Fall 2018

An exploration of a mentoring program on the experiences of African-American students at a predominately white institution

Cierra Davis
James Madison University

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/diss201019

Part of the Psychology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://commons.libjmu.edu/diss201019/193

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the The Graduate School at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.
An Exploration of a Mentoring Program on the Experiences of African-American Students at a Predominately White Institution

Cierra R. Davis

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Graduate Psychology

December 2018

FACULTY COMMITTEE:

Committee Chair: Renee Staton

Committee Members/Readers:

Michele Kielty

Lennis Echterling
DEDICATