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**THE OPPRESSIVE RANKING SYSTEM: ISSUES FOR BLACK
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS & HBCUs**

by

Lynn Oberkehr

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services & Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Master of Arts in Higher Education
at
Rowan University
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Leadership

Dedications

To my son, Dakota. Life doesn't always go as planned, but may you always know that hard work and dedication can be used to overcome the hardest of obstacles if you're passionate enough about your dreams.

Acknowledgements

To Leon, thank you for supporting me and our son for the last three years so that I could accomplish this goal. Thank you for listening to me talk about assignment after assignment, paper after paper. Thank you for being my shoulder to cry on when I needed it most, and being a rock through all of the hard moments that arose during this time. I love you.

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Last but not least, thank you to everyone who helped and guided me along the way. Thank you to my bosses and coworkers, who always supported the continuation of my education; thank you to Dr. Wright-Mair for broadening my perspectives astronomically and fueling my passion for this field; and finally, thank you to Dr. Lezotte, without whose help this document could not have come together.

I am immensely grateful for all of you, and this work is a tribute to you all. Thank you.

Abstract

Lynn Oberkehr

The Oppressive Ranking System: Issues for Black Undergraduate Students & HBCUs
2021-2022

Stephanie Lezotte, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in Higher Education

This quantitative study aims to address two areas related to the current research on Black college student experiences and college rankings. First, data obtained from surveys distributed from the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) will be analyzed in order to obtain information related to the engagement of Black undergraduate students on two specific college campuses, Kentucky State University, a historically black college or university (HBCU) and Rowan University, a predominantly white institution (PWI). Second, after this data is analyzed, it will be utilized to determine which of the two campuses provided their Black students with a more positive student experience.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

U.S. News and World Report has been releasing college rankings for nearly two decades. Today, these rankings arguably dictate many decisions made by higher education institutions and those that enroll at these establishments (Myers & Robe, 2009). America's ranking system, which has existed in some form since 1983, has generated criticisms since its creation (Myers & Robe, 2009). For those that may not possess background knowledge on the system of college rankings, these statistics may often seem finite and legitimate. However, based on previous research, we can identify concerns and issues that exist among this published data.

Statement of the Problem

College rankings, for the most part, are extremely problematic (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020; Espinosa et al., 2017; Astin, 2005). In the constantly changing world of higher education, the factors that contribute to college rankings continue to evolve. What originally began as reputational surveys in 1983, these rankings have evolved into a concise methodology that now analyze factors such as graduation and retention rates, acceptance rates, and student indebtedness upon graduation (Myers & Robe, 2009; Morse & Brooks, 2020).

While the methodology of college rankings continues to change over time, it seems as though the criticisms of these rankings continue to evolve with them. Today, although there seems to be a lack of consensus on a proper definition of institutional quality, it appears that the discrepancies related to this concept are at the forefront of the

arguments against college rankings (Myers & Robe, 2009). Of these arguments, it is said that the problematic criterion and weighting, in addition to changes in an institution's ranking, cannot accurately be used to represent the quality of an institution (Myers & Robe, 2009). With these criticisms taken into consideration, it seems that in many cases, college rankings could potentially cause more harm than good, specifically for Black students.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have often provided their students with experiences that are superior to those experiences presented for Black students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). This includes higher grade point averages (GPAs), better faculty-student experiences, higher levels of student engagement, and many more attributes of the college experience (Cokley, 2000; Allen, 1992). However, the system of college rankings by U.S. News and World Report fails to take these various factors into consideration when analyzing the characteristics of an institution, in turn, providing Black students with a sense of false security during their college searches.

Significance of the Problem

While college rankings may have some type of negative impact on various types of academic institutions, minority serving institutions (MSIs) seem to be impacted disproportionately by this data. There are many factors that can contribute to this, including percentage of full-time enrollment of students at MSIs, the restrictive populations used to calculate completion rates, and institutional selectivity and accessibility provided by MSIs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020; Espinosa et al., 2012; Gasman & Conrad, 2013).

In addition to the various discrepancies that can affect institutions, college rankings can often influence students into thinking that MSIs are not as successful as other institutions. However, many MSIs provide their students with experiences that are much more conducive to their learning than their PWI counterparts (Cokley, 2000; Allen, 1992; Terenzini et al, 1997; Conrad & Gasman, 2013). HBCUs are an example of this. U.S. News and World Report provides a list of rankings, often broken up into various categories, one of which is National Universities. This category lists the top universities in the country, with these institutions typically offering a full range of undergraduate, Master's, and Doctoral degrees (U.S. News & World Report, n.d.-c). However, the HBCU that is ranked the highest on the National University scale, Howard University, is ranked 83rd (U.S. News & World Report, n.d.-c). Since the majority of the institutions that are nationally ranked are PWIs, students may be led to believe that HBCUs are inferior to these institutions. This however, seems to be an inaccurate assumption.

Purpose of the Study

This quantitative study aims to address two areas related to the current research on Black college student experiences and college rankings. First, data obtained from surveys distributed from the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) will be analyzed in order to obtain information related to the engagement of Black undergraduate students on two specific college campuses, Kentucky State University, a historically black college or university (HBCU) and Rowan University, a predominantly white institution (PWI). Second, after this data is analyzed, it will be utilized to determine which of the two campuses provided their Black students with a more positive student experience.

Assumptions & Limitations

There are some limitations that should be considered related to this specific study. First are the differences among institutions that were utilized for this study. Kentucky State University is a public institution that had a population of 2,148 students in Fall 2020 (U.S. News & World Report, n.d.-a). Rowan University, on the other hand, is a public institution that had a student population of 15,963 in Fall 2020 (U.S. News & World Report, n.d.-b). Even with a much smaller student population, Kentucky State University had more than double the survey participants compared to the number of survey participants that completed the Rowan University survey.

The second limitation of this study centers around the demographics of the participants. The purpose of this study is to analyze the experience of Black undergraduate students at two different institutions. While KSU's population is majority made up of Black students, there are still other ethnicities and nationalities that attend this institution (National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d.-a). NSSE does not discern the demographics of their survey participants in their published frequency distributions, so there is a chance that not all of the individuals in the survey were Black students. The responses that we will be utilizing from Kentucky State University, however, will be responses from seniors. The survey distributed at Rowan University, however, was distributed to only Black undergraduate seniors.

The third limitation of this study is surrounding the small survey size. Kentucky State University's data is based on 55 students that participated in this survey. For the purposes of Rowan's survey, I hoped to have 210 students complete the survey. This was the ideal sample size, based on the total number of Black undergraduate seniors at Rowan

University, and identified by utilizing an online survey size calculator through Qualtrics. However, I had a total of 23 participants answer survey questions, 17 of which completed the survey entirely.

The fourth limitation of this study comes from the way that Kentucky State University and Rowan University are ranked. Rowan University holds a spot in the National University rankings given by U.S. News and World Report, while Kentucky State University does not. Kentucky State University was ranked 35th in a category referred to as Regional Universities South (U.S. News & World Report, n.d.-a). Rowan University, on the other hand, ranked 179th in the National Universities category (U.S. News & World Report, n.d.-b).

The fifth, and final, limitation of this study is the difference in years surrounding the survey results. Kentucky State University's NSSE data is from their last published survey, which is 2017. Rowan University students, on the other hand, were provided with the survey that NSSE published for 2021. There were small differences in survey questions, though the majority of the questions were the same. Additionally, since the publication of the data in 2017, the COVID-19 pandemic caused changes in the climate of higher education all over the country. This could have affected results of the survey responses.

Operational Definitions

1. Student experiences: how students perceive their institution through their levels of engagement.
2. Engagement indicators: valuable information about a distinct aspect of student engagement by summarizing students' responses to a set of related survey questions (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2020).
3. National Universities: offer a full range of undergraduate majors, plus master's and doctoral programs. These colleges also are committed to producing groundbreaking research (U.S. News & World Report, n.d.-c).
4. Regional Universities: Regional Universities offer a full range of undergraduate programs and some Master's programs but few Doctoral programs (U.S. News & World Report, n.d.-d)
5. HBCU: historically black college or university; also a specific type of minority-serving institution
6. PWI: predominantly white institution
7. MSI: minority-serving institution
8. Mixed enrollment: move between attending college both full time and part time, and not solely through one or the other (Espinosa et al., 2017)
9. Institutional selectivity: how selective institutions are when determining which students will be accepted to attend their institution. This is usually determined by SAT scores, and students' high school standing in the top 10% or 25% (Morse & Brooks, 2020)

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research question:

1. Are there differences in the experiences of Black undergraduate college students at HBCUs and PWIs? It is hypothesized that, contrary to their lower rankings, HBCUs provide their students with experiences that are far more exemplary than their PWI counterparts.

Organization of Thesis

Chapter Two of this document will review the literature on history of completion rates and institutional rankings, issues with college rankings, the history and benefits of HBCUs, and student experiences at HBCUs and PWIs.

Chapter Three will review the methodological approach that was used for the duration of this study. More specifically, I will review the context and purpose of the study, the population and sampling, the data instrumentation and collection, and the data analysis.

Chapter 4 will provide an overview of the data that was collected from the survey. The results will be explained in relation to the research question, and a connection will be made between the results of the survey and the respective rankings of the institutions.

Chapter Five will offer a review of the findings of this study. It will also reveal any gaps that can be utilized for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The History of HBCUs

This literature review provides an overview on the history and benefits of HBCUs and how they often provide experiences for Black undergraduate students that are superior to other institutions, specifically predominately white institutions. These benefits, unbeknownst to most, tend to be hidden in the process of college selection through the system of college rankings and published completion rates. The factors that are taken into consideration in the college ranking process are identified and then explained from a student experience perspective, helping to show the ways in which published college rankings cannot accurately reflect the success and experiences of students that attend HBCUs. This study seeks to uncover the relationship, or lack thereof, between college rankings and the experience of Black undergraduate students in an effort to educate individuals on the inaccuracies of college rankings and uncover some of the hidden benefits that HBCUs are often able to provide.

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have existed in the United States for over a century (Albritton, 2012). Today, there are 107 HBCUs with more than 228,000 students enrolled (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). These institutions typically hold the same goals today as they did when they were first instituted: the education of Black Americans (Gasman & Conrad, 2013). With such honorable goals, and environments that are often conducive to success for Black undergraduate students, it is puzzling why these institutions do not attract as many college students as their

predominately white institution (PWI) counterparts (Gasman et al., 2015). Today, HBCUs enroll only 9% of the nation's African American students (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.-c). While there may be a variety of different explanations for this, one main concern for these institutions is the often-suffocating system of college rankings.

Prior to *Brown v. The Board of Education* in 1954, Black students were confined to HBCUs if they wished to further their education (Albritton, 2012). What are now considered pivotal institutions for minoritized populations, HBCUs once existed as solely a means to educate “free” slaves (Albritton, 2012). Prior to the Civil War, there were three universities in the country that existed to educate this incredibly small population. After the war concluded and more Black individuals were considered free from the confines of slavery, more institutions began forming in an effort to educate Black students that wished to enroll in a postsecondary institution (Albritton, 2012). After the *Brown* decision forced White institutions to open their doors to students of color, HBCUs saw a decrease in the number of students that were enrolling annually (Albritton, 2012). By 1980, only 20% of Black students that attended a higher education institution were enrolled at an HBCU (Albritton, 2012). While some understood this shift as a representation of the quality of education that HBCUs could provide students compared to predominantly white institutions (PWI), this was not necessarily the case (Albritton, 2012). After *Brown v. The Board of Education*, PWIs were also expected to increase their minority enrollment (Albritton, 2012). These institutions had the funding and stability to begin offering minority students incentives in the form of scholarships and financial aid

in an effort to attract them and, furthermore, were able to increase the number of minoritized students that attended their institution (Albritton, 2012).

Even with the shifts in enrollment and plethora of options that exist for Black students today, HBCUs still play an important role in the education of Black students in the United States (Albritton, 2012). However, the benefits that these institutions have created for Black students might not be well known to those that are unfamiliar with HBCUs. HBCUs are often regarded as low-performing institutions that, at-best, exist to diversify the national need for diversity amongst students in higher education (Richards & Awokoya, 2012). Much of this perception stems from the completion rates of these institutions, many of which trail behind the nation's median (Richards & Awokoya, 2012).

College Rankings & Completion Rates: What Are They?

Each year, U.S. News and World Report publishes their list of top colleges and universities in the United States. While these rankings are readily available to anyone that might be investigating which university to attend, the factors that contribute to these rankings are not. According to U.S. News and World Report, there are a number of factors taken into consideration when establishing the ranking of a university (Morse & Brooks, 2020). These include graduation and retention rates, social mobility and Pell Grant data, graduation rate performance, undergraduate academic reputation, faculty resources, student selectivity, financial resources per student, alumni giving rates, and graduate indebtedness (Morse & Brooks, 2020). U.S. News is also open about the factors that they leave out of these rankings. Some of these include things like social life for students and athletics involvement (Morse & Brooks, 2020).

The largest ranking factor for colleges and universities today is their graduation and retention rates, taking up 22% of the entire ranking (Morse & Brooks, 2020).

Although both of these items are evaluated together, the graduation rates, also known as completion rates, make up 17.6% of this data, while retention rates only make up 4.4% (Morse & Brooks, 2020). While some consider retention and graduation rates to be one in the same, they are actually much different.

Graduation rates focus on first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students that complete their degree from their first attended institution in six years or less (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Retention, on the other hand, focuses solely on first-time undergraduate students that return to the same institution annually (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). Retention rates, unlike federal completion rates, take into consideration part-time students and do not set a limit for how long students persist at an institution while achieving their degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Since completion rates hold such a high percentage of college rankings, they become instrumental in ranking the top colleges for students to attend. However, recent research evaluating completion rates in the United States has uncovered faults with how this data is calculated, as well as how it is interpreted by students.

HBCUs, Completion Rates, & College Rankings: The Issues

Current research has provided us with a variety of issues that exist among federal completion data as a whole. Among these issues are the inaccuracy of the data that is reported for graduation rates, as well as a lack of understanding around the importance of institutional and student characteristics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020; Espinosa et al., 2017; Astin, 2005). When computing federal completion data, one of the

main issues is the restrictive population used in calculating the data. The only individuals that are taken into consideration during this process are first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). This means that transfer students and part-time students are automatically excluded from a college's federal completion data. In addition to the restrictive population guidelines that this data considers, they also do not include anyone that has taken six years or more to complete their degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

While these guidelines can negatively affect all colleges and institutions across the country, they often disproportionately affect HBCUs. The majority of students that attend minority-serving institutions (MSIs), including HBCUs, often do not attend full-time (Espinosa et al., 2012). In fact, 52% of all students that attended HBCUs enrolled through mixed enrollment (Espinosa et al., 2012). This means that they enrolled both part-time and full-time throughout their entire college experience. Based on this statistic, more than half of the population at public four-year HBCUs would be excluded from the published federal completion data. This, in turn, excludes a vast amount of Black students and, in turn, members of HBCUs, that are not considered or reported in the rankings.

In a first of its kind study completed by the American Council on Education (ACE) (2017), ACE discovered that the degree completion rates for MSIs were actually much higher than federally published completion data reported. In this study, ACE utilized data from the National Clearing House (NSC), the most comprehensive source of data for higher education nationwide (Espinosa et al., 2017). Unlike federally published data, NSC's report of graduation rates encompasses a much larger student profile (Espinosa et al., 2017). According to NSC's report, 43% of all students graduate from

four-year HBCUs, increasing to 62% for students that were enrolled at these institutions full-time (Espinosa et al., 2017). However, federally published completion data reported that only 34.1% of students graduate from public four-year HBCUs (Espinosa et al., 2017).

In addition to the misleading publication of federal completion data, the missions and goals of HBCUs, while honorable and necessary, also negatively impact their completion rates, and therefore, their rankings. HBCUs, like other MSIs, have always provided access for a large variety of students (Gasman & Conrad, 2013). The populations that HBCUs often serve are much different than the populations that attend PWIs (Espinosa et al., 2017). HBCUs pride themselves in their ability to educate financially disadvantaged, academically underprepared Black students (Allen, 1992). In fact, 74% of all current HBCU students are Pell Grant eligible, proving their commitment to support low-income students (Gasman & Conrad, 2013). In other words, the institutional selectivity of HBCUs is not as discriminatory as it might be at a PWI.

Institutional selectivity refers to the measure of admissions competitiveness at an institution and is evaluated as its own criteria for the rankings posted in U.S. News and World Report (Barron's, 2000; Morse & Brooks, 2020). This category takes up 7% of an institution's ranking, and analyzes student characteristics, such as math, reading, and writing portions of the SAT and high school class standing in the top 10% (Morse & Brooks, 2020). However, students that attend HBCUs are typically much less prepared for college, generally entering their postsecondary institution with lower GPAs and SAT scores than those that attend PWIs (Kim, 2002). By providing a post-secondary education to students that come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and devoting themselves

to the accessibility of their institution for students of color that may be less prepared for a postsecondary institution, HBCUs are inherently punished for the level of access they provide to their communities by receiving lower completion rates, and therefore, lower rankings.

U.S. News and World justifies the importance of this category with claims that students who achieved strong grades and test scores during high school have the highest probability of succeeding at challenging college-level coursework, enabling instructors to design classes that have great rigor (Morse & Brooks, 2020). Misleading statements such as this one, especially when taken from a seemingly credible source, can be used to assist in interpreting college rankings. While some might not see the issue with the discrepancies amongst published college rankings and their explanations, research shows that students, as well as parents, interpret and use this data in a variety of ways.

Why Do Rankings & Completion Rates Matter?

Even with all of the proven discrepancies and issues that exist among published federal completion rates, one of the main concerns for HBCUs lies within the interpretation of these data. For those that might not know exactly what factors go into the calculation of college rankings, this data can be extremely misleading. In fact, research completed by Machung (1998) shows that college rankings impacted the decision of 40% of students who were deciding which college to attend. According to Astin (2005), those that analyze the data indicate that the lower the completion rates and rankings were for the institution, the less likely they were to believe that this institution could be successful at providing a positive educational experience (Astin, 2005). The schools with higher completion rates and rankings, in turn, were interpreted to provide

students with higher rates of success and increase chances of graduation (Astin, 2005). Due to the low completion rates calculated for HBCUs, and in turn, lower rankings in databases like U.S. News and World Report, the many benefits that HBCUs provide to their students are often hidden and overshadowed by college rankings and completion rates.

Benefits of HBCUs: The Student Experience

Regardless of how they may appear based on published data, HBCUs have provided students with benefits outside of receiving a postsecondary education since their creation (Albritton, 2012). Today, these institutions can provide Black students, as well as other students of color, with experiences that they might not have at PWIs (Terenzini et al., 1997). These positive experiences play directly into the students' success and institutional outcomes (Terenzini et al., 1997; Cokley, 2000). Research has shown that Black students that attend HBCUs are more likely to report a positive overall experience at their higher education institution. These experiences include, but are not limited to, greater social and faculty support, fewer racist incidents, more engagement, and more institutional support (Davis, 1994; Fleming, 1984; Allen, 1992). HBCUs also foster environments for Black students that significantly enhance student learning and cultivate leadership skills, directly tying in to these students' college experiences (Conrad & Gasman, 2013). The environments at these institutions often cultivate an ethos of familial support, provide extraordinary resources and opportunities for low-income and under-prepared students, and foster a belief of success in their students which is regularly communicated to them by their faculty and staff (Gasman et al., 2015). These experiences

often correlate directly with the students' growth and accomplishment, which can play into their individual success (Terenzini et al., 1997).

In addition to the positive experiences that these institutions afford their students, it has been shown that there are many institutional differences for Black students that attend HBCUs compared to those that attend PWIs (Cokley, 2000). Cokley (2000) completed a study focused on the correlation between institution type and academic self-concept. In his study, he focused on the differences between students' academic self-concept at HBCUs and PWIs. Academic self-concept can be defined as how a student views their academic ability when compared to their peers (Cokley, 2000). While his findings did not find a significant difference in academic self-concept based on the institution attended, Black students that attended an HBCU displayed a number of positive traits that the students attending a PWI did not. Some of these institutional differences include higher reported GPAs, more positive student-faculty relationships, and more positive perceptions about evaluations of Black student performance (Cokley, 2000). While these results might not support a difference in academic self-concept, they support previous research that the racial composition of an institution can have a direct impact on the outcomes of Black college students (Cokley, 2000).

These experiences are important when looking at the success of Black students at HBCUs, since the experiences of Black students at PWIs are often not as positive, although the institutions appear to be much more successful. Black students that attend PWIs often graduate one third less often than their White counterparts, and report lower rates of academic achievement (Love, 2006; Allen, 1992). Additionally, according to Watson and Kuh (1996), Black students at PWIs experience feelings of alienation and

frustration, as well as a lack of campus support. While the completion rates and rankings of PWIs are typically much higher than HBCUs, it seems as though the experiences for Black students do not correspond. These experiences, therefore, affect the Black college student's success, creating problematic environments and experiences on PWI campuses.

While there may not ever be a perfect way to actually determine which colleges are the best to attend, it seems as though college rankings and federal completion rates cannot speak to the full extent of Black college student experiences. The various positive experiences that exist for Black students on HBCU campuses are excluded from the factors that are utilized to calculate college rankings. These excluded factors include final student GPA, pre-college characteristics, individual student characteristics, student experiences, student involvement, and student-faculty relationships, among many others (Morse & Brooks, 2020). The inaccuracy of this published data can essentially lead to students using inaccurate assumptions to select an institution that they believe is right for them, which can ultimately lead to the hindrance of their success.

While the measuring of student success and experiences can be considered subjective, there are a variety of tools and instruments that can be used today to help us identify what type of experiences that college students are obtaining from attending a higher education institution. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), an empirically tested survey instrument, is just one example. This survey was originally created to provide evidence for the effectiveness of undergraduate teaching and learning in an effort to help colleges and universities improve the experiences of current and prospective students (National Survey for Student Engagement, 2007). Since 2000, 1,650 institutions have participated in NSSE, with a total of 6 million students completing the

survey (National Survey for Student Engagement, 2021). While this method may not be perfect, it has been revised and adjusted over the years to help us retrieve accurate information from today's college student, helping to show whether the institution that they are attending is conducive to helping them succeed.

Many might argue that the success of college students' experiences can be just as valuable as their education. HBCUs can provide valuable experiences to Black students, regardless of the data that seems to be interpreted otherwise (Astin, 2005). Unbeknownst to most, this data excludes a variety of factors, and includes some as well, that might not help in reflecting the institution's true capability of providing students with an exceptional college experience (Morse & Brooks, 2020). The factors that are taken into consideration in the college ranking process can be detrimental to the overall ranking of HBCUs, allowing students to think that these institutions are inferior to their PWI counterparts. It is important that we uncover exactly what rankings show, and do not show, in an effort to better help students choose a higher education institution that is right for them. With the survey instruments that exist today, we can highlight what areas of student success PWIs may be lacking, and bring to light the issues with allowing rankings to be interpreted as the overall success of an institution.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Context of the Study

This study was conducted at one U.S. higher education institution, Rowan University, and the results were compared to verified NSSE data from Kentucky State University (KSU). Rowan University is a predominantly white institution (PWI), while Kentucky State University is a historically black college or university (HBCU). Kentucky State University is a public university that was founded in 1886 (U.S. News and World Report, n.d.-a). Their student population in Fall of 2020 consisted of 2,148 (U.S. News and World Report, n.d.-a). Sixty percent of the students that attended KSU during this time were Black or African American and their student to faculty ratio was 14:1 (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.-a). Kentucky State University does not place in the National Universities rankings in U.S. News and World Report. Instead, they were ranked 35th in a category that is referred to as Regional Universities South (U.S. News and World Report, n.d.-a).

Rowan University is a Carnegie classified national doctoral, public 4-year research institution founded in 1923 located in Glassboro, New Jersey, dedicated to excellence in undergraduate education (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.-b; Rowan University, 2021). In Fall 2020, they had 15,963 students enrolled (U.S. News and World Report, n.d.-b). Sixty-six percent of the students that attended Rowan University were White and ten percent of the student population was Black. Their student to faculty ratio was 17:1 (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.-b). Rowan

University was ranked 179th in National Universities, according to U.S. News and World Reports (U.S. News and World Report, n.d.-b).

The students selected at Rowan University took part in a quantitative study, which ultimately compared NSSE survey results from Kentucky State University, in order to determine whether the rankings at the respective universities reflected the experiences that they had during their undergraduate education.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not college rankings could be used to measure the experiences of Black undergraduate college seniors. I attempted to answer one research question in this study: Are there differences in the experiences of Black undergraduate college seniors at HBCUs and PWIs?

Population & Sampling

The population that was utilized in this research study consisted of Black undergraduate college students that were considered seniors from a credit standpoint. In the U.S. higher education system, this means that all students must have had 90 or more completed college credits in order to complete this survey. Random sampling was used to obtain study participants. The ideal sample size, 210 students, was based on a total of 460 Black undergraduate seniors, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error at 5% and calculated with an online sample size calculator through Qualtrics. The sampling frame consisted of Black undergraduate seniors at Rowan University and was compared to the same group from Kentucky State University. Kentucky State University was selected for two reasons. First, their NSSE results were posted publicly, making the data extremely accessible. Second, their sample size was the closest to the sample size that

was obtained from the survey distribution from Rowan University. Due to the nature of the survey administered by NSSE, anyone that fell outside of the sampling frame was excluded from this study. All Black undergraduate senior students had an equal chance at being selected for this study.

Data Instrumentation and Collection

After IRB approval was received (see Appendix B), the survey was created and disseminated through Rowan University's Qualtrics system. For this study, I utilized a survey which asked questions using the Likert scale that was adopted from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), utilizing the following themes: academic challenge, learning with peers, experiences with faculty, and campus environment (National Survey for Student Engagement, 2020-a). Within these themes, there were 10 indicators that were utilized in order to determine the levels of student engagement and experiences that students had at their respective institutions. These engagement indicators were higher-order learning, reflective & integrative learning, learning strategies, quantitative reasoning, collaborative learning, discussions with diverse others, student-faculty interaction, effective teaching practices, quality of interactions, and supportive environment (National Survey for Student Engagement, 2020-a). This survey was accessed through NSSE's website, where the verified survey instrument is publicly posted at

https://nssesurvey.org/test/main/1/edit.cfm?packaged=true§ionList=main,demo_us,cloning,test .

The engagement variables (EVs) and component items were rigorously tested both qualitatively and quantitatively in a multi-year effort that included student focus groups, cognitive interviews, and two years of pilot testing and analysis (National Survey for Student Engagement, 2020-a). As a result, each EV provides valuable, concise, actionable information about a distinct aspect of student engagement (National Survey for Student Engagement, 2020-a). Since this survey had already been validated through NSSE in terms of determining student engagement, I did not conduct a field test for this study.

Data Analysis

The responses that were collected through the use of the survey instrument were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 24 program for statistical analysis of the data. Once SPSS analyzed the data, I used frequency distributions in the form of tables in order to have a better picture of the differences in the two institutional groups. Each question on the survey was associated with a respective engagement variable, allowing me to analyze the results by categories. This helped to determine if the experiences of Black students differed depending on the university attended in some areas, compared to others (McMillan, 2016). Validity and reliability of this study were confirmed through the NSSE validation of survey questions and results, in addition to random sampling techniques (McMillan, 2016).

Chapter 4

Findings

Profile of the Sample

An email was sent via Rowan's Qualtrics system to 523 students to obtain a random sample of participants. The email indicated the purpose of the study and why these specific students were asked to participate. The survey was distributed through this system three times. Of those that accessed the survey, 23 students completed the survey, either partially or completely, and 17 students completed the survey in its entirety. There were partial responses recorded. As a whole, the survey yielded a response rate of 4.4%.

All participants in this study were Black, undergraduate students, who identified as seniors from a credit standpoint. Of the participants, there were 14 different majors recorded. All majors, aside from biological sciences, made up 2.8% of the survey data. Biological sciences made up 11.1% of the survey data (see Table 1). This data cannot be compared to results posted by Kentucky State University, as their majors were not listed in the published data.

Table 1

Major or Expected Major

Major or Expected Major	n	%
Advising & Strategic Communications	1	2.8
Biochemistry	1	2.8
Biological Sciences	4	11.1
Biology	1	2.8
Chemical Engineering	1	2.8
Communications	1	2.8

Major or Expected Major	n	%
Criminal Justice	1	2.8
Inclusive and Elementary Education w/ a CUG in teaching and ESL	1	2.8
Inclusive Education	1	2.8
International Studies	1	2.8
Law & Justice	1	2.8
Music Education	1	2.8
Psychology	1	2.8
World Religions	1	2.8

Analysis of the Data

Are there differences in the experiences of Black undergraduate college students at HBCUs and PWIs? Results showed that in the majority of explored areas, based on compared frequencies, the experiences at KSU were more beneficial to Black undergraduate seniors than Rowan University. There were 96 survey questions that were associated with ten different engagement indicators regarding experiences during the current school year, each discussing certain experiences as they related to that respective area. The following tables break down the experiences from the different sections of the survey that stood out amongst the others. A snippet of the engagement indicator coding can be found in Appendix A and was determined by NSSE.

Table 2 shows comparisons of survey results for the collaborative learning engagement indicator. Collaborative learning is defined by NSSE as how often students collaborated with others in mastering difficult material by asking for help, explaining material to others, preparing for exams, and working on group projects (National Survey for Student Engagement, 2020-b). In three out of four collaborative learning categories, the students at Kentucky State University answered that collaborative learning took place

“Very Often” in larger percentages than the Rowan University students. However, students at Rowan University seemed more likely to collaborate and participate in group projects than the students at Kentucky State University.

Table 2

Collaborative Learning Engagement Indicator Responses

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?					
Asked another student to help you understand course material	Never	4	17.4	16	28
	Sometimes	10	43.5	21	41
	Often	7	30.4	12	23
	Very Often	2	8.7	5	9
	Total	23	100	54	100
Explained course material to one or more students	Never	2	8.7	5	7
	Sometimes	10	43.5	14	25
	Often	8	34.8	21	40
	Very Often	3	13	14	28
	Total	23	100	54	100
Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students	Never	10	43.5	13	22
	Sometimes	8	34.8	14	24
	Often	3	13	20	41
	Very Often	2	8.7	7	13
	Total	23	100	54	100
Worked with other students on course projects or assignments	Never	2	8.7	8	12
	Sometimes	8	34.8	18	34
	Often	10	43.5	21	43
	Very Often	3	13	5	10
	Total	23	100	52	100

Note. Surveys from different years were utilized to collect data. Only questions that appear on both surveys, with a corresponding engagement indicator (EI) are recorded and compared here. The respective engagement indicators were retrieved through the published results from KSU.

Table 3 shows comparisons of survey results for the reflective & integrative learning engagement indicator. According to NSSE (2020-b), this is defined as how often students made connections with prior knowledge, other courses, and societal issues, took into account diverse perspectives, and reflected on their own views while examining the views of others. Similar to the collaborative learning EI, six out of seven of the scenarios below showed that reflective and integrative learning more often took place at Kentucky State University than it did at Rowan.

Table 3

Reflective & Integrative Learning Engagement Indicator Responses

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
<i>During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?</i>					
Combined ideas from different courses when completing an assignment	Never	2	8.7	7	12
	Sometimes	6	26.1	15	28
	Often	9	39.1	20	39
	Very Often	6	26.1	11	21
	Total	23	100	53	100
	Never	2	8.7	5	10

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
Connected your learning to societal problems or issues	Sometimes	8	34.8	11	19
	Often	8	34.8	19	36
	Very Often	5	21.7	18	35
	Total	23	100	53	100
Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments	Never	4	17.4	2	4
	Sometimes	11	47.8	15	28
	Often	5	21.7	20	37
	Very Often	3	13	16	31
	Total	23	100	53	100
Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue	Never	5	21.7	1	2
	Sometimes	6	26.1	15	28
	Often	6	26.1	22	41
	Very Often	6	26.1	15	29
	Total	23	100	53	100
Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from their perspective	Never	2	8.7	1	2
	Sometimes	6	26.1	12	23
	Often	8	34.8	23	42
	Very Often	7	30.4	17	33
	Total	23	100	53	100
Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept	Never	3	13	1	2
	Sometimes	9	39.1	14	27
	Often	8	34.8	29	54
	Very Often	3	13	9	16
	Total	23	100	53	100

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
Connected ideas from your courses to your prior experiences and knowledge	Never	1	4.5	0	0
	Sometimes	7	31.8	10	20
	Often	10	45.5	24	43
	Very Often	4	18.1	19	36
	Total	22	100	53	100

Note. Surveys from different years were utilized to collect data. Only questions that appear on both surveys, with a corresponding engagement indicator (EI) are recorded and compared here. The respective engagement indicators were retrieved through the published results from KSU.

Table 4 shows comparisons of survey results for the student-faculty interactions engagement indicator. This is defined by NSSE (2020-b) as how often students had meaningful, substantive interactions with faculty members and advisors, such as talking about career plans, working on committees or student groups, discussing course material outside of class, or discussing their academic performance. This EI shows that Rowan was less likely to engage in all of the scenarios listed below, showing higher percentages in the “Never” category in each example.

Table 4*Student-Faculty Interaction Engagement Indicator Responses*

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
<i>During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?</i>					
Talked about career plans with a faculty member	Never	6	26.1	10	17
	Sometimes	5	21.7	16	30
	Often	9	39.1	19	38
	Very Often	3	13	8	16
	Total	23	100	53	100
Worked with a faculty member on activities other than coursework (committees, student groups, etc.)	Never	14	60.9	18	31
	Sometimes	4	17.4	12	24
	Often	2	8.7	15	30
	Very Often	3	13	8	16
	Total	23	100	53	100
Discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class	Never	7	30.4	11	18
	Sometimes	10	43.5	16	30
	Often	5	21.7	18	36
	Very Often	1	4.3	8	16
	Total	23	100	53	100
Discussed your academic performance with a faculty member	Never	5	21.7	7	13
	Sometimes	9	39.1	26	48
	Often	7	30.4	14	27
	Very Often	2	8.7	6	12
	Total	23	100	53	100

Note. Surveys from different years were utilized to collect data. Only questions that appear on both surveys, with a corresponding engagement indicator (EI) are recorded and

compared here. The respective engagement indicators were retrieved through the published results from KSU.

Table 5 shows the differences in survey results for the engagement indicator titled Higher-Order Learning. Higher-order learning is defined as the amount that coursework emphasized challenging learning tasks including applying learned information to practical problems, analyzing ideas and experiences, evaluating information from other sources, and forming new ideas from various pieces of information (National Center for Student Engagement, 2020-b). As with previous results, the students at Kentucky State University answered that higher-order learning took place “Very much” their institutions in greater percentages than students at Rowan. In half of the scenarios below, Rowan answered “Very little” in greater percentages than KSU students, and “Some” in greater percentages in each individual category.

Table 5

Higher-Order Learning Engagement Indicator Responses

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
<i>During the current school year, how much has your coursework emphasized the following?</i>					
Applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations	Very little	2	8.7	2	4
	Some	10	43.5	8	16
	Quite a bit	6	26.1	26	51
	Very much	5	21.7	17	29
	Total	23	100	53	100

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
Analyzing an idea, experience, or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts	Very little	2	8.7	2	4
	Some	9	39.1	9	17
	Quite a bit	6	26.1	24	48
	Very much	6	26.1	17	31
	Total	23	100	52	100
Evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source	Very little	1	4.3	4	9
	Some	11	47.8	9	17
	Quite a bit	8	34.8	19	38
	Very much	3	13.0	21	36
	Total	23	100	53	100
Forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information	Very little	0	0	2	4
	Some	10	43.5	11	21
	Quite a bit	11	47.8	24	47
	Very much	2	8.7	16	28
	Total	23	100	53	100

Note. Surveys from different years were utilized to collect data. Only questions that appear on both surveys, with a corresponding engagement indicator (EI) are recorded and compared here. The respective engagement indicators were retrieved through the published results from KSU.

Table 6 evaluates the responses for Effective Teaching Practices. This is defined by NSSE (2020-b) as the amount instructors emphasized student comprehension and learning with clear explanations and organization, use of illustrative examples, and providing formative and effective feedback. In all categories but one, Rowan students answered that these practices had “Never” occurred in their educational journey, while

KSU students answered in all categories that these practices were “Very much” practiced by their professors.

Table 6

Effective Teaching Practices Engagement Indicator Responses

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
<i>During the current school year, to what extent have your instructors done the following?</i>					
Clearly explained course goals and requirements	Very little	3	15	2	3
	Some	3	15	8	17
	Quite a bit	6	30	18	33
	Very much	8	40	25	47
	Total	20	100	53	100
Taught course sessions in an organized way	Very little	2	10	3	6
	Some	5	25	10	21
	Quite a bit	10	50	18	34
	Very much	3	15	21	40
	Total	20	100	52	100
Used examples or illustrations to explain difficult points	Very little	3	15	4	7
	Some	6	30	14	29
	Quite a bit	7	35	12	22
	Very much	4	20	22	43
	Total	20	100	52	100
Provided feedback on a draft or work in progress	Very little	2	10	7	13
	Some	3	15	7	14
	Quite a bit	13	65	17	33
	Very much	2	10	21	40
	Total	20	100	52	100
Provided prompt and	Very little	3	15	4	7
	Some	11	55	13	24

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
<i>During the current school year, to what extent have your instructors done the following?</i>					
detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments	Quite a bit	3	15	19	37
	Very much	3	15	17	32
	Total	20	100	53	100

Note. Surveys from different years were utilized to collect data. Only questions that appear on both surveys, with a corresponding engagement indicator (EI) are recorded and compared here. The respective engagement indicators were retrieved through the published results from KSU.

Table 7 shows the differences in survey results for the engagement indicator titled Quantitative Reasoning. NSSE (2020-b) defined this EI as how often students engaged with numerical and statistical information across the curriculum, and used this information to reach conclusions, examine real-world problems, and evaluate what others have concluded. Unlike previous results, quantitative reasoning is the first EI that Rowan University students answered happened “Very often” at their institution in higher percentages than the students at Kentucky State University in two out of three categories. However, they also answered in higher percentages in two out of three categories that these quantitative reasoning scenarios had “Never” happened during their educational journeys. Students from KSU answered “Often” in higher percentages in each category than Rowan students, making this category the first set of results without a clear answer

on which school provides the better quantitative reasoning experience to its students.

Table 7

Quantitative Reasoning Engagement Indicator Responses

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
<i>During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?</i>					
Reached conclusions based on your own analysis of numerical information (numbers, graphs, statistics, etc.)	Never	2	10	7	13
	Sometimes	8	40	17	31
	Often	5	25	24	46
	Very often	5	25	5	10
	Total	20	100	53	100
Used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue (unemployment, climate change, public health, etc.)	Never	8	40	8	15
	Sometimes	6	30	16	31
	Often	3	15	24	44
	Very often	3	15	5	10
	Total	20	100	53	100
Evaluated what others have concluded from numerical information	Never	6	30	10	18
	Sometimes	6	30	16	30
	Often	7	35	21	40
	Very often	1	5	6	12
	Total	20	100	53	100

Note. Surveys from different years were utilized to collect data. Only questions that appear on both surveys, with a corresponding engagement indicator (EI) are recorded and compared here. The respective engagement indicators were retrieved through the

published results from KSU.

Table 8 shows the results in respect to the engagement indicator titled Discussions with Diverse Others. This is described as how often students had discussions with people who differ from themselves in terms of race or ethnicity, economic background, religious belief, or political views (National Center for Student Engagement, 2020-b). When it comes to the results labeled “Very Often”, this category has the highest difference in percentages between the two schools. The students at Kentucky State University answered that the following discussions happened “Very Often” with individuals that differed from them in each category in the highest percentage difference than the students did at Rowan University.

Table 8

Discussions with Diverse Others Engagement Indicator Responses

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
<i>During the current school year, about how often have you had discussions with people from the following groups?</i>					
People of a race or ethnicity other than your own	Never	1	5.6	1	1
	Sometimes	5	27.8	6	13
	Often	8	44.4	12	27
	Very often	4	22.2	28	59
	Total	18	100	47	100
People from an economic background other than your own	Never	1	5.6	1	1
	Sometimes	5	27.8	12	26
	Often	8	44.4	12	27
	Very often	4	22.2	22	46
	Total	18	100	47	100

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
<i>During the current school year, about how often have you had discussions with people from the following groups?</i>					
People with religious beliefs other than your own	Never	0	0	4	8
	Sometimes	8	44.4	7	5
	Often	6	33.3	13	28
	Very often	4	22.2	23	48
	Total	18	100	47	100
People with political views other than your own	Never	1	5.6	3	6
	Sometimes	5	27.8	10	22
	Often	8	44.4	19	41
	Very often	4	22.2	15	31
	Total	18	100	47	100

Note. Surveys from different years were utilized to collect data. Only questions that appear on both surveys, with a corresponding engagement indicator (EI) are recorded and compared here. The respective engagement indicators were retrieved through the published results from KSU.

Table 9 compares survey results related to learning strategies at each institution. This engagement indicator is defined by NSSE (2020-b) as how often students enacted basic strategies for academic success, such as identifying key information in readings, reviewing notes after class, and summarizing course material. As with almost every other category, the students at Kentucky State answered in higher percentages that they had “Very Often” engaged in activities that required them to utilize the following learning strategies. In two out of the three scenarios below, Rowan students answered that they had “Never” utilized the learning strategies described in higher percentages than the

students at KSU.

Table 9

Learning Strategies Engagement Indicator Responses

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
<i>During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?</i>					
Identified key information from reading assignments	Never	0	0	1	3
	Sometimes	7	38.9	6	14
	Often	7	38.9	20	39
	Very often	4	22.2	20	45
	Total	18	100	47	100
Reviewed your notes after class	Never	2	11.1	4	9
	Sometimes	5	27.8	11	22
	Often	5	27.8	16	35
	Very often	6	33.3	16	34
	Total	18	100	47	100
Summarized what you learned in a class or from course materials	Never	2	11.1	4	9
	Sometimes	6	33.3	9	20
	Often	6	33.3	20	43
	Very often	4	22.2	14	28
	Total	18	100	47	100

Note. Surveys from different years were utilized to collect data. Only questions that appear on both surveys, with a corresponding engagement indicator (EI) are recorded and compared here. The respective engagement indicators were retrieved through the

published results from KSU.

Table 10 looks at the engagement indicator titled quality of interactions. Quality of interactions is defined as how students rated their interactions with important people in their learning environment, including other students, advisors, faculty, student services, and other administrative staff members (National Center for Student Engagement, 2020-b). In every category except the one referring to “other administrative staff and offices” such as the bursar and registrar, the students at KSU rated their interactions as “Excellent” in much higher percentages than Rowan University students. Additionally, in every single category aside from faculty, Rowan University students rated their interactions as “Poor” in higher percentages. Neither KSU or Rowan students answered that their interactions with faculty were poor, but on a scale of one to seven, Rowan students rated their interactions as a “2” in higher percentages than Kentucky State students.

Table 10

Quality of Interactions Engagement Indicator Responses

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
<i>Indicate the quality of your interactions with the following at your institution</i>					
Students	1 – Poor	1	5.6	2	4
	2	1	5.6	0	0
	3	1	5.6	3	7
	4	5	27.8	3	6
	5	3	16.7	10	22

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
Academic Advisors	6	4	22.2	10	21
	7 – Excellent	3	16.7	16	35
	- Not applicable	0	0	3	4
	Total	18	100	47	100
	1 – Poor	4	22.2	2	4
	2	1	5.6	2	4
	3	2	11.1	5	10
	4	4	22.2	2	4
	5	4	22.2	5	12
	6	0	0	11	23
Faculty	7 – Excellent	3	16.7	18	39
	- Not applicable	0	0	2	6
	Total	18	100	47	100
	1 – Poor	0	0	0	0
	2	2	11.1	2	4
	3	1	5.6	3	6
	4	5	27.8	2	5
	5	6	33.3	12	26
	6	3	16.7	11	24
	7 – Excellent	1	5.6	17	36
Student services staff (career services, student activities, housing, etc.)	- Not applicable	0	0	0	0
	Total	18	100	47	100
	1 – Poor	3	16.7	2	5
	2	2	11.1	2	4
	3	2	11.1	5	11
	4	1	5.6	8	17
	5	2	11.1	7	15
	6	0	0	6	13
	7 – Excellent	1	5.6	8	19
	- Not applicable	7	38.9	9	16
Other administrative staff and offices	Total	18	100	47	100
	1 – Poor	3	20	7	15
	2	1	6.7	6	13
	3	1	6.7	6	13
	4	5	33.3	9	17

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
(registrar, financial aid, etc.)	5	3	20	5	10
	6	0	0	9	20
	7 – Excellent	2	13.3	4	9
	- Not applicable	0	0	1	3
	Total	15	100	47	100

Note. Surveys from different years were utilized to collect data. Only questions that appear on both surveys, with a corresponding engagement indicator (EI) are recorded and compared here. The respective engagement indicators were retrieved through the published results from KSU.

Table 11 shows the results from the final engagement indicator identified by NSSE: supportive environment. This is defined by NSSE (2020-b) as the amount that the institution emphasized help for students to persist and learn through academic support programs, encouraged diverse interactions, and provided social opportunities, campus activities, health and wellness, and support for non-academic responsibilities. As you can see below, the students at KSU answered that they perceive their institution to place “Very much” emphasis in every single category, aside from overall well-being, relating to a supportive environment for its students. Again, the students at Rowan University answered “Very little” in greater quantities in each section associated with the institution emphasizing a supportive environment.

Table 11*Supportive Environment Engagement Indicator Responses*

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
How much does your institution emphasize the following?					
Providing support and help to students academically	Very little	1	5.9	2	5
	Some	9	52.9	10	22
	Quite a bit	5	29.4	16	36
	Very much	2	11.8	16	37
	Total	17	100	44	100
Using learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.)	Very little	6	35.3	2	4
	Some	2	11.8	9	20
	Quite a bit	9	52.9	20	46
	Very much	0	0	13	30
	Total	17	100	44	100
Encouraging contact among students from difference backgrounds (social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.)	Very little	7	41.2	8	17
	Some	6	35.3	8	20
	Quite a bit	4	23.5	19	42
	Very much	0	0	10	22
	Total	17	100	45	100
Providing opportunities to be involved socially	Very little	3	18.8	3	6
	Some	7	43.8	11	27
	Quite a bit	5	31.3	18	41
	Very much	1	6.3	12	26
	Total	16	100	44	100
Providing support for your overall well-being (recreation, health care,	Very little	5	29.4	10	24
	Some	5	29.4	5	12
	Quite a bit	4	23.5	24	53
	Very much	3	17.6	5	11
	Total	17	100	44	100

Question	Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
		n	%	n	%
counseling, etc.)					
Helping you manage your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	Very little	10	58.9	14	32
	Some	3	17.6	15	34
	Quite a bit	3	17.6	11	25
	Very much	1	5.9	4	9
	Total	17	100	44	100
Attending campus activities and events (performing arts, athletic events, etc.)	Very little	6	35.3	4	9
	Some	2	11.8	11	26
	Quite a bit	6	35.3	18	42
	Very much	3	17.6	11	24
	Total	17		44	100
Attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues	Very little	9	52.9	5	12
	Some	3	17.6	8	19
	Quite a bit	3	17.6	20	45
	Very much	2	11.8	11	24
	Total	17	100	44	100

In addition to the survey questions related to engagement indicators, two sections of the NSSE survey asked questions regarding the overall experience of the student at their respective institution, as well as whether they would choose the same institution if they had a chance to complete their educational experience all over again.

Table 12 and Table 13 below show the compared responses to the questions from KSU and Rowan students. Consistent with previous findings, students at Kentucky State University were more likely to rate their experience as “Excellent” than Rowan

University students. Additionally, 66% of KSU students said that they would likely select the same institution if they had the chance, compared to only 53% of Rowan University students.

Table 12

How Would You Rate Your Entire Experience at This Institution?

Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
	n	%	n	%
Poor	0	0	1	2
Fair	8	47.1	9	21
Good	7	41.2	19	42
Excellent	2	11.8	15	35
Total	17	100	44	100

Table 13

If You Could Start Over Again, Would You Go to the Same Institution You Are Now Attending?

Response Options	Rowan University		Kentucky State University	
	n	%	n	%
Definitely no	2	11.8	5	11
Probably no	6	35.3	10	23
Probably yes	7	41.2	15	35
Definitely yes	2	11.8	13	31
Total	17	100	43	100

Chapter 5

Summary, Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Summary of the Study

This quantitative study aimed to address two areas related to Black college student experiences and college rankings. First, data was obtained from surveys utilized from the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) and was analyzed in order to obtain information related to the engagement of Black undergraduate students on two specific college campuses, Kentucky State University, a historically black college or university (HBCU) and Rowan University, a predominantly white institution (PWI). After reviewing the findings of the survey results, I looked at both institutions as a whole to determine which institution seemed to be better for Black undergraduate student experiences. I then used this information to determine if the rankings of the respective institution, which can often be interpreted to show the success of student experiences (Astin, 2005), accurately reflect the experiences of the students that attended.

Random sampling was used to recruit Black undergraduate Rowan students in their senior year, with 90 or more completed credits. The survey was sent to a total of 523 students at Rowan University, and was distributed three separate time via Qualtrics over a three-week period. At that point, frequency distributions were used to analyze the current data and compare it to the published NSSE data obtained from Kentucky State University.

Discussion of the Findings

Research Question

The survey sought to reveal whether or not there were differences in the experiences of Black undergraduate students at a PWI and an HBCU. Rowan University was selected as the PWI in this study, and data collected from its students was compared to the previously published data from Kentucky State University, an HBCU. There were 23 students that took part in this survey, 17 of which completed it in its entirety. The questions that we asked were geared toward experiences at the respective institution. The survey found that in nine out of the ten categories that indicated successful experiences, KSU often had more positive experiences than the students at Rowan University.

