each class level was chosen. Each student was a member of an on campus organization such as the Pre-Professional Society, the Black Culture League and the Talented 10.

Instrumentation

The study was conducted in two parts. The first part focused on collecting quantitative data through distributing 200 surveys; the second part collected qualitative data through a series of interviews. The instrument used for the survey was modified after Piper (2008) who based his instrument on *Ohio University's Institutional Research Department Student Involvement Survey* and the *National Survey of Student Engagement* (NSSE). The modified survey (Appendix A) consisted of 60 items and was divided into four different sections. The first section gathered background information such as age,

class level, enrollment status, and cumulative GPA. The second section gathered information on involvement frequencies in areas such as intramural athletics, social clubs, and classroom activities. The third section inquired about the relationship students had with other students of the same and different races as well as with faculty and staff members. The final section of the survey gathered information on the importance and satisfaction of social involvement, academic involvement, and campus atmosphere.

The second part of the study collected qualitative data through a series of interviews (Appendix B). Both the survey and interview schedule were approved by the Institutional Review Board at Rowan University (Appendix C). The interview was divided into 3 sections: Background Information, Involvement on Campus, and Future Goals and Involvement. These phases were designed to discover the attitudes of black students on three different aspects of their college and personal life. It also focused on their past, present, and future aspirations. Each section contained 10 interview questions.

The questions and typed statements (Appendix B) collected information in an open ended fashion. Each question was designed to avoid short answers. Also, if there was a topic that students did not feel comfortable discussing, they were free to pass on answering the question. Furthermore, each participant was thanked and notified that their responses were solely used for data collection in this study and that their names would be changed for anonymity.

The survey was modeled after the instrument Piper (2008) used which was rooted in Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement to account for validity. Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement states that the more time students spend on academics and extracurricular activities on campus, the better their developmental process and overall

experience is. The interview questions were also modeled after this theory as well as Watkins' (2007) research on connectedness black students feel when participating in groups with students of the same race and or ethnicity. Information from the knowledge base accounted for the validity of the interview questions. To test for reliability of the survey, a Cronbach Alpha coefficient was used on the items addressing satisfaction of social and academic involvement, and campus atmosphere yielding a score of .751. Survey items yielding Cronbach coefficients of .70 or higher are considered acceptable when conducting research (UCLA: Academic Technology Services, Statistical Consulting Group).

Data Collection

Data collection took place over a three month period. During the months of February, March, and April in 2009, the researcher distributed surveys and conducted interviews with eight purposely selected students. Each participant was notified in advance as to when and where the interviews took place and how long they would last.

The three month time period also gave the researcher an opportunity to note certain changes of behavior or attitudes among the students as the semester approached and closed. These changes were then noted in the analysis of the data. This time period was also chosen to note any joining or quitting of a certain club, organization, or job on campus. This did not occur in the study. However, it would have affected the responses of the student who made the decision to change. Their reasons for joining or quitting would relate to personal attitudes towards Rowan's club promotion or methods of organization.

All of the interview information collected was done on a one-on-one basis with the participant and the researcher in a locked study room in the Rowan University library. If the participant allowed, each session was tape recorded and then later transcribed for further analysis. Each session lasted an average of one half hour. During the month of April, the researcher followed up with each of the participants and discussed if there were any changes in their attitudes towards involvement or any changes towards their current involvement patterns. All of the participants said nothing had changed at that time. Each student was very cooperative and thorough in their explanations during the interviews.

Data Analysis

The independent variables of this study were gender, class rank, and organization involvement. The independent variables, background information, and future plans were recorded within the first and third parts of the interview sessions. The dependent variables were the attitudes students had toward their past, current involvement, and future plans. The results of each interview session were compared and searched for key phrases and connections between class rank and involvement. The survey findings were then analyzed using the SPSS software to calculate frequencies, means, percents, and standard deviations. A Pearson's product moment correlation was calculated to determine if there were any significant relationships between the African American students with students of the same or different race, and their involvement in social or academic programs. Interviews were transcribed and interpreted using content analysis (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Sisco, 1981). Key words and phrases were coded and arranged in themes in order to reveal patterns of involvement and triangulate the qualitative findings to the survey results.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The study findings were produced through a combination of surveys and interviews. The total number of surveys distributed was 200 and the number of interviews conducted was eight. Each student was interviewed once and then contacted one month later to discuss his/her comments and to add or subtract anything they had previously stated. Surveys and interviews were completed to identify involvement patterns, reasoning, and recommendations towards African American student involvement.

Profile of the Sample

The study's target audience was a representation sample of African American undergraduate students selected at random from Rowan University's main campus in Glassboro, NJ. A total of 200 surveys were distributed and 178 were completed yielding an 89% return rate. Each participant was currently enrolled at Rowan during the 2008-2009 school year and were all matriculated as either full time or part time students. The ages of the students ranged from 18-26 and older. More than half of the subjects fell in the 21-25 age bracket.

The residence classification varied among the subjects with the majority (86.5%) being students that reside on campus. Fifty-three percent of the subjects work, either on or off campus, and 72.5% are EOF/MAP students. A majority of subjects were female at 52.2%. The highest average percentage for GPA (grade point average) was 38.2% with a

range of 2.7-2.9 GPA. Table 4.1 shows the subject classification by class level, enrollment status, living residence, work status and cumulative GPA.

Table 4.1

Sample Demographics (N = 178)

Variable		Frequency	%
Class Level	Freshman	55	30.9
	Sophomore	53	29.8
	Junior	57	32.0
	Senior	13	7.3
Gender	Male	85	47.8
	Female	93	52.2
Enrollment Status	Full Time	164	92.1
	Pat Time	14	7.9
Current Living Residence	Rowan Residence Hall	154	86.5
	Fraternity/Sorority House	3	1.7
	Off Campus Housing	9	5.1
	Home of Parents or Relatives	12	6.7
Work Status	Currently Working	87	48.9
	Currently Not Working	91	51.1
Cumulative GPA	3.7 to 4.0	8	4.5
	3.4 to 3.6	18	10.1
	3.0 to 3.3	46	25.8
	2.7 to 2.9	68	38.2
	2.4 to 2.6	18	10.1
	2.0 to 2.3	10	5.6
	1.7 to 1.9	6	3.4
	1.4 to 1.6	3	1.7
	1.3 & below	1	.6

The study's qualitative findings are the result of interviews conducted during the 2009 spring semester. There were eight students, each of which was purposely selected on gender and class rank. All are attendees of Rowan University and had also agreed to complete the survey. The eight participants that were interviewed all agreed to have their session tape recorded. The sessions were held in a quiet study room in Rowan

University's library. The sample represented a diverse group of African American students on Rowan's campus.

The sample consisted of four male and four female students. Each of the males and females were evenly split by class rank; one male freshman and one female freshman, with one male sophomore and one female sophomore, etc. One female was involved in a Greek Organization, two students commuted, four worked jobs on and off campus and all represented themselves as student leaders. Their GPAs ranged from 2.7 to 3.3. All but one participant was born and raised in different parts of New Jersey and all participated in varying levels of high school activities.

Analysis of the Data

Research Question 1: What are the involvement patterns among selected African American undergraduate students?

The majority of the subjects participated in many different on-campus events. As noted in Table 4.2, participation in these non-academic related activities was very high. Participation in residence hall activities, publication, and social clubs were all rated above 30% in the "Often" category and above 15% in the "Very Often" category. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 represent the highest and lowest rated statements of involvement.

Table 4.2

Survey of Involvement Information (N=178)

Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Intramural athletics	2.32	1.16
2. Student government	2.58	1.00
3. University publication	2.64	1.02
4. College productions or performances	3.07	3.20

5. Participated in professional or departmental clubs	2.72	.914
6. Participated in social clubs	2.55	.986
7. Residence hall activities	2.42	1.04
8. Participated in religious organizations	2.53	.921
9. Volunteer service	2.43	.913
10. Leadership programs	2.32	.971
11. Off-campus part-time job	2.72	1.09
12. On-campus part-time job	2.74	1.14
13. Held an internship	2.69	.986
14. Participated in field experience	2.74	.915
15. Participated in independent study	2.73	.886
16. Worked with classmates outside of class	2.53	.884
17. Tutored or taught other students	2.52	.858
18. Participated in community-based projects as part of class	2.48	.872
19. Attended an art exhibit, gallery, play or dance	2.44	.830
20. Exercised or participated in physical activities	2.38	.830
21. Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	2.16	.801
22. Discussed ideas with faculty members	2.12	.828
23. Participated in religious or spiritual activities	2.16	.888
24. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	2.21	.678
25. Made a class presentation	2.07	.652
26. Included diverse perspectives in class discussions/assignments	2.16	.824
27. Worked with other students on projects during class	2.09	.746
28. Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments	2.08	.795

29. Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor	1.89	.770
30. Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor	1.92	.777

Table 4.3

Highest Rated Statements of Involvement (N=178)

Very Often = 1, Often = 2, Sometimes = 3, Never = 4

Statement	Very Often		Often		Sometimes		Never	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
1. Intramural athletics (<i>M</i> = 2.32, <i>SD</i> = 1.16)	51	32.6	47	26.4	31	17.4	42	23.6
2. Student government (<i>M</i> = 2.58, <i>SD</i> = 1.00)	23	12.9	73	41.0	38	21.3	44	24.7
3. Participated in social clubs (<i>M</i> = 2.55, <i>SD</i> = .98)	30	16.9	54	30.3	60	33.7	34	19.1
4. Residence hall activities (<i>M</i> = 2.42, <i>SD</i> = 1.04)	39	21.9	60	33.7	44	24.7	35	19.7
5. Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor (<i>M</i> = 2.16, <i>SD</i> = .80)	37	20.8	84	47.2	49	27.5	8	4.5
6. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions (<i>M</i> = 2.21, <i>SD</i> = .67)	22	12.4	101	56.7	51	28.7	4	2.2

Table 4.4

Lowest Rated Statements of Involvement (N=178)

Very Often = 1, Often = 2, Sometimes = 3, Never = 4

Statement	Very Often		Often		Sometimes		Never	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
1. University publication (<i>M</i> = 2.64, <i>SD</i> = 1.02)	26	14.6	59	33.1	46	25.8	47	26.4
2. College productions or performances (<i>M</i> = 3.07, <i>SD</i> = 3.20)	7	3.9	58	32.6	67	37.6	44	24.7
3. Participated in professional or departmental clubs (<i>M</i> = 2.72, <i>SD</i> = .91)	14	7.9	64	36.0	58	32.6	42	23.6
4. Participated in religious organizations (<i>M</i> = 2.53, <i>SD</i> = 1.09)	29	16.3	49	27.5	76	42.7	24	13.5
5. Off-campus part-time job (<i>M</i> = 2.72, <i>SD</i> = 1.09)	32	18.0	41	23.0	49	27.5	56	31.5
6. Participated in independent study (<i>M</i> = 2.73, <i>SD</i> = .88)	12	6.7	64	36.0	62	34.8	40	22.5

Involvement patterns in relation to academics were also surveyed. In activities such as holding an internship and working with classmates outside of class, 32.3% chose the “Often” response and 12.9% chose the “Very Often” response. The percentages suggest that the subjects participated the most in non-academic related activities. Table 4.5 displays these results.

Table 4.5

Academic Involvement Information Among African American Students (N=178)
Very Often = 1, Often = 2, Sometimes = 3, Never = 4

Statement	Very Often		Often		Sometimes		Never	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Held and internship ($M = 2.69, SD = .986$)	23	12.9	53	29.8	58	32.6	44	24.7
2. Participated in field experience ($M = 2.74, SD = .915$)	13	7.3	64	36	57	32	44	24.7
3. Participated in independent study ($M = 2.73, SD = .886$)	12	6.7	64	36	62	34.8	40	22.5
4. Worked with classmates outside of class ($M = 2.53, SD = .884$)	23	12.9	62	34.8	69	38.8	24	13.5
5. Tutored or taught other students ($M = 2.52, SD = .858$)	21	11.8	66	37.1	69	38.8	22	12.4
6. Participated in community-based projects as a part of class ($M = 2.48, SD = .872$)	22	12.4	71	39.9	62	34.8	23	12.9

In terms of involvement regarding academic preparation and future planning, several statements were given in the surveys. Almost half of the subjects (47.2%) agreed to discussing grades and assignments with their instructor on an “Often” basis. Also, almost half of the subjects (46.1%) agreed to discussing their career plans with a faculty member or advisor. Table 4.6 displays these results.

Table 4.6

*Academic Preparation and Future Planning Involvement Information (N=178)**Very Often = 1, Often = 2, Sometimes = 3, Never = 4*

Statement	Very Often		Often		Sometimes		Never	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
1. Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor ($M = 2.16, SD = .801$)	63	35.4	71	39.9	44	24.7	0	0.0
2. Discussed ideas with faculty members ($M = 2.12, SD = .828$)	45	25.3	72	40.4	55	30.9	6	3.4
3. Used email to communicate with an instructor ($M = 1.96, SD = .750$)	53	29.8	81	45.5	43	24.2	1	.6
4. Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor ($M = 1.92, SD = .777$)	57	32	82	46.1	35	19.7	4	2.2

Research Question 2: What are the attitudes of the selected African American students towards getting involved at Rowan University?

In order to test the attitudes of African American students towards involvement at Rowan, the survey focused on relationships with students and faculty of the same and different races, and importance versus satisfaction of three major areas of involvement: social, academic and general campus atmosphere. In terms of relationships with students, Table 4.7 shows that the majority of subjects reported that students of a different race are generally friendlier and more supportive. When compared to relationships with staff and faculty, the majority of the subjects (50.55%) reported that both groups were “Occasionally Friendly and Supportive” (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7

Relationships Among Black and Non-Black Students; Relationships with Faculty and Staff (N=178)

Unfriendly, Unsupportive = 1, Occasionally Unfriendly, Occasionally Unsupportive = 2, Friendly, Unsupportive = 3, Supportive, Unfriendly = 4, Occasionally Friendly, Occasionally Supportive = 5, Friendly, Supportive = 6

Statement	Un-friendly, Un-supportive		Occasionally Unfriendly, Occasionally Unsupportive		Friendly, Un-supportive		Supportive, Un-friendly		Occasionally Friendly, Occasionally Supportive		Friendly, Supportive	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%

1. Relationships with other students of the same race ($M = 5.32$, $SD = .605$)	0	0.0	1	.6	0	0.0	7	3.9	103	57.9	67	37.6
2. Relationships with other students of a different race ($M = 5.15$, $SD = .659$)	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	1.7	18	10.1	106	59.6	51	28.7
3. Relationships with faculty members ($M = 5.19$, $SD = .687$)	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	.6	25	14	91	51.1	61	34.3
4. Relationships with staff members ($M = 5.08$, $SD = .813$)	0	0.0	1	.6	7	3.9	24	14	89	50	56	35.1

Social involvement was also surveyed and tested by an importance satisfaction scale. The majority of the subjects (65.7%) believed that it is “Very Important” to establish personal relationships with peers at Rowan. However, only 27.5% were “Very Satisfied” with this social component of their college involvement. Another large majority (68.0%) indicated that it is “Very Important” to attend cultural events on campus and 73.6% of the surveyed group is “Very Satisfied” with this area of involvement. The results on social involvement are found in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8

Social Involvement Satisfaction Information (N=178)

Very Satisfied = 1, Satisfied = 2, Moderately Satisfied = 3, Somewhat Not Satisfied = 4, Not at All Satisfied = 5

Statement	Very Satisfied		Satisfied		Moderately Satisfied		Somewhat Not Satisfied		Not at All Satisfied	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
1. Establishing personal relationships with peers at Rowan ($M = 1.78$, $SD = .555$)	49	27.5	121	68	6	3.4	2	1.1	0	0.0
2. Getting involved in student organizations ($M = 1.69$, $SD = .584$)	65	36.5	106	59.6	5	2.8	2	1.1	0	0.0
3. Getting involved in campus activities ($M = 1.38$, $SD = .628$)	122	68.5	47	26.4	8	4.5	0	0.0	1	.6
4. Attending cultural events on campus ($M = 1.33$, $SD = .616$)	131	73.6	38	21.3	8	4.5	0	0.0	1	.6

5. Interacting with students of different races or cultures ($M = 1.51, SD = .666$)	101	56.7	65	36.5	11	.62	0	0.0	1	.6
6. Getting involved in religious activities ($M = 1.44, SD = .654$)	115	64.6	49	27.5	13	7.3	1	.6	0	0.0
7. Having a job while enrolled ($M = 1.40, SD = .642$)	118	66.3	50	28.1	9	5.1	0	0.0	1	.6

The final two components of involvement that were surveyed are academic involvement and campus atmosphere. These items also tested and compared the importance versus the satisfaction of faculty contact and availability, as well as security, and fitting into the campus atmosphere. Tables 4.9 and 4.10 display the results.

Table 4.9

Academic Involvement Information (N=178)

Very Important = 1, Important = 2, Moderately Important = 3, Somewhat Not Important = 4, Not at All Important = 5

Very Satisfied = 1, Satisfied = 2, Moderately Satisfied = 3, Somewhat Not Satisfied = 4, Not at All Satisfied = 5

Statement	Importance		Satisfaction	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. Faculty availability outside of class	1.53	.665	1.78 .910	
2. Social contact with faculty	1.44	.646	1.72 .979	
3. Academic advising	1.29	.603	1.65	1.05

Table 4.10

Rating of Campus Atmosphere (N=178)

Very Important = 1, Important = 2, Moderately Important = 3, Somewhat Not Important = 4, Not at All Important = 5

Very Satisfied = 1, Satisfied = 2, Moderately Satisfied = 3, Somewhat Not Satisfied = 4, Not at All Satisfied = 5

Statement	Importance		Satisfaction	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. Adequate personal security	1.24	.535	1.39	.533
2. Adequate physical environment on campus	1.64	.537	1.43	.609
3. Adequate social atmosphere	1.51	.565	1.37	.588
4. Fitting into campus community	1.23	.473	1.32	.535

Research Question 3: Is there any correlation between the relationships of the selected African American students with students of the same or different race and their involvement in social or academic programs?

A Pearson product moment correlation was conducted to determine that there were two weak correlations, one of which was negative: participated in leadership programs and the relationship with students of a different race ($r = .180, p = .016$) at a $p = < .05$ level, and working with other students on projects outside of class and the relationship with students of the same race yielded a weak correlation ($r = -.152, p = .043$) at a $p = < .05$ level. There were no other correlations between these two components. The results are represented in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11

<i>Significant Correlations Between Relationships of Students and Social and Academic Involvement</i>			
Relationship	Involvement	<i>r</i> coefficient	<i>p</i> -level
Relationship with students of different race	Participated in leadership programs	.180*	.016
Relationship with students of same race	Worked with other students on projects outside of class	-.152*	.043

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

Research Question 4: What do the results of the interviews say about involvement levels of African American students at Rowan University?

“What clubs or organizations are you involved in here at Rowan University?”

The results of the interviewees’ involvement are found in Table 4.12. Much of their participation in campus activities is found in ethnic related organizations and academic clubs. The amount of involvement increased with the class rank of the

subjects. The two freshmen are involved in four clubs and the two seniors are involved in seven clubs and organizations.

Table 4.12

<i>Current Club and Organizational Involvement</i>			
Category	Subcategory	<i>f</i>	Rank
Ethnic Related Clubs	EOF/MAP	13	1
	Black Culture League (BCL)		
	Student Organization for Caribbean Awareness (SOCA)		
	Talented 10		
	Alliance of United Cultures		
Non-Ethnic Related Clubs	Gospel Choir	8	2
	Chi- Alpha Christian Fellowship		
	Ujima Mentoring Program		
	Resident Assistant (RA)		
	Student University Programming Welcoming Committee		
Academic Clubs	Pre-Soma	4	3
	Pre-Professional Society		
	Biology Club		
	Honors Program		
Work	Julie Peterson's Office	1	4
Sports	Football	1	4
Greek Life	Alpha Kappa Alpha	1	4

“Whose idea was it for you to join? Why did you choose to do so?”

Table 4.13 displays the results of reasoning as to why the selected students chose to get involved on campus. The main themes-personal choice, family influence, and friends influence-were all discussed. One interviewee discussed negative feelings towards their own race. “At first, I wasn’t going to join BCL because I went to an all black school and I got sick of black people. I didn’t feel like being near them. I wanted to go to a white school. Then I changed my mind and figured I would just join. Also,

I'm really into my Guianese culture and I don't want to be one of those people where I say I'm Guianese, but not pay attention to it. With the Asian club, I just love the Asian culture. I like it the most for some reason. I learn a lot from them." Another interviewee spoke on how it was a personal choice in order to build leadership within him/her self and others. "It was my idea. I wanted to become an RA to kind of help people. I didn't really have an RA. I came through EOF and I got a sense of what RAs were like. Plus since I want to be a teacher, I felt that it was a good leadership role. I don't just want to lead; I want to build leaders also. So I thought it would be good to get experience."

Table 4.13

<i>Reasoning for Involvement</i>			
Category	Subcategory	<i>f</i>	Rank
Personal Choice with Influence	Family suggested involvement	6	1
	Community influenced		
Friends Influence	Joined to make friends	3	2
	Joined with friends		
	Friends suggested involvement		
Cultural Reasons	Wants to practice cultural habits	1	3
Selection	Academically fit to join; chosen	1	3

"If you weren't a member of a club or organization, would you still feel connected to Rowan? If so in what ways?"

Table 4.14 contains the results of the participants' connection to Rowan in absence of club and organizational involvement. The results varied as most of the students agreed they would still feel a connection to Rowan by means of relationships. One interviewee stated, "Yes, because of my relationships with my professors. I really like that a lot. I have a good relationship with them and it makes me want to do better."

Another interviewee disagreed and claimed to not feel connected without involvement.

“I don’t think I would; not as much. I guess I do well academically. I would feel like it’s just school. If you don’t get involved, you don’t get an extra experience. I want it to last. I want to make this time mean something more than just a good grade.”

Table 4.14

<i>Connection to Rowan without Club Involvement</i>			
Category	Subcategory	<i>f</i>	Rank
Connection to Rowan	Relationships with professors	4	1
	Relationships with staff		
	Relationships with friends		
No Connection to Rowan	Needs a balance of work and play	2	2
	Harder to make an effort without clubs		
	Not heavily involved now; less would be disconnecting		
Somewhat Connected to Rowan	Experienced both being and not being involved	2	2
	Fun is had outside of the classroom		

“Do you feel that Rowan University has adequate choices for student involvement?”

The majority of the participants stated that they believed Rowan’s choices for student involvement were adequate or better. One participant stated involvement was not only adequate, but also had academic choices. “I think they have a good amount of choices for student involvement. They have a lot of clubs related to majors. I guess there could be more, but they have a lot.” Table 4.15 contains results regarding participant views of Rowan’s involvement options.

Table 4.15

View of Rowan's Involvement Options

Category	Subcategory	<i>f</i>	Rank
Adequate choices	Offers diverse clubs	6	1
	Clubs related to majors		
Inadequate choices	Weak promotion	2	2
	Lack of diverse clubs		
	Small events are held		

“As a minority, do you feel that Rowan offers a diverse amount of clubs that meet the needs of minority groups on campus?”

The results of this question were split; 50% said “yes” and 50% said “no.” The participants that felt Rowan offers a diverse amount of clubs all had similar responses, stating how the minority clubs are available for people who want to join. One interviewee did not agree and stated, “No, I don’t. They should make a better effort to increase involvement for minority groups. It’s our school too, even though we’re a small number of the population, we still deserve just as many programs as the majority.”

Another interviewee stated how the lack of student involvement, due to a lack of options, causes overlap in group participants. “No, actually members of some clubs are the same members of others. The president of BCL could be the vice president of the NAACP.”

Table 4.16 displays the results of the selected students discussing whether Rowan has diverse club options.

Table 4.16

Opinions on Rowan's Diverse Club Selection

Category	Subcategory	<i>f</i>	Rank
Offers diverse options	Racially specific clubs (BCL, ULA, SOCA)	4	1
	Sexually specific clubs (GSA)		

Does not offer diverse options	Weak promotion Focus on Greek Life Only has five in total	4	1
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“Will you be an advocate for student involvement in the future?”

Table 4.17 contains the results of the participants advocating for student involvement in the future. Most of the participants stated they would be an advocate for student involvement in the future, however one student he would not. The student discussed how involvement gives students a chance to grow and be a part of the university. There was also a participant who discussed how he was unsure about would advocating for student involvement. Both talked about how it is not something that is taught so it is more difficult to practice. One freshman student stated how she would like to introduce a new club to Rowan’s campus. “I want to. One of these days I want to make my own club. Have you ever heard of NSBE? It’s the National Society of Black Engineers. I was in it in high school and I want to bring it here someday. They have internships with Sony and Microsoft; it’s really great.” One of the senior students discussed the importance of involvement and the younger generation. “I’ll try to. I realize that as a minority, I have to help educate the younger generation and involvement is a great way to do that.”

Table 4.17

<i>Opinions on Advocating for Student Involvement</i>			
Category	Subcategory	<i>f</i>	Rank
Will advocate	Introduce new club to Rowan	6	1
	Give others a chance to participate		
	Promote events in-house		
	Important to be involved		
	Truly enjoys involvement		

Will not advocate	Was successful without clubs	1	2
May advocate	Hard to walk the talk Hard to practice what's not taught	1	2

“Is there anything you would change about the club(s) you’re involved in?”

The final part of the interview asked each participant for advice or suggestions about the clubs they are involved in and the way activities are presented to students by Rowan. Seven out of the eight students stated they would not change anything about the club they are currently involved. One participant mentioned some operational changes. “In BCL I would like to talk about more things. I don’t want to keep on complaining. In the ACA, we should have more discussions like BCL. They should have a discussion about cultures before having large events.” The complete results are displayed in Table 4.18.

Table 4.18

<i>Suggestions for Improvement of Current Club Involvement</i>			
Category	Subcategory	<i>f</i>	Rank
No Changes	Comfortable with present options	7	1
Operational Changes	Broaden discussions Invite more people Promote more Research cultural histories	1	2

“What changes would you make, if any, about Rowan’s methods of club promotion?”

Despite the lack of suggestions for change within the clubs, the participants gave suggestions for changing Rowan’s methods of club promotion. Many of the responses dealt with a desire to incorporate online, social networking groups, such as www.facebook.com and www.myspace.com, as a communication avenue. One of the

students mentioned that Rowan's methods of club promotion should parallel the advertisement of academic majors. "I believe it would be better for Rowan to market clubs and organizations like they market majors; almost like a business." Table 4.19 contains the results of this question.

Table 4.19

<i>Suggestions for Change of Rowan's Methods of Club Promotion</i>			
Category	Subcategory	<i>f</i>	Rank
Online; Social Networking	Facebook	6	1
	MySpace		
	Emails		
Increase current methods	Fliers	3	2
Hard copies of information	Mailboxes	1	3
No changes	Comfortable with present options	1	3

The overall results of the interviews showed that each student was generally satisfied with Rowan's clubs and organizations, despite a few changes. There was also a pattern between class status and involvement found. The higher ranked a student was by class status, the more involved they were. One month after the interviews had taken place, each interviewee was contacted to discuss their responses and was also given an opportunity to make any changes to their responses. All of the participants felt confident in their statements and did not choose to change any of their responses.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

The study investigated student involvement patterns among African American undergraduate students and their suggestions for improvements. It was conducted at Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ during the spring semester of 2009. The study was designed in order to understand the reasoning African American students use to participate in certain activities and ignore others. The participants of this study were undergraduate students of varying majors who ranged from first year freshman to fifth year seniors.

A convenience sample of 178 African American undergraduate students was administered a survey. The first part of the survey collected background information such as age, class rank and GPA. The second part of the survey consisted of a 30-item Likert-type section on involvement information. The third part of the survey consisted of 21 statements that inquired information on relationships with other students and faculty, and a comparison of importance versus satisfaction in social and academic involvement and campus atmosphere.

After the surveys were administered, eight students-two freshmen, two sophomores, two juniors and two seniors-agreed to participate in a interview session. The sessions were held in the Rowan University library in a quiet study room. Upon

request, the sessions were tape recorded. The interview was divided into three sections, past, current, and future involvement. Each section was composed of 10 questions. The surveys were designed to obtain a well rounded view of why selected students were involved, are involved, and will or will not be involved in the future.

Using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software, variations in involvement levels were tested. The surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlations. Pearson product moment correlations determined small significant statistical differences. Each interview was coded and themed using content analysis (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Sisco, 1981).

Discussion of the Findings

The study found that there was little disparity between involvement patterns and gender. The items rated the highest in the survey related to social involvement were: participated in intramural activities, participated in student government activities, and participated in leadership programs. In relations to academics, the highest rated items were: discussed grades or assignments with an instructor, and worked with classmates outside of class. The lowest rated items were: participated in field experience, held an off campus job, and participated in religious or spiritual activities. The heavy involvement in intramural activities and lack of involvement in religious groups supports the findings of Astin (1999).

There were positive associations between academic involvement and social involvement. The more time spent with academic programs, the less time was spent with social activities. These results coincide with the findings of Astin (1999) and Palmer (2008). There were also positive associations between the selected students'

relationships with students of a different race and working with classmates outside of class. These results confirm the findings of Fries-Britt (2007). The study also found that many students were very satisfied with the campus atmosphere. The findings support those of Piper (2008) which found that the selected black students had positive relationships and satisfaction with faculty. Since Rowan is a PWI, this conflicts with the research of Fur (2002) which discusses that black students at PWIs have negative relationships with white faculty because of preconceived, negative stigmas about their race and ability to do well in the classroom.

The data collected from the interview sessions revealed consistency with previous research. According to Sutton and Kimbrough (2001), many African American students seek to have more of an active, out-of-the classroom learning experience. The findings support Durham (2008) who found that the selected black students felt marginalized in relation to classroom climate so they sought out of classroom activities. Also, Phinny (2004) writes that many minorities engage in groups that do not hold much status or power on campus. The students join purely to experience connectedness. Furthermore, the participants in the interview had a different view of values than the larger society. They believed that as long as their voice was heard they held as much power and purpose as their white counterparts in high ranked clubs such as student government associations. This supports the interview and survey results where most of the involvement was through participation in ethnic clubs, not political and governmental groups, or planning committees.

One of the interviewees revealed how negatively she felt towards students of her own race prior to attending college. After participating in a summer program she

attended where she were forced to live, study and cohabitate with many students of the same race, she students learned more about herself and her own personal identity. This lead to self acceptance and also confirms the research of Phinney (2004) who discusses how understanding more about one's ethnicity can lead to a greater personal acceptance.

Astin's (1999) research mentions the importance of time spent and its direct relationship to student involvement. According to the research, more time spent being involved leads to a more improved and developed student. This statement does not follow the data collected from this study. Many of the students who were very involved in social clubs had lower GPAs. Conversely, the data do support Astin's (1999) research on time spent in academic clubs and studying for exams.

Conclusions

The data from this study confirms the research of Cuyjet (1997) who writes, campus administrators have an obligation to abolish common stigmas of African American students by developing educative programs that focus on healthy images. Support systems should be developed through offices such as Residential Life and Student Government to erase belittling of the black population. According to the data collected from the interviews, there is a lack of ethnic programming at Rowan and few support systems related to combating the negative stigmas.

There were positive relationships found with students who worked with classmates outside of class and worked on projects during class. These findings were also positively related to academic involvement, including faculty availability outside of class, social contact with faculty, and academic advising. This study also found that there

were no differences among gender and class rank when compared to the importance and satisfaction of academic involvement.

This study validates the connectedness research of Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) which states that many African American students are constantly exposed to injustice so they view White students as competitors, not colleagues. As a result Black students join minority and ethnic clubs because they believe it provides them with greater opportunities. The selected students also joined minority and ethnic clubs because of feelings of marginalization which was consistent with the findings of Durham (2008) who found that feelings of marginality in the classroom may be directly related to the low numbers of African American students in the entire class. The selected students not only mentioned this feeling to be present within the classroom, but outside as well.

This study demonstrates that the selected students are involved on campus in amounts consistent with the research of Astin (1999). However, it differs in that students from the selected population that were typically less involved did not neglect studies, abstain from extracurricular activities, or spend less time on campus. The majority of the interview participants' involvement was within ethnic clubs and organizations. The participants discussed a feeling of connection and comfort from being a member of these groups. Participating in social and academic clubs was very important among the target population which also parallels the findings of Piper (2008). Much of the reasoning for involvement was to experience a sense of connectedness and to further educate not just themselves, but also each other.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following suggestions are presented:

1. Universities should offer courses that allow Caucasian students to experience racial identity development.
2. An increase in ethnic programming would offer greater choices for the minority population.
3. African American students should intentionally integrate themselves into non-ethnic clubs and organizations.
4. Professors should be educated on the stigmas that the African American student population faces.
5. African American students should be encouraged to reach out to other groups through the ethnic clubs they are involved to help different races further develop their own, personal racial identity.
6. Alternate admissions and college preparation programs, such as the EOF/MAP Pre-College Institute should continue to be developed to help better prepare the black population.
7. Faculty should engage in more open dialogue about African American identity development as well as awareness.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following suggestions are presented:

1. Studies should be conducted at HBCUs and large scale institutions.

2. A pilot survey should be administered to a selected number of black students.
3. Follow up interview sessions should be held to see if views have changed over time.
4. Interviews with larger numbers and focus groups should be held to increase the data sets.
5. Interviews should be held with the majority population to see if it coincides with research on African American ethnic identity.

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APPENDIX A

Survey of Involvement Among African American Undergraduate Students

Survey of Involvement Among African American Undergraduate Students

While your participation in this survey is voluntary and you are not required to answer any of the questions herein, your cooperation and participation are important to the success of the project and are greatly appreciated. If you choose to participate, please understand that all responses are strictly confidential and anonymity will be kept throughout this process. Your completion of this survey constitutes informed consent and your willingness to participate.

Please indicate your response by checking the oval(s) that apply to you.

Background Information

1. Age:

- ☐ 18 – 20
☐ 21 – 25
☐ 26 or Over

2. Class Level:

- ☐ Freshman
☐ Sophomore
☐ Junior
☐ Senior

3. Current Enrollment Status:

- ☐ Full Time
☐ Part Time

4. Gender:

- ☐ Male
☐ Female

5. Current Living Residence:

- ☐ Rowan Residence Hall
☐ Fraternity/Sorority House
☐ Off Campus Housing
☐ Home of Parents or Relatives
☐ Own Home
☐ Other _____

6. Do you currently work?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

7. Where is your job located?

- ☐ On Campus
☐ Off Campus
☐ I do not currently work

8. What is your Cumulative GPA?

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3.7 to 4.0 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3.4 to 3.6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3.0 to 3.3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2.7 to 2.9 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2.4 to 2.6 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2.0 to 2.3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1.7 to 1.9 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1.4 to 1.6 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1.3 & Below | | | |

Section One – Involvement Information

In your experience at Rowan University, about how often have you done each of the following?

Please mark your answers in the boxes.

Statement

Very Often Sometimes Never
Often

Intramural athletics				
Student government				
University publication				
College productions or performances				
Participated professional or departmental clubs				
Participated in social clubs				
Residence hall activities				
Participated in religious organizations				
Volunteer service				
Leadership programs				
Off-campus part-time job				
On-campus part-time job				
Held an internship				
Participated in field experience				
Participated in independent study				
Worked with classmates outside of class				
Tutored or taught other students				
Participated in community-based projects as part of class				
Attended an art exhibit, gallery, play, or dance				
Exercised or participated in physical activities				
Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor				
Discussed ideas with faculty members				
Participated in religious or spiritual activities				

Very Often Sometimes Never
Often

Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions				
Made a class presentation				
Included diverse perspectives in class discussions/assignments				
Worked with other students on projects during class				
Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments				
Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor				
Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor				
Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor				

Are you a member of a social fraternity or sorority?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Have you participated in a study abroad program?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you an EOF/MAP student?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Mark the box that best represents your relationship with people at Rowan University:

Unfriendly,
Unsupportive

[] [] [] [] [] []
1 2 3 4 5 6

Friendly,
Supportive

Unfriendly,
Unsupportive

[] [] [] [] [] []
1 2 3 4 5 6

Friendly,
Supportive

Unfriendly,
Unsupportive

[] [] [] [] [] []
1 2 3 4 5 6

Friendly,
Supportive

b. Relationships with staff members

Unfriendly,
Unsupportive

Friendly,
Supportive

[]
1

[]
2

[]
3

[]
4

[]
5

[]
6

Section Three

The following questions have two parts. First, rate how important each item is to you by circling one of the numbers 1-5. Second, rate how satisfied you are with each item by circling one of the numbers from 1-5. Use the following scale.

Importance

Satisfaction

Very
Important
1 2 3 4

Not at all
Important
5

Very
Satisfied
1 2 3 4

Not at all
Satisfied
5

Importance

Satisfaction

Social Involvement

- Establishing Personal
Relationships w/ peers

At Rowan

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

- Getting Involved in
Student Organizations

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

- Getting Involved in
Campus Activities

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

- Attending Cultural
Events on Campus

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

- Interacting with
Students of Different
Races or Cultures

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

- Getting Involved in
Religious Activities

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

- Having a Job While
Enrolled

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

Academic Involvement

- Faculty Availability Outside
Of Class

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

- Social Contact with Faculty

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

- Academic Advising

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

Campus Atmosphere

- Adequate Personal Security

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

- Adequate Physical									
Environment on Campus	1	2	3	4	5				
- Adequate Social Atmosphere	1	2	3	4	5				
- Fitting into Campus									
Community	1	2	3	4	5				

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey. Your answers will be read and analyzed very carefully. Your thoughts are much needed and greatly appreciated. If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, please contact me at jordan80@students.rowan.edu, by telephone at (856) 256 – 7188, or my advisor Dr. Burton Sisco at sisco@rowan.edu or by telephone at (856) 256-3717. Thank you.

- Adam Jordan

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Interview Process for African American Undergraduate Students

While your participation in this interview is voluntary and you are not required to answer any of the questions herein, your cooperation and participation are important to the success of the project and are greatly appreciated. If you choose to participate, please understand that all responses are strictly confidential and no personally identifiable information is being requested. Your completion of this interview constitutes informed consent and your willingness to participate.

Section One

Background Information

- (1) Where were you born and where you raised?
- (2) Were you very involved with your family?
- (3) Were there any activities you participated in your community?
- (4) Were you a part of any clubs or groups in high school?
- (5) Do you feel (not) being involved shaped who you are today?
- (6) Would you change anything about your involvement in the past?
- (7) Did you consider being a part of a school club was as important as doing well academically?
- (8) When you applied to college, did this feeling change?
- (9) Did any or your friends push you towards being involved?
- (10) Did your parents push you towards being involved?

Section Two

Current Information

- (1) What clubs or organizations are you involved in here at Rowan University?
- (2) Whose idea was it for you to join? Why did you choose to do so?
- (3) Do you ever feel uncomfortable as a member of this group?
- (4) Do you feel Rowan has adequate choices for student involvement?
- (5) Do your responsibilities as a member ever conflict with your school work?
- (6) Is there anything you would change in the club(s) you're involved in?
- (7) As a minority, do you feel that Rowan offers a diverse amount of clubs that meet the needs of the minority groups on campus?
- (8) If you weren't a member of a club or organization, would you still feel connected to Rowan?
- (9) If so, in what ways?
- (10) What changes would you make, if any, about Rowan's methods of club promotion?

Section Three

Future Information

- (1) Has the club you're involved in helped you in any way to organize your future plans?
- (2) Will you keep in contact with other members after you graduate?
- (3) Has the club or organization taught you any skills you will be able to utilize in your future?
- (4) Will you have any regrets about the club you're in after you graduate?
- (5) Do you plan on quitting any organization in the near future?
- (6) Will you be proud to have been a member of this group in the future?
- (7) Will you come back at any point and help with events this club has to offer?
- (8) Do you believe joining this club has been detrimental to you in any way? i.e. a loss of friends, poor grades etc
- (9) Will you be an advocate for student involvement in the future?
- (10) Has this interview been helpful? Do you have any questions?

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this interview process. Your answers will be read and analyzed very carefully. I realize that it was very lengthy and time consuming; however your thoughts are much needed and greatly appreciated.

- Adam Jordan

APPENDIX C

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



December 17, 2008

Adam M. Jordan
Box 1052, Student Center
Rowan University
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028

Dear Adam M. Jordan:

In accordance with the University's IRB policies and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to inform you that the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your project:

IRB application number: 2009-082

Project Title: Undergraduate Student Involvement: A Closer Look at the African American Pattern

In accordance with federal law, this approval is effective for **one calendar year** from the date of this letter. If your research project extends beyond that date or if you need to make significant modifications to your study, you must notify the IRB immediately. Please reference the above-cited IRB application number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

Please retain copies of consent forms for this research for three years after completion of the research.

If, during your research, you encounter any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, you must report this immediately to Dr. Harriet Hartman (hartman@rowan.edu or call 856-256-4500, ext. 3787) or contact Dr. Gautam Pillay, Associate Provost for Research (pillay@rowan.edu or call 856-256-5150).

If you have any administrative questions, please contact Karen Heiser (heiser@rowan.edu or 856-256-5150).

Sincerely,

Harriet Hartman, Ph.D.
Chair, Rowan University IRB

c: Burt Sisco, Educational Leadership, Education Hall

Office of Research
Bole Hall Annex
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701

856-256-5150
856-256-4425 fax

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Rowan University

Principle Investigator: Adam Jordan, M.A. Higher Education Administration Candidate
Department of Educational Leadership

By reading this form, I agree to participate in a study entitled “Undergraduate Student Involvement: A Closer Look at the African American Pattern,” which is being conducted by Adam Jordan, an M.A. Higher Educational Administration candidate at Rowan University.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the involvement patterns of African American undergraduate students at Rowan University through a survey and a series of interviews that will take place in three sessions. The data collected in the surveys and interviews will be thoroughly analyzed.

I understand that I am not obligated to participate in the interview sessions, however if I do, I am aware that I will be asked to divulge personal information about my history, current enrollment and activity involvement status, and future plans.

I understand that my responses will be anonymous and all of the data gathered will be confidential. I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used for publication or further research. Furthermore, I am aware that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study and I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.

If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study, I may contact Adam Jordan by phone at (856) 256-7188, or by email at jordan80@students.rowan.edu or Dr. Burton Sisco by phone at (856) 256-3717 or email at sisco@rowan.edu.

APPENDIX E

Content Analysis Rules and Procedures for Logical Analysis of Written Data

RULES AND PROCEDURES FOR LOGICAL ANALYSIS OF WRITTEN DATA

The following decisions were made regarding what was to be the unit of data analysis (Sisco, 1981):

1. A phrase or clause will be the basic unit of analysis.
2. Verbiage not considered essential to the phrase or clause will be edited out-e.g., articles of speech, possessives, some adjectives, elaborative examples.
3. Where there is a violation of convention syntax in the data, it will be corrected.
4. Where there are compound thoughts in a phrase or clause, each unit of thought will be represented separately (unless one was an elaboration of the other)
5. Where information seems important to add to the statement in order to clarify it in a context, this information will be added to the unit by using parentheses.

The following decisions were made regarding the procedures for categorization of content units:

1. After several units are listed on a sheet of paper, they will be scanned in order to determine differences and similarities.
2. From this tentative analysis, logical categories will be derived for the units.
3. When additional units of data suggest further categories, they will be added to the classification scheme.

4. After all the units from a particular question responses are thus classified, the categories are further reduced to broader clusters (collapsing of categories).
5. Frequencies of units in each cluster category are determined and further analysis steps are undertaken, depending on the nature of the data—i.e., ranking of categories with verbatim quotes which represent the range of ideas or opinions.