

Enablers and Barriers Influencing African American Administrators' Career Advancement at Predominantly White Institutions of Higher Learning

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The purpose of this study was to explore and identify enablers and barriers contributing to African Americans' career advancement into administrative positions at PWIs of higher learning. The analysis yielded 23 emergent themes and eight overall themes regarding the enablers and barriers influencing the career advancement of African Americans at public two and four-year PWIs in Mississippi. The findings from the study suggest the creation of a state and national mentoring program in addition to hiring strategies aimed at growing the pipeline of potential African American administrators could lead to PWIs having a workforce that adequately represents its student population.

Keywords: Higher Ed Leadership, Diversity, Inclusion, Education Administration, African American Administrators

INTRODUCTION

Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) of higher learning must employ knowledgeable and competent administrators in the ever-evolving environment of higher education (Bisbee, 2007; Turner & Grauerholz, 2017). With the increasing growth, in the United States, of racial and ethnic minorities' matriculation into college, PWIs of higher learning must pursue ways to diversify their administration to equip all students with the skills needed to live and compete in a global society (Creighton, 2007). Betts, Urias, Chavez, and Betts (2009) and Whittaker, Montgomery, and Acosta (2015) suggest the more diverse PWIs of higher learning faculty, staff, and student body become, the need to develop a more diverse pool of upper-level administrators to lead increases.

Reyes and Rios (2005) suggest many PWIs of higher learning do not have adequate African American representation to lead their institutions in curriculum development, mentoring, recruitment, and governance. However, Martin (2014) along with Perna, Gerald, Baum, and Milem (2007) attribute the modest representation of African American administrators and faculty members to systemic barriers impeding the recruitment, advancement, and tenure of African Americans at PWIs of higher learning. As society searches for ways to cultivate a culturally and socially sensitive environment that produces

success for all people, educational institutions, especially PWIs, must understand the barriers African Americans encounter (Dockery, 2015).

According to Spearman and Harrison (2010), having someone of the same race and the same gender as a role model within the organization or institution is more influential than having someone of the opposite race or gender as a role model. Turrentine and Conely (2001) suggest students from all backgrounds benefit from faculty and staff diversity because students witness different role models, as well as an environment reflective of the workforce students will enter. Furthermore, previous studies suggest the underrepresentation of role models of the same race, in academic settings, might impede African Americans and other minorities' professional progress (Spearman & Harrison, 2010). Chen and Hamilton (2015) referenced a study conducted by Tinto (1975), which explains how the dynamics between students and educational institutions could significantly impact a student's decision to persist or drop out of college. Kelly, Gayles, and Williams (2017) contend the lack of African American representation at PWIs could lead to racial tension and protest by African American students and faculty.

BACKGROUND

To comprehend how the leadership at PWIs of higher learning has advanced for African American administrators, an examination of the history of African Americans and their plight in the U.S. educational system follows (Higgs, 2014). Since the origin of higher education in America, women and minorities have encountered discriminatory practices (Beckwith, Carter, & Peters, 2016). Caplow and McGee (2001) maintain that race-based discrimination seems absolute in higher education and no major PWIs of higher learning employ more than a token representation of African American faculty members.

Before the 1960s, the minimal representation of African American administrators and faculty members at PWIs was due to deliberate discriminatory practices (Jackson, 1991). The minimal representation of African Americans in administration in higher education dates back to the *Brown v. the Board of Education* 1954 ruling (Brown, 2007). Leading up to the ruling of *Brown v. the Board of Education*, the majority of African American college students attended historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) due to a segregated educational system (Brown, 2007). Brown (2007) suggests after the *Brown v. the Board of Education* decision, African Americans lost administrative positions at HBCUs. Due to the significant decrease in African American students' matriculation at HBCUs and noticeable growth in their matriculation in desegregated colleges, the diversity gap in higher education leadership positions expanded (Brown, 2007).

From early accounts, affirmative action was enacted to eradicate racial barriers prohibiting access to disenfranchised groups (Jones, 2007). African Americans have since made marginal advancements in accumulating notable educational accomplishments such as earning high school diplomas, achieving higher education matriculation, filling faculty and staff positions, receiving promotions, and earning senior-level administration appointments (Jones, 2007). Although the objectives of affirmative action have positive intent, the structural and political changes pertaining to employment, advancement, and promotion opportunities often come at the expense of the minority hires having to endure and adjust to institutions' political landscape. (Alger, 2000).

Previous studies and reports support the notion of progress in higher education, but Jones (2007) calls for greater action in improving the representation of African Americans and women in positions such as chief academic officers (CAOs), vice presidents, deans, and directors. Jackson and O'Cullaghan (2009b) contend students and faculty diversity rate at PWIs are not representative of the population change in America. For example, in 2006, racial minorities held 13.6% of college CEO positions (King & Gomez, 2008), and according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2008), racial minorities held only 16% of faculty positions. Jackson and O'Cullaghan (2009b) contend students of color during the same timeframe represented 31% of the total student body. A study conducted by Jackson and O'Cullaghan (2009) on full-time administrators in higher education indicated an increase in administrative positions of 51%, and of those available openings, Caucasians filled 89.6% of the vacancies as compared to minorities who filled only 10.4% of the vacancies.

African Americans statistically lack representation in top policy and decision-making positions, except for positions traditionally designated for minorities (Brown, 2007). Likewise, women and people of color, especially African American administrators, are underrepresented in higher education (Alexander, 2010; Seltzer 2017). The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2017) report women in 1986 held about 9.5% of college president positions in the United States. Of the 9.5%, African American women occupied about 3% of those positions. Data collected by the American Council on Education (ACE; 2017) show during the same period, females represented about 56% of the student population attending colleges and universities. Moreover, Whites represented 82.6% and Blacks totaled 10.5%. In 2016, the ACE (2017) reports women representation increased to 31.1% while Black women representation remained static at approximately 8.1% of the total number of women serving as college presidents. Conversely, the enrollment of African American females in institutions of higher learning increased to 15.5% (ACE, 2017). The study also suggests ethnic and racial minorities account for less than a fifth of all college and university presidents. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education (2014), men in higher education administrative roles, in 2011, totaled 109,347. Only 8,638 (7.9%) administrators were African American males.

The community college system has experienced significant growth in the matriculation of African American students, but the representation of African American faculty and administrators fails to keep pace (Fujii, 2014). The American Association of Community Colleges (2015) reports the racial demographics of community college presidents as follows: 81% Caucasian; 8% African American; 6% Hispanic; 1% Asian Pacific, and 3% American Indian. According to Fujii (2014), most community colleges' senior and mid-level administrators are promoted or hired from the faculty level; therefore, an increased level of African American representation at the administrative ranks is dependent on the progress of faculty diversity.

Prior studies indicate African American faculty members lack adequate representation, and when compared to their Caucasian counterparts, African Americans often have inferior academic standing and status at their institutions (Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh, & Bonous-Hammarth, 2000; Jackson, 2004; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009a). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2016) reports full-time faculty members at community colleges and universities total 807,032. Of the 575,657 (approximately 71%) were Caucasian and 44,146 (approximately 5%) were African American. When comparing full-time faculty members at community colleges and universities based on gender by race, Caucasian males accounted for 39%, Caucasian females 33%, African American males 2% and African American females 3%.

If the United States seeks to improve or maintain its global positions in production, innovation, and technology, Palmer, Davis, Moore, and Hilton (2010) propose success will derive from developing human capital, especially African Americans, through higher education. African Americans along with other racial minorities, from 2007-2008, represented 35% of all students enrolled at two-year colleges across the United States (Fujimoto, 2012). Now, more than any other time in the history of the United States, a need exist to reduce the disparity of college access and degree attainment between African Americans and Caucasians (Wagner, 2006). Increasing access could help to ensure the United States has an adequate number of college-educated people to participate in the fast-paced and ever-growing knowledge-based economy (Wagner, 2006).

According to NCES (2016), the original source for data on U.S. colleges, universities, and technical and vocational institutions, the number of students enrolled at the 14 predominantly White public community colleges in Mississippi, in 2015-2016, totaled 69,125. African American students enrolled at those institutions totaled 25,506 (approximately 37%). During that same time frame, Mississippi's five predominantly White public universities included a student population of (undergraduate) 54,595. Of the 54,595 approximately 21% (11,502) of the students were African American.

According to the Chronicle of Higher Education (2014), the national college completion rate for students who attended two-year public colleges at 150% time to complete was 19.4%. In Mississippi, the completion rate was 24.2%. However, the data from the report indicates a significant gap between the graduation rate of Caucasian and African American college students. Nationally, Caucasian students'

completion rate at 150% (4 years) time to complete is 22.4% as compared to African American students at 18.9% (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2014). When examining two-year public institutions in Mississippi, the graduation rate for Caucasian students was 28.9% and for African American students 10.7%. However, the graduation rate at public four-year institutions at a 150% time to complete (6 years) nationally was 57.6% compared to 49.8% in Mississippi (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2014). The data from the study also show when comparing Caucasian students and African American students' graduation rate at public four-year institutions at a 150% time to complete, nationally, Caucasian students had a 60.6% completion rate versus African American students who had a 40.3% completion rate. In Mississippi, Caucasian students had a completion rate of 58.8% as compared to African American students who had a 36.5% completion rate.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

A critical factor in completing a successful research project requires the researcher to develop a set of well-structured, clearly defined, and meaningful research objectives (Roberts, 2010). Likewise, research objectives set the parameters for what the researcher expects to achieve, driving various aspects of the methodology, i.e., design, data collection, and analysis (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, the following research objectives were developed to explore the enablers and barriers influencing African Americans' advancement at PWIs of higher learning.

***RO1** - Describe the demographic characteristics of the participants, including their gender, work experience in higher education, years of experience in their current position, and degree attainment.*

***RO2** - Explore and identify perceived enablers influencing the advancement of African Americans at PWIs of higher learning.*

***RO3** - Explore and identify perceived barriers influencing the advancement of African Americans at PWIs of higher learning.*

***RO4** - Explore African American administrators' perspective toward advancement opportunities for African Americans at PWIs of higher learning.*

***RO5** - Identify institutional strategies in place at PWIs of higher learning addressing racial diversity.*

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Future African American administrators and institutions of higher learning can use the data collected as a resource to promote awareness and improve understanding for college and university administrators who are committed to bridging the racial diversity gap in higher education leadership. A review of the literature suggests only marginal gains in the advancement of African Americans into administrative positions at PWIs. (Perrakis, Campbell, & Antonaros, 2009; Robinson-Neal, 2009). This research focuses on the perspectives and realizations of African American administrators regarding enablers and barriers influencing advancement into upper-level administrative positions in today's higher education environment.

This study represents an effort to inform African Americans who desire senior-level and mid-level administrator positions (e.g., chancellors, presidents, vice-presidents, deans, and directors) of the perceived internal and external enablers and barriers influencing advancement opportunities. Moreover, this information could be instrumental for institutions of higher learning serious about supporting the advancement of African Americans. The findings will add to the conversations pertaining to the development and implementation of strategies, which could lead to an increase in the recruitment and retention of African American administrators at PWIs of higher learning.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), a conceptual framework can assist researchers in understanding which methodology is appropriate. Merriam (1998) describes a conceptual framework as an analytical instrument explained as an illustration and description serving as the platform and the structure of a study. A conceptual framework corresponds with theories, concepts, and terms from a specific area of literature. Within the conceptual framework (see Figure 1), three theories—critical race theory (CRT), human capital theory (HCT) and the theory of representative bureaucracy—are used to examine the impact of race and other internal and external factors as it relates to understanding the advancement of African Americans at PWIs.

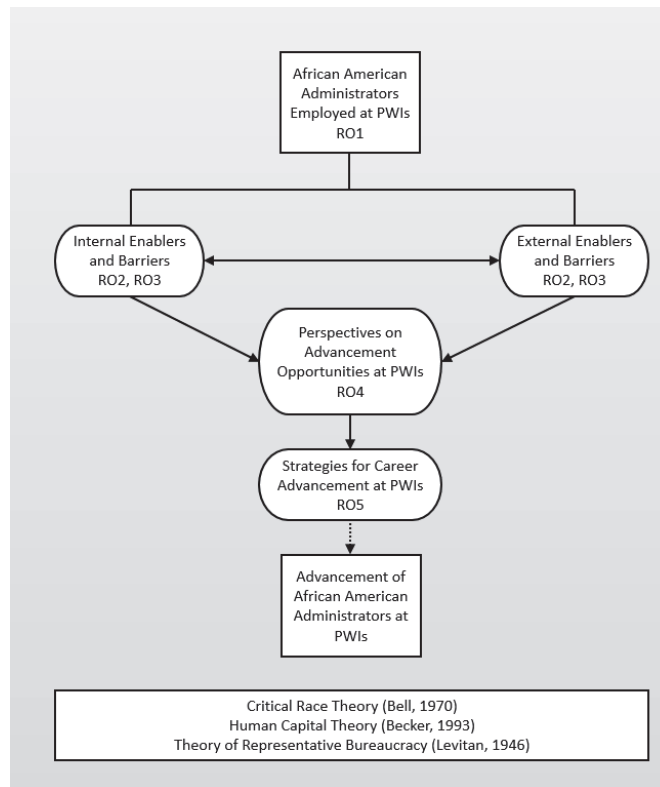
Critical race theory, a social science theoretical framework originating from the critical theory, is intended to study race, laws, and power and their interrelationship with society and culture (Lynn, Benigno, Williams, Park, & Michell, 2006). The CRT was used to identify perceived enablers and barriers influencing African Americans' ability to advance into higher education administration. According to Zamudio, Russell, Rios, and Bridgeman (2011), CRT contests the concept of meritocracy, which assumes all people have equal access to opportunity. Critical race theory, according to Parker and Villalpando (2007), provides opportunities for action to address the racial injustices in educational institutions. Applying CRT suggests race is the principal driver in American culture (Blauner, 2001). Parker and Villalpando (2007) also assert CRT can be an important and invaluable lens through which to investigate and clarify educational institutions' managerial policies and procedures, and their relationship to racial injustice. CRT identifies racial and ethnic minorities as one of the primary factors in defining societal inequities (Lynn et al., 2006).

Human capital theory, according to Schultz (1981), suggests human capital consists of the knowledge, skills, and abilities—innate or acquired—that an employee brings to an organization. Becker (1993) adds that education and training, as a whole, advance human capital. Therefore, this researcher used the human capital theory as a lens through which to investigate the factors, informal and formal, influencing the career advancement of African Americans at PWIs.

According to Bradbury and Kellough (2008), the theory of representative bureaucracy posits to ensure the interest of all groups, in the decision-making process of a bureaucratic organization, organizations should reflect the people in terms of race, ethnicity, and sex. Meier and Smith (1994) also reference the importance of representation within the administration of public agencies. Selden (1998) suggests the theory of representative bureaucracy holds that passive representation leads to active representation.

Passive representation is the degree to which a government employs people of diverse demographic backgrounds, while active representation is the pursuit of policies echoing the interests and needs of those people (Selden, 1998). Meier and Smith (1994) state the representation of diverse employees increases the legitimacy of the organization, thereby, bringing about a feeling of inclusiveness at the upper levels of the organization. Bradbury and Kellough (2008) note research in the field of public administration is consistent with active representation and studies in the criminal justice field. Testing relationships between workforce demographics and government, at the individual level, were consistent with outcomes observed as actions by minorities or female public servants. Therefore, this researcher uses the theory of representative bureaucracy as a lens to identify and explore PWIs diversity and inclusion strategies and if they are passive or active institutions.

FIGURE 1
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



LITERATURE REVIEW

The 1960s represented an era of change in the United States in which social and political policies deprived African Americans equal access to pursuing a post-secondary degree (Prendergast, 2002). African Americans' enrollment in PWIs of higher learning increased significantly after the 1954 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* (Prendergast, 2002). The review of literature for this study provides a brief perspective on the history of race and education in America as well as the social and political legislation that presented barriers and opened doors of opportunities in higher education for African Americans. With educational opportunity at an all-time high, African Americans are still disproportionately represented in leadership positions at PWIs of higher learning (Evans & Chun, 2007). The purpose of this literature review is to provide the credibility required to justify conducting the study (Creswell, 2005). The review of literature provides insight on perceived internal and external enablers and barriers influencing African American administrators' career advancement at PWIs of higher learning.

Historical Perspective on Race and Education

To understand and overcome the current barriers and challenges in higher education faced by African American administrators, the historical journey of African Americans must be understood (Allen et al., 2000). African Americans in higher educations have continued to be affected by trends in higher education, which limits their access to opportunity; thereby, contributing to low representation of African Americans employed in leadership positions in higher education (Marable, 2008). Despite constitutional advancements, lawmakers have passed legislation suppressing African Americans and other marginalized groups (Lopez, 2006). For many African American students and other disadvantaged students, the passing

of the Higher Education Act of 1965 made education more accessible (Ria & Critzer, 2000). However, the Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954 is arguably the most renowned piece of academic legislation to date (McNeal, 2009)

In the years leading into, and the subsequent years following the Revolutionary War, the majority of post-secondary institutions in the United States embraced social norm of racial exclusion and the idea of African Americans not being educable at the college level (Slater, 1994). African Americans were considered academically challenged, mediocre, and unworthy of being educated (Slater, 1994). It was not until nearly 200 years after the establishment of Harvard University (1896), the first institution of higher learning in the United States, before an African American would earn a college degree from an American university (Slater, 1994). Dreading educating slaves would defy the slave system, the White majority legislated laws making it a crime to teach slaves to read and write (Barrows, 1836). Slaves who pursued educational obtainment endured mental and corporal punishment from their owners (Harris, 1992).

With the general notion that African American slaves were intellectually inferior and incapable of earning a college degree, in the early 1800s, a few African Americans were allowed to enroll in certain colleges and universities (Slater, 1994). In 1883, Alexander Lucius Twilight graduated from Middlebury College in Vermont making him the first African American to earn a degree from a college in the United States. Edward Jones and John Russwurm soon followed Alexander Lucius Twilight, graduating from Amherst and Bowdoin three years later (Slater, 1994). Founded in 1833, Oberlin Collegiate Institute became the first institution of higher learning to publicly adopt policies admitting African American students (Rudolph, 1990). In 1862, Mary Jane Patterson earned a college degree, making her the first African American woman to do so (Slater, 1994).

In an effort to maintain White superiority and privilege throughout the 18th and 19th century, the federal government, judicial, legislative, and executive branches continued imposing and passing acts and policies based on misguided beliefs (Prendergast, 2002). One such illustration was the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* court decision, which upheld the separate but equal racial segregation laws for public facilities (Byrd-Chichester, 2000). Prendergast (2002) suggests changes for African Americans, socially and politically, as it related to restrictions prohibiting them from pursuing higher education did not come about until 1960. However, it was the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* case in 1954 which produced the first victory regarding education for African Americans in which the U. S. Supreme Courts acknowledged segregation laws as being unconstitutional (Rolle, Davies, & Banning, 2000). It took almost eighteen years after 1954 ruling in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* before enrollment for African American students nearly doubled at colleges and universities, leading to a record number of African American students graduating from PWIs of higher learning in the United States (Rolle et al., 2000).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 coupled with federal legislation produced by President Kennedy and President Johnson were instrumental in generating political victories for African Americans (DeSousa, 2001). According to Williams (2001), it was the civil rights moment and the enactment of federal legislation, not the essence of equality and justice within the academic institutions, which led to the desegregation of post-secondary institutions. These victories forced integration, allowing African Americans greater access into PWIs of higher learning, which had long denied African Americans access because of the color of their skin (Williams, 2001). Byrd-Chichester (2000) suggests the involvement of the federal courts mandating PWIs of higher learning to grant access to African Americans met enormous resistance, especially in southern states like Mississippi and Alabama.

STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCEMENT AT PWIs

Women and minorities in the field of higher education have struggled to obtain support in the form of mentoring in part because of the historical nature of higher education and most workplaces (Tessen, White, & Webb, 2011). The practice of mentoring has materialized into an institutional strategy by organizations for minorities to attain career promotion, retention, and success in senior leadership roles (Blackwood, 2010). Wilson and Meyer (2012) suggest diversity management, if appropriately

incorporated, can increase diversity within an organization. Literature has also identified succession planning as a strategic method for creating a seamless transition for the advancement of minority employees (Rothwell, 2005).

Mentoring

Mentoring as defined by Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011) is the practice whereby a senior or more experienced individual, direct, coach, counsel, and assist a junior, younger, new, or less experienced employee to help cultivate and develop their leadership skills and possible advancement within the institution. Previous literature suggests mentoring relationships provide enormous advantages to individuals who participate (Ballenger, 2010; Jacobson & Lomotey, 1995; Kram, 1985). However, without the benefits of mentorship, minorities are least likely to advance and will continue to earn less than their White counterparts (Blackwood, 2010; Seanlon, 1997). Mentoring is a vital part of the developmental process, both personal and professional, as it relates to all facets of higher education, e.g., students, faculty, and staff members (Vance, 2016). Research on the effects of mentoring supports the notion of mentoring having a meaningfully and positive impact on the earning and promotion potential of those involved in such relationships, eliminating some of the inequities existing in earnings and career advancement (Hubbard & Robinson, 1998).

Mentoring, for African American faculty, is an accepted method by which to promote their professional maturation and increase representation in PWIs of higher learning; however, there is not sufficient empirical data in this area to prove this is the case (Tillman, 2001). Now more than ever, institutions are becoming more dependent on mentoring as an instrument to improve socialization, training, and career development (Young, Cady, & Foxon, 2006). Good mentoring, a wide range of experiences, and the opportunity to participate in leadership programs increase African Americans chances of obtaining executive level positions with colleges and universities (Jackson, 2001; Nelms, 1999). Judson (1999) suggest effective mentorship, in part, contributes to the success of African American administrators.

According to Bogat and Redner (1995), a mentor is an individual who has more expertise and skills than the protégé in a specific field or area, in which the mentor facilitates the professional growth of the protégé. The primary functions of mentors are their behavior and psychosocial roles and career development (Kram, 1985). Mentors in their psychosocial role serve as friend, coach, role model, and counselor as well as provide personal support when needed (Kram, 1985). Moreover, role modeling serves as a separate function (Scandura, 1992). Protégé's receive tremendous benefits from the mentoring relationship, and as a result, the protégé receives knowledge and experience from the interactions with the mentor, adding value to the protégé's personal and professional development (Kram, 1985). As it relates to career development, mentors assume the responsibilities of coaching and creating opportunities for positive recognition as well as provide assignments which challenge the protégé to grow as a leader, while serving as a coach (Kram, 1985).

Diversity Management

The effect diversity has within an organization is maximized when strategically instituted within the organization's mission, vision, and strategic plans (Wilson, 2015). Historically, the task of overseeing diversity among human capital was the responsibility of division and department heads or the human resource department (Sabharwal, 2014). The literature suggests employing the use of diversity management can increase inclusion; moreover, implementing inclusion strategies to change the culture of an organization is critical to the diversity management practice (Sabharwal, 2014). To move organizations past shallow levels of diversity practices to organizational culture change and management, Wyatt-Nichol and Antwi-Boasiako (2012) posit, perception and practices are imperative. Juffer (2001) references the importance of cultural sensitive training and multicultural courses as essential management practices for transforming institutional culture, promoting inclusive campus culture, and minimizing internal and external perspectives.

When analyzing strategies of management and accountability, Bradbury and Kellough (2008) advocate that when viewed from the perspective of representative bureaucracy, strategies can produce a more inclusive leadership team, reflecting the student population, while moving an institution from passive to active representation. According to Flowers and Moore (2008), studies suggest upper management subscribe to an array of management practices to increase the representation of minority leaders in college administration positions. To grow diversity within the leadership pipeline, Wilson and Meyer (2013) and Galarrage (2014) suggest the use of succession planning and management as a viable method for access and promoting inclusion for minority groups at the chief executive level. Aligning management and succession planning can help decrease barriers hindering the pipeline of minority non-positional leaders (Grotrian-Ryan, 2015).

Succession Planning

Succession planning is a method in which companies can create a seamless transition to field vacancies, especially position of leadership, by identifying potential successors (Kowalewski, Moretti, & McGee, 2011). Succession planning allows the organization to develop a talent pipeline (Rothwell, 2005). According to Grotrian-Ryans (2015), effective implementation and management of succession plan strategies could enhance diversity, address retirement issues in leadership positions, and prepare the next generation of minority leaders. To achieve the goals of succession planning, Rowthell (2005) suggests a comprehensive plan that includes assessment personnel and position duties, the use of strategies, a commitment to the procedure, evaluation of future employees and positional requirements, and the evaluation of succession planning strategies.

Succession planning is a top-down approach requiring a commitment from upper management to achieve the goals of identifying potential candidates and critical positions within the agency (Orellano, 2018). Strategic planning combined with identifying future leadership vacancies followed by a process outlined for developing possible successor could make for an effortless transition when it is time to fill vacant positions (Grotrian-Ryans, 2015). Investing and growing replacements is a vital piece to developing an effective succession plan to increase diversity at the senior level. According to a presidential study released in 2013, 80 % of the 87% of White male executives working at PWI of higher learning are nearing retirement (ACE, 2013). Orellano (2018) suggests institutions of higher learning should implement succession planning strategies identifying mentors and endorsing the advancement of minorities to address the lack of racial diversity.

METHOD

A qualitative approach was used to explore and gain an understanding of enablers and barriers influencing African Americans career advancement into administration positions at PWIs of higher learning. The study's design was qualitative phenomenological. The study explores the lived experiences of African American administrators. The researcher conducted 12 one-on-one interviews using semistructured, open-ended interview questions to collect descriptive narratives about the lived experiences of African American administrators working at PWIs of higher learning in Mississippi. The interviews consisted of a series of eight semi-structured, open-ended question.

Population and Sample

For this study, the population was mid and upper-level African American administrators who work at predominantly White two-year and four-year public institutions of higher learning in the state of Mississippi. A focus group was used to triangulate data collected from one-on-one interviews. The six focus group members were all employed at two-year public PWIs in Mississippi. This study employed a snowball (chain) sampling technique. Table 1 and Table 2 provides demographics information for the interview participants and focus group participants.

RESULTS

The researcher analyzed the data using interpretative phenomenological analyses (IPA). IPA data analysis design allows the researcher to have some autonomy and flexibility to adapt based on the researcher's objectives (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The analysis of the data and its subsequent theme development produced eight themes, seven relating to the research objectives for this study. The following themes developed from the transcribed audio interviews and the reflective journal are listed below.

- Theme 1 *Good Mentors*
- Theme 2 *Relationships matter*
- Theme 3 *The intangibles: What to bring to the table*
- Theme 4 *Above and beyond expectations*
- Theme 5 *Challenges influencing advancement*
- Theme 6 *"The only" or "the first"*
- Theme 7 *The optimistic future*
- Theme 8 *Strategies for growth*

TABLE 1
INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Participant	Gender	Yrs. Working In Higher Ed	Yrs. Working In Higher Ed. Adm.	Yrs. Working Current Position	Degree Attainment At Start of Current Position	Highest Level of Degree Attainment	Position
1-3T	M	26	19	19	Master	Doctorate	ULA
2-Thomas	M	12	7	5	Master	Master	MLA
3-Tina	F	10	10	6	Specialist	Specialist	ULA
4-Tim	M	25	20	3	Doctorate	Doctorate	ULA
5-Joyce	F	23	12	3	Doctorate	Doctorate	ULA
6-Tonya	F	12	6	5	Master	Master	MLA
7-Sarah	F	19	10	7	Doctorate	Doctorate	ULA
8-Tiffany	F	16	3	3	Master	Master	MLA
9-Amy	F	19	11	11	Master	Doctorate	MLA
10-Ebony	F	10	5	5	Master	Master	MLA
11-Dennis	M	28	28	7	Doctorate	Doctorate	ULA
12-Heather	F	12	9	2	Master	Doctorate	MLA

Note. MLA refers to Mid-Level Administrator
ULA refers to Upper-Level Administrator

TABLE 2
FOCUS GROU P PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

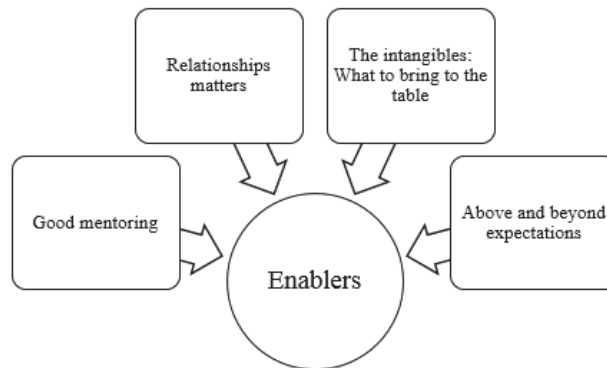
Participants	Gender	Race	Yrs. Working In Higher Ed	Yrs. Working In Current Position	Highest Level of Degree Attainment	Position
Participant 1	M	C	25	6	Doctorate	MLA
Participant 2	F	C	21	1	Doctorate	ULA
Participant 3	M	O	15	6	Master	MLA
Participant 4	M	C	11	5	Doctorate	MLA
Participant 5	F	C	9	1	Doctorate	ULA
Participant 6	F	AA	5	5	Specialist	MLA

Note. MLA refers to Mid-Level Administrator
 ULA refers to Upper-Level Administrator
 AA refers to African American
 C refers Caucasian
 O refers to all other races

THEMES ASSOCIATED WITH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ENABLERS

Based on responses from the research participants, four themes were discovered and identified as enablers influencing career advancement (see Figure 2). The perceived internal and external enablers identified in the study were good mentors, relationships matters, the intangibles, and above and beyond expectations. However, Theme Four above and beyond the expectations was discovered to both an enabler and barrier.

**FIGURE 2
ENABLERS**



Theme 1. Good Mentoring

When discussing people instrumental to success, nine of the 12 participants interviewed alluded to the impact and role their mentor(s) played in their path to becoming administrators. However, only four participants identified people, within their current institution, who served as mentors. Due to the lack of African American administrators at their institution; only one participant reported having an African American mentor. When asked about their professional career in higher education and what gave them the confidence they were ready for a position in administrations, seven participants recognized individuals who had mentored them from previous employment. Several participants attributed some of their success to the strong support received from supervisors who mentored them early on in their career.