Experiences & Rankings

What do these results tell us about student engagement and experiences in relation to college rankings? According to US News and World Report, one of the most comprehensive ranking websites in the world, Rowan University ranks higher than Kentucky State University (U.S. News & World Report, n.d.-c, U.S. News & World Report, n.d.-d). In 2021, Rowan University ranked 179th in the National Universities category, the top-rated category in rankings. National Universities offer a full-range of undergraduate, Master's, and Doctoral programs (U.S. News & World Report, n.d.-c). Kentucky State University, on the other hand, did not place in the category of National Universities. Instead, in 2021, they ranked 35th in a category that is titled Regional Universities South (U.S. News & World Report, n.d.-a).

Astin (2005) tells us that university rankings can often be interpreted by students and parents to show which universities would provide their students with the best experiences. If this were true, then the survey results would have yielded that Rowan University students had superior experiences to the students at Kentucky State University, due to their higher rankings. NSSE identified ten different engagement indicators as a way to determine successful experiences and engagement for college students. We utilized those same engagement indicators and analyzed experiences separately for each indicator. Out of the ten indicators, Kentucky State University students' experiences were superior to the experiences of the students at Rowan University in nine of the ten categories, with the remaining category revealing inconclusive results.

KSU students answered in higher percentages than Rowan students that their experiences in the following areas were positive: higher-order learning, reflective and integrative learning, learning strategies, collaborative learning, discussions with diverse others, student-faculty interaction, effective teaching practices, quality of interaction, and supportive environment. The only indicator that seemed to yield somewhat inclusive results was quantitative reasoning.

Results from this particular survey have revealed that, contrary to popular belief, college rankings may not always indicate a successful college experience for all individuals. Kentucky State University students seemed to have more positive experiences at their respective institution than the Rowan University students, contrary to the ranking difference between the two schools.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings and conclusions as of a result of this study, the following suggestions for practice are recommended:

1. Educate Black college students on the reality of college rankings and their indications of a successful college experience.
2. Analyze and implement ways in which PWIs can better emulate the environments of HBCUs.

Recommendations for Further Research

Future research may be conducted to explore the following questions:

1. How can rankings be effectively modified to better represent experiences for college students?
2. If rankings are not accurate, what should Black students be looking for when choosing a college that they believe will give them the best experience?
3. What in-depth factors contribute to the following engagement indicators and how can we implement them better at PWIs?
4. How can we better improve experiences at PWIs for our Black undergraduate students?

Conclusion

Rankings have existed for centuries, providing data that is important and notable for the perspective college student and those that work in higher education (Myers & Robe, 2009). While this data can be used in a variety of ways, it can also be interpreted in ways that can be misleading and hurtful to certain populations. It is important to know the ways in which rankings can be helpful, while also noting the aspects that they exclude. Knowing more about these rankings and the information that they consider can better help students to select a college that will be the best fit for them and ultimately, provide them with the best possible college experience.

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Appendix A

NSSE Core Codebook



This codebook is divided into six sections: (a) NSSE Core (the main survey questions), (b) Engagement Indicators (scale values derived from sets of items), (c) Survey Weights (values used adjust the proportional responses to population parameters), (d) Data Provided by Your Institution (variables used for weights and other institutional records), (e) Data Related to Survey Administration (metadata related to survey procedures), and (f) Appendix (major field and country code lists).

Survey questions are listed in the order that students received them. Response options appear in italics beneath. Variable names appear in brackets (e.g., [askquest]) after each item. Items that are recoded (e.g., reversed response values) or derived (new computed values such as age category or total number of written pages) from original question(s) are shaded and prefaced by a bracket and the word "RECODED" or "DERIVED."

NSSE Core

1. During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?

Response options: Very often=4, Often=3, Sometimes=2, Never=1

- a. Asked questions or contributed to course discussions in other ways [askquest]
- b. Asked another student to help you understand course material [CLaskhelp]
- c. Explained course material to one or more students [CLexplain]
- d. Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students [CLstudy]
- e. Worked with other students on course projects or assignments [CLproject]
- f. Given a course presentation [present]

2. During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?

Response options: Very often=4, Often=3, Sometimes=2, Never=1

- a. Combined ideas from different courses when completing assignments [RIntegrate]
- b. Connected your learning to societal problems or issues [RIsocietal]
- c. Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments [RIdiverse]
- d. Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue [Rlownview]
- e. Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from their perspective [RIperspect]
- f. Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept [RInewview]
- g. Connected ideas from your courses to your prior experiences and knowledge [RIconnect]

3. During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?

Response options: Very often=4, Often=3, Sometimes=2, Never=1

- a. Talked about career plans with a faculty member [SFcareer]
- b. Worked with a faculty member on activities other than coursework (committees, student groups, etc.) [SFotherwork]
- c. Discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class [SFdiscuss]
- d. Discussed your academic performance with a faculty member [SFperform]

4. During the current school year, how much has your coursework emphasized the following?

Response options: Very much=4, Quite a bit=3, Some=2, Very little=1

- a. Memorizing course material [memorize]
- b. Applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations [HOapply]
- c. Analyzing an idea, experience, or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts [HOanalyze]
- d. Evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source [HOevaluate]
- e. Forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information [HOform]

5. During the current school year, to what extent have your instructors done the following?

Response options: Very much=4, Quite a bit=3, Some=2, Very little=1

- a. Clearly explained course goals and requirements [ETgoals]
- b. Taught course sessions in an organized way [ETorganize]
- c. Used examples or illustrations to explain difficult points [ETexample]
- d. Provided feedback on a draft or work in progress [ETdraftfb]
- e. Provided prompt and detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments [ETfeedback]
- f. Explained in advance the criteria for successfully completing your assignments [etcriteria]
- g. Reviewed and summarized key ideas or concepts [etreview]
- h. Taught in a way that aligns with how you prefer to learn [etprefer]
- i. Enabled you to demonstrate your learning through quizzes, assignments, and other activities [etdemonstrate]

6. During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?

Response options: Very often=4, Often=3, Sometimes=2, Never=1

- a. Reached conclusions based on your own analysis of numerical information (numbers, graphs, statistics, etc.) [QRconclude]
- b. Used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue (unemployment, climate change, public health, etc.) [QRproblem]
- c. Evaluated what others have concluded from numerical information [QRevaluate]

7. During the current school year, about how many papers, reports, or other writing tasks of the following lengths have you been assigned? (Include those not yet completed.)

Response options: None=1, 1-2=2, 3-5=3, 6-10=4, 11-15=5, 16-20=6, More than 20 papers=7

- a. Up to 5 pages [wrshort]
- b. Between 6 and 10 pages [wrmed]
- c. 11 pages or more [wrlong]

[RECODED] The following items were recoded from items 7a to 7c using the midpoints of response ranges and an estimate for the unbounded option. Recoded values represent the number of papers, reports, or other writing tasks:

Values: None=0.0, 1-2=1.5, 3-5=4.0, 6-10=8.0, 11-15=13.0, 16-20=18.0, More than 20 papers=23.0

- Up to 5 pages [wrshortnum]
- Between 6 and 10 pages [wrmednum]
- 11 pages or more [wrlongnum]

[DERIVED] Estimated pages of assigned writing, recoded and summed by NSSE from wrshort, wrmed, and wrlong using the midpoints of response ranges and an estimate for unbounded options [wrpages]

8. During the current school year, about how often have you had discussions with people from the following groups?

Response options: Very often=4, Often=3, Sometimes=2, Never=1

- a. People of a race or ethnicity other than your own [DDrace]
- b. People from an economic background other than your own [DDeconomic]
- c. People with religious beliefs other than your own [DDreligion]
- d. People with political views other than your own [DDpolitical]

9. During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?

Response options: Very often=4, Often=3, Sometimes=2, Never=1

- a. Identified key information from reading assignments [LSreading]
- b. Reviewed your notes after class [LSnotes]
- c. Summarized what you learned in class or from course materials [LSsummary]

10. During the current school year, to what extent have your courses challenged you to do your best work? [challenge]

Response options: Not at all=1 to Very much=7

11. Which of the following have you done or do you plan to do before you graduate?

Response options: Done or in progress=4, Plan to do=3, Do not plan to do=2, Have not decided=1

- a. Participate in an internship, co-op, field experience, student teaching, or clinical placement [intern]
- b. Hold a formal leadership role in a student organization or group [leader]
- c. Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together [learncom]
- d. Participate in a study abroad program [abroad]
- e. Work with a faculty member on a research project [research]
- f. Complete a culminating senior experience (capstone course, senior project or thesis, portfolio, recital, comprehensive exam, etc.) [capstone]

12. About how many of your courses at this institution have included a community-based project (service-learning)? [servcourse]

Response options: All=4, Most=3, Some=2, None=1

[DERIVED] Sum of high-impact practices for first-year students marked 'Done or in progress' for learncom or research or 'All, Most, or Some' for servcourse [HIPsumFY]

[DERIVED] Sum of high-impact practices for seniors marked 'Done or in progress' for learncom, research, intern, abroad, or capstone, or 'All, Most, or Some' for servcourse [HIPsumSR]

13. Indicate the quality of your interactions with the following people at your institution.

Response options: Poor=1 to Excellent=7

- a. Students [QIstudent]
- b. Academic advisors [QIadvisor]
- c. Faculty [QIfaculty]
- d. Student services staff (career services, student activities, housing, etc.) [QIstaff]
- e. Other administrative staff and offices (registrar, financial aid, etc.) [QIadmin]

[RECODED] To accommodate SAS users, recodes of question 13 are included in the data file to include "Not applicable" as a valid response.

Values: Poor=1 to Excellent=7, Not Applicable=9

- Students [QIstudentR]
- Academic advisors [QIadvisorR]
- Faculty [QIfacultyR]

- Student services staff (career services, student activities, housing, etc.) [QlstaffR]
- Other administrative staff and offices (registrar, financial aid, etc.) [QladminR]

14. How much does your institution emphasize the following?

Response options: Very much=4, Quite a bit=3, Some=2, Very little=1

- Spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work [empstudy]
- Providing support to help students succeed academically [SEacademic]
- Using learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.) [SElearnsup]
- Encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds (social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.) [SEdiverse]
- Providing opportunities to be involved socially [SEsocial]
- Providing support for your overall well-being (recreation, health care, counseling, etc.) [SEwellness]
- Helping you manage your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) [SEnonacad]
- Attending campus activities and events (performing arts, athletic events, etc.) [SEactivities]
- Attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues [SEevents]

15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Response options: Strongly disagree=1, Disagree=2, Agree=3, Strongly agree=4

- I feel comfortable being myself at this institution. [SBmyself]
- I feel valued by this institution. [SBvalued]
- I feel like part of the community at this institution. [SBcommunity]

16. About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing the following?

Response options: 0=1, 1-5=2, 6-10=3, 11-15=4, 16-20=5, 21-25=6, 26-30=7, More than 30 (Hours per week)=8

- Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities) [tmprep]
- Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.) [tmccurr]
- Working for pay **on campus** [tmworkon]
- Working for pay **off campus** [tmworkoff]
- Doing community service or volunteer work [tmserve]
- Relaxing and socializing (time with friends, video games, TV or videos, keeping up with friends online, etc.) [tmrelax]
- Providing care for dependents (children, parents, etc.) [tmcare]
- Commuting to campus (driving, walking, etc.) [tmcommute]

[RECODED] Items 16a to 16h were recoded using the midpoints of response ranges and an estimate for the unbounded option. Recoded values represent the number of hours per week.

Values: 0 hrs=0, 1-5 hrs=3, 6-10 hrs=8, 11-15 hrs=13, 16-20 hrs=18, 21-25 hrs=23, 26-30 hrs=28, More than 30 hrs=33

- Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities) [tmprephrs]
- Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.) [tmccurrhrs]
- Working for pay **on campus** [tmworkonhrs]
- Working for pay **off campus** [tmworkoffhrs]
- Doing community service or volunteer work [tmservehrs]
- Relaxing and socializing (time with friends, video games, TV or videos, keeping up with friends online, etc.) [tmrelaxhrs]
- Providing care for dependents (children, parents, etc.) [tmcarehrs]
- Commuting to campus (driving, walking, etc.) [tmcommutehrs]

[DERIVED] Estimated number of hours working for pay recoded and summed by NSSE from tmworkonhrs and tmworkoffhrs using the response range midpoints and an estimate for unbounded options [tmworkhrs]

17. Of the time you spend preparing for class in a typical 7-day week, about how much is on *assigned reading*? [reading]

Response options: Very little=1, Some=2, About half=3, Most=4, Almost all=5

[DERIVED] Estimated number of hours reading calculated by multiplying tmprephrs by a proportion of reading (Very little=.10; Some=.25; About half=.50; Most=.75; Almost all=.90) [tmreadinghrs]

[RECODED] Collapsed recode of tmreadinghrs [tmreadinghrscol]

Values: 0 hrs=1; More than zero, up to 5 hrs=2; More than 5, up to 10 hrs=3; More than 10, up to 15 hrs=4; More than 15, up to 20 hrs=5; More than 20, up to 25 hrs=6; More than 25 hrs=7

18. How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?

Response options: Very much=4, Quite a bit=3, Some=2, Very little=1

- a. Writing clearly and effectively [pgwrite]
- b. Speaking clearly and effectively [pgspeak]
- c. Thinking critically and analytically [pgthink]
- d. Analyzing numerical and statistical information [pganalyze]
- e. Acquiring job- or work-related knowledge and skills [pgwork]
- f. Working effectively with others [pgothers]
- g. Developing or clarifying a personal code of values and ethics [pgvalues]
- h. Understanding people of other backgrounds (economic, racial/ethnic, political, religious, nationality, etc.) [pgdiverse]
- i. Solving complex real-world problems [pgprobsolve]
- j. Being an informed and active citizen [pgcitizen]

19. How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution? [evalexp]

Response options: Excellent=4, Good=3, Fair=2, Poor=1

20. If you could start over again, would you go to the *same institution* you are now attending? [sameinst]

Response options: Definitely yes=4, Probably yes=3, Probably no=2, Definitely no=1

21. Do you intend to return to this institution next year? [returnexp]

Response options: Yes=1, No=0, Not sure=9

Note: Only non-seniors receive this question.

22. To what extent have the faculty and staff at your institution done a good job helping students adapt to the changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic? [covidexp]

Response options: Very much=4, Quite a bit=3, Some=2, Very little=1

23a. How many majors do you plan to complete? (Do not count minors.) [MAJnum]

Response options: One=1, More than one=2

23b. Please enter your major or expected major:

- Major [MAJfirst]

Response options: Text box plus drop-down list of majors (see Appendix A) from NSSE's lookup table.

Appendix B

IRB Approval Letter



DHHS Federal Wide Assurance Identifier: FWA00007111

IRB Chair Person: Dr. Ane Johnson

IRB Director: Eric Gregory

Effective Date: December 2, 2021

Notice of Approval - Initial

Study ID: PRO-2021-583

Title: The Oppressive Ranking System: Issues for Black Undergraduate Students & HBCUs

Principal Investigator: Stephanie Lezotte

Study Coordinator: Lynn Oberkehr

Co-Investigator(s): Lynn Oberkehr

Sponsor: Department Funded

Submission Type: Initial

Submission Status: Approved

Approval Date: December 1, 2021

Expiration Date: November 30, 2022

Approval Cycle: 12 months

Continuation Review Required: Yes

Closure Required: Yes

Appendix C

Alternate Consent



ONLINE SURVEY (ALTERNATE CONSENT)

You are invited to participate in this online research survey entitled “The Oppressive Ranking System: Issues for Black Undergraduate Students & HBCUs”. You are included in this survey because you fit the population of Black undergraduate students that identify as seniors. The number of subjects to be enrolled in the study will be 210.

The survey may take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in this survey, do not respond to this online survey. Completing this survey indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey.

The purpose of this research study aims to determine whether HBCU or PWI campuses provided their Black undergraduate students with a more positive student experience.

There are no risks or discomforts associated with this survey. There may be no direct benefit to you, however, by participating in this study, you may help us understand more about the experiences of Black undergraduate students at different universities.

Your response will be kept confidential. We will store the data in a secure computer file and the file will be destroyed once the data has been published. Any part of the research that is published as part of this study will not include your individual information. If you have any questions about the survey, you can contact the researcher at the address provided below, but you do not have to give your personal identification.

Stephanie Lezotte
Department of Educational Services & Leadership
856-256-4124

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at (856) 256-4078– Glassboro/CMSRU.

This study has been approved by the Rowan IRB, PRO-2021-583.

Please complete the checkbox below.

To participate in this survey, you must be 18 years or older and identify as a Black undergraduate senior from a credit standpoint. Place a check box here ☐

Completing this survey indicates that you are voluntarily giving consent to participate in the survey ☐