Theme 2. Relationships Matter

Of the 12 participants, 10 expressed the importance of developing strong relationships internally and externally. Those internal relationships were identified as being important because “when issues occur, it’s important to have trusted people to assist with problem-solving.” “Alternatively, there may be times when you need an advocate at the table to speak on your behalf, especially when it comes to promotions.” According to the study participants, “it is not always what you know, but who you know that can open up doors leading to advancement.” Participants acknowledge the importance of developing internal relationships with students and faculty members, and external relationships with community members and sister institutions.

Theme 3. The Intangibles: What to Bring to the Table

When asked about innate qualities African Americans need to advance into administration at a PWI, 11 participants identified strong work ethic. Other participants identified qualities like integrity, confidence, compassion, intrinsic motivation, and understanding of one’s self as needed attributes.

When asked about the innate qualities African Americans need to possess when seeking to advance into administration at a PWI, the focus group members identified many of the same attributes identified

by the one-on-one interview participants. However, the focus group members believed the attributes identified were necessary for anyone seeking to become an administrator.

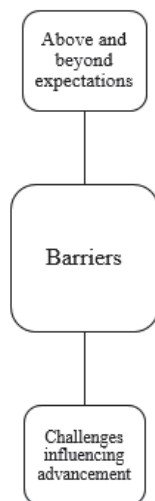
Theme 4. Above and Beyond Expectations

When discussing the qualification future African American administrators at PWIs in Mississippi would need, most participants agreed, proper credentialing was necessary. Ten participants believed earning a terminal degree would be critical to increasing the representation of African Americans in the pipeline for leadership positions at PWI's. This belief was evident; all but two of the participants either held terminal degrees or were enrolled in doctoral programs. All but one of the interview participants expressed the belief that just being qualified was not enough for African Americans. Several participants expressed the need for future African American leaders to take advantage of every opportunity even if it meant going above and beyond the call of duty, without pay. When presented the question about formal and informal training believed to be important when pursuing advancement into administration, participants' expressed the value in obtaining advanced degrees and participating in internal and external educational leadership programs. However, when one focus group member alluded to the notion of African Americans having to work twice as hard and being held to a different standard than Whites at her institution. No other member of the group disagreed with her perspective, but one of the members stated: " I hold everybody to the same standards regardless of race, gender, or what have you."

THEMES ASSOCIATED WITH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL BARRIERS

Based on responses from the research participants, two themes were discovered and identified as barriers influencing career advancement. Study participants responded to questions about barriers and challenges they encountered at PWI, as well as possible challenges future African American administrators may encounter. Theme 4, above and beyond expectation and Theme 5, challenges influencing advancement were identified as barriers (see Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3
BARRIERS**



Theme 5. Challenges Influencing Advancement

When addressing the challenges influencing African Americans' desire to advance, some participants perceived internal promotions, who knows who, and stereotypes about African Americans as barriers.

Other themes uncovered included perception of the institutions, continuous inconsistency in standards and hiring practices, a lack of African American mentors, and small candidate pool. Moreover, when discussing barriers influencing career advancement for African Americans, participants alluded to the lack of mentors, especially African American mentors, as a challenge influencing advancement. Study participants also recognized the inconsistent hiring practices at their institution and attributed them, and the lack of African American representation on hiring committees to the underrepresentation of African Americans at their institution. When the focus group members were asked the same question as the one-on-one interview participants about the cultural climate and promoting racial diversity within the hiring practice at their institution. One focus group member's response was, "we discussed the notion of making sure to check the diversity box when it comes to interview committees but not because we are being intentional..."

Study participants spoke openly and honestly about race and stereotypes and their influence on African Americans' career advancement at PWIs. Several participants suggested it was more than just stereotypes about African Americans presenting challenges in attracting qualified African Americans to PWIs in Mississippi, it was also the perception that some people have of Mississippi and some of the PWIs in Mississippi. And on the subject of racial stereotypes, some participants contend stereotypes about African Americans can influence career advancement opportunities. The focus group members comments about race and stereotypes supported the commentary made by the one-on-one participants suggesting perceptions of the PWIs and race relations in Mississippi might affect PWIs ability to recruit and hire qualified African Americans.

"THE ONLY" OR "THE FIRST"

During the one-on-one interviews, many of the study participants talked about their experience as being either "the only" or "the first" at their institution. Study participants alluded to the pressure, loneliness, and challenges encountered by them as "the only" or "the first." Theme 6, while not connected to the research objectives, was recognized as being a significant finding due to the number of participants who were either the only or first at their institution.

Theme 6. "The Only" or "The First"

The pressure and anxiety of being "the only" or "the first" were expressed over and over by participants. One of the participants described the pressure of feeling troubled and stress in being the only one, suggesting, at times as if he was called on to speak on behalf of all the African Americans at his institution. Another participant expressed the idea of feeling like she was not being heard and wondering if her peers saw her as just being a token.

PERSPECTIVES TOWARDS ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Participants were asked their thoughts regarding African Americans' access to leadership positions and expressed some concerns, but they were optimistic about the future for African Americans at PWIs. Some of the participants suggest future African American administrators will not face as many challenges as previous generations or their generation.

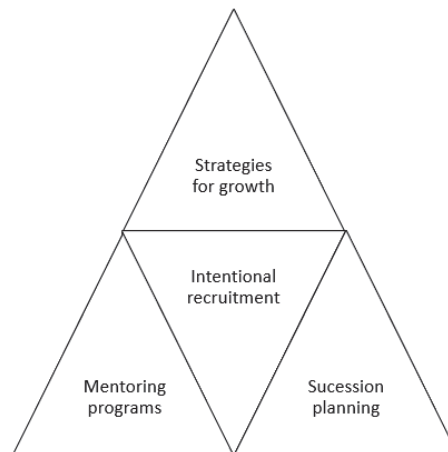
Theme 7. The Optimistic Future

Many participants, when discussing their perspective toward the advancement of African Americans at PWIs, expressed a belief which suggests some of the current members of the dominant culture at their institution do not see diversity as a priority and are unwilling to relinquish control. However, they suggest in certain departments at their institution, change is already occurring, and they are very optimistic about the future for African Americans taking on leadership positions at PWIs in Mississippi.

STRATEGIES ADDRESSING RACIAL DIVERSITY

When asked about specific policies, procedures or strategies in place at their institution to address hiring more minorities, only one of the participants stated having procedures in place, outside of the standard federal discrimination policy, at their institution. The findings also include possible strategies such as developing mentoring programs, succession planning, and PWIs becoming more intentional in recruiting African Americans for position of leadership. Study participants suggest implementing such strategies could increase the application pool for administrative positions.

FIGURE 4



Theme 8. Strategies for Growth

Nine participants believed their college administration promotes diversity. When discussing possible strategies, the majority of participants believed their institution's administration needed to be more intentional in diversifying when hiring. Two participants talk about strategies they have incorporated, even though there is no formal process in place. When asked about hiring strategies aimed at promoting diversity, the focus group members admitted to the absence of any official policies, procedures, or strategies at their institution. However, similar to interview participants, the focus group members too felt as if the CEO of their respective institution promoted diversity.

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1: Having a Mentor(s) Is Critical to the Development and Advancement of African Americans at PWIs

Participants from the study spoke passionately about having a mentor(s) who assisted and inspired them throughout their career. Participants acknowledged the importance of having a mentor regardless of race or gender. In contrast, some participants expressed concerns over not having African Americans in administrative leadership positions available to serve as mentors.

Conclusion

The literature supports the value of mentorship to help future African American administrators navigate their career path and understand the culture and politics at PWIs. Participants in administrative positions in higher education expressed concerns with the lack of African American administrators to serve as mentors. The dearth of African American mentors in administrative positions leaves new, young

or aspiring African American administrators without guidance when trying to understand where they fit in a culture dominated by people who are racially and culturally different from them.

Recommendation

Develop an internal mentoring program allowing African American faculty and staff members within the institution, who want to become administrators, to connect with current administrators who can assist in navigating careers. The creation of a mentoring program could also be beneficial in helping aspiring administrators understand the culture and the processes within the institution. The relationship between mentor and mentee is not only beneficial for the mentee but the mentor as well. The mentoring relationship could assist the mentor in producing positive results as it relates to the organization's outcomes and the administrator's intrinsic fulfillment (Ragins, 1997).

From a policy perspective, PWIs could recruit top-level administrators to undertake a mentoring relationship with mid-level African American administrators or potential administrators. In schools with no African American mid-level administrators, top-level administrators could identify faculty or staff members who have expressed interest in administration and mentor them. Consequently, this could help to develop a pipeline of potential African American administrators at various institutional levels.

The development of a state and national mentoring program to connect African Americans who aspire to be administrators with other administrators could be beneficial.

Finding 2: African American Administrators Expressed the Anxiety of Being “The Only” or “The First” at Their Current Institution

When talking about their experience as administrators at their respective institution, participants alluded to the anxiety and the challenges they felt in being “the only” or “the first” African American to hold the position. The participants' racial identity is a central part of their background while serving at a PWI. However, the challenge of being an African American administrator at a PWI presents an illusion that they were the voice of all things relating to African Americans and diversity at their institution.

Conclusion

In a study conducted by Rolle, Davis, and Banning (2000), findings suggest African Americans struggle for acceptance into mainstream society. Additional findings support the previous research from Kanter (1993), that African American administrators feel apprehensive about “not measuring up” and “having to prove their leadership abilities” to the organization, continuously. Study participants believe they always have to prove themselves to be accepted, and most times, their ideas are scrutinized or vetted more rigorously than their White counterparts.

Racial tokenism, which originated from Kanter's original theory on tokenism (1993), suggests African Americans assume high profile positions to be an authority on all things relating to African Americans. Study participants expressed concerns over feeling as if when they spoke their voice represented the voice of all African Americans at their institution. Several participants expressed additional pressure to succeed because if they did not, it might minimize opportunities for other African Americans in the future.

Recommendation

College and university administrators on all levels could be required to participate in diversity, and inclusion training as a part of their development plans. Juffer (2001) references the significance of cultural sensitivity training and multicultural courses as necessary management practices that can transform institutional culture, promote inclusive campus culture, and minimize internal and external perspectives on race and stereotypes.

Finding 3: A Lack of Formal Institutional Hiring Policies and Procedures Aimed at Increasing Diversity Attributes to the Racial Disparity Among Mid and Upper-Level Administrators at PWIs, Creating the Perception of Institutional Racism

Recruitment and hiring procedures are critical strategies for the progression and hiring of diverse administrators. Study participants from the focus group and one-on-one interviews, suggest the degree in which internal promotions take place, and people hiring individuals in whom they are comfortable with contributes to the lack of diversity among administration and faculty at PWIs. Participants also contribute the lack of diversity on search committees and inconsistent hiring practices as possible factors. Moreover, participants felt their institution could implement intentional practices that lead to a culture of diversity and inclusion. Several participants alluded to the absence of consistent hiring practices as possible barriers for African Americans' advancement at PWIs.

Conclusion

Study participants acknowledge that their institution did not have any policies in place addressing diversity within the school's leadership. However, two of the participants alluded to the standard nondiscrimination clause required by the federal government as their school's policy on diversity. Lastly, study participants contend people within the institution tend to hire either people they know or people they feel comfortable with while using the term "good fit."

Recommendation

PWIs need to become more intentional in their advertisement and recruitment of African Americans for leadership positions within their institution. Advertising at HBCUs, state and national conferences, and in educational journals geared toward African Americans and other minorities should be a part of the recruitment strategy. After applications are received a fair and systematic method to determine potential candidates should be in place as a consistent practice throughout the institution. Interview committees should be diverse in terms of race, gender, and age. All interview committee members should receive training and information detailing the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of an interview committee member.

PWIs could look at developing a succession plan so as administrators advance, retire, or move on, qualified African Americans will be ready to assume positions without any serious dropoff in productivity. PWI could develop a plan for upward movement of African American faculty and staff members into administrative positions. Moreover, a plan detailing the guidelines for advancement could be available for internal promotions. Previous literature supports the idea of succession planning and management being a viable method for access and the promotion of inclusion for minority groups at the chief executive level (Galarrage 2014). Aligning management and succession planning can help cut barriers obstructing the pipeline for African American non-positional leaders (Grotrian-Ryan, 2015).

Finding 4: Proper Credentialing, Along with Internal and External Leadership Development Opportunities Were Identified as Key Factors Influencing Advancement Opportunities for African Americans at PWIs in Mississippi

All of the study participants expressed the importance for African Americans to have the proper credentials for administrative positions. Study participants stress the importance of participating in internal and/or external higher education leadership development programs. However, several of the participants noted the disparity and barriers African Americans face when pursuing leadership development opportunities.

Conclusion

In discussing the credentials for future African American administrators at PWIs, several of the participants believed it would be imperative that minority candidates have a terminal degree. However, some of the participants believed at the very least a graduate degree along with the proper experience would suffice. Jackson (2001) suggests the idea of African American administrators having the

opportunity to be involved in a plethora of leadership opportunities is appealing and could lead to an increased number of African American applicants for leadership positions at PWIs.

Recommendation

Exposure to various internal and external leadership development opportunities for African Americans who work at PWIs can prove vital in growing the pipeline for future African American administrators. Upper-level administrators at PWIs could encourage and recommend potential African American leaders to participate in internal and external leadership programs when opportunities arise.

Being intentional and being knowledgeable about all integral parts and nuances of an institution is important for African Americans when navigating their career pathway into administration. African Americans who are interested in advancing into leadership positions could let it be known and be intentional in their pursuit. They could seek to enroll in terminal degree programs and identify the positions of interest (e.g., student affairs, academic, admission and enrollment) in which to advance.

IMPLICATION OF LIMITATIONS

The first limitation is the researcher. The researcher in this study is part of the target population. Therefore, the researcher analyzed the data from the viewpoint of his lived experiences which could have affected his interpretation of the data. However, through reflective journaling, the researcher acknowledged the possible biases, thereby minimizing the biases effect on the methodology and results of the study.

A second limitation was the researcher's inability to acquire representatives from four-year institutions to participate in the focus group, which was a part of the triangulation. In using the purposive sampling technique to solicit participation, administrators at 12 of the 18 PWIs in Mississippi received emails requesting their participation, three four-year institutions and nine two-year institutions. Eight responses were received, two declining because of other obligations and six agreeing to participate. However, all of the responses were from two-year PWIs.

The third limitation included the researcher inability to identify and solicit more African American administrators employed at four-year PWIs in Mississippi to participate in the one-on-one interviews. The snowballing method only yielded the identification of eight potential candidates. Of the eight potential candidates receiving an email to participate, only four responded, with three of the four actually participating in the study.

The fourth possible limitation was the inexperience of the researcher in conducting interviews for this qualitative study. Throughout the interview process, the researcher recognized ways in which to improve his interview approach, and after each interview, the researcher reflected and made notes on process improvement. The researcher also exercised caution to ensure questions did not lead participants to a desired response. With each interview, the researcher confidence grew in understanding when to ask follow up questions and prompts requiring deeper responses from the participants.

Lastly, the findings from the study may not be generalizable. Generalizable is the extension of a study's results and conclusions from research conducted on a sample population to the larger population (Creswell, 2013). This study only includes African American administrators currently employed at public PWIs of higher learning in Mississippi.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTHER RESEARCH

Future research may investigate the lived experiences of African American administrators employed at private, religious, and proprietary PWIs. The current study examines the enablers and barriers influencing African American administrators' career advancement at two and four-year institutions as a single phenomenon. Impending research could seek to compare factors influencing African Americans' career advancement at two and four-year institutions. Furthermore, research exploring the lived

experience of African American administrators at HBCUs to the lived experiences of African American administrators at PWIs could be conducted.

A study comparing the paradigm and culture of PWIs and HBCUs, as it relates to the hiring and promotion of African Americans at PWIs and Caucasians at HBCUs. The study could compare and contrast the differences that exist in the recruitment, hiring, and advancement opportunities. Findings from this type of study could lead to the development and implementation of strategies geared toward diversity and inclusion at both PWIs and HBCUs.

Likewise, a study aimed at understanding the perspective of Caucasian administrators and senior leaders as it relates to enablers and barriers influencing the underrepresentation of African American administrators at PWIs could be beneficial. A study of this nature would provide an alternative perspective on the subject and the findings could be used to educate African American administrators and potential administrators on what the dominant culture view as contributing factors.

DISCUSSIONS

The participants in this study spoke honestly and passionately about their experience as an African American administrator at a PWI. The interview participants expressed the need and their desire to motivate and cultivate up-and-coming African American higher ed leaders. Each of the participants in this study, both one-on-one interviewees and focus group members, expressed their support in conducting a study in Mississippi that addressed this phenomenon. Members of the focus group, which consisted of four Caucasian administrators and two minority administrators, seemed very passionate and sincere in wanting to hire more African Americans and to have their institution truly be a representation, from top to bottom, of the students they serve.

The researcher, through personal lived experiences, identified with many of the responses provided by members of the target population. At times the researcher felt engrossed in the discussion and hinged on every word of some of the participants, because of the similarities of their story and plight. However, the researcher was able to remain objective throughout the interviews. Moreover, when it comes to understanding the enablers and barriers influencing the career advancement of African Americans at PWIs, PWIs will need to become more strategic and intentional in their efforts to grow the pipeline and employ more African Americans into leadership positions. Likewise, African Americans seeking administrative positions at PWI will need to develop an understanding of the enablers and barriers influencing their advancement opportunities in order to effectively navigate their career.

SUMMARY

This study focused on the lived experience of African Americans who work at publicly funded PWIs in Mississippi. The purpose of the research was to explore and identify enablers and barriers contributing to African Americans' advancement into administrative positions at PWIs of higher learning. The researcher used a qualitative interpretive approach to collect the data. The data collected was interpreted using the IPA method.

This study offers a lens to explore and expand knowledge relating to racial diversity and inclusion at PWIs of higher learning. The personal experiences showcase African American administrators' advancement while exploring the enablers and barriers influencing their career advancement at PWIs. The IPA process yielded eight themes categorized as good mentoring, relationships matter, the intangibles, above and beyond the expectations, challenges influencing advancement, "the only" & "the first," the optimistic future and lost opportunities.

The researcher's goal is that this study's results, findings, and implications attract interest from senior leaders at PWIs who are serious and determined to bridge the racial gap existing in higher education administration. Furthermore, the creation of a state and national mentoring program in addition to hiring strategies aimed at growing the pipeline of potential African American administrators could lead to PWIs having a workforce that adequately represents its student population. Consequently, increasing African

American representation throughout various levels of the institution (e.g., faculty, staff, support staff, administration), which could increase PWIs ability to recruit, retain and graduate more African American students.

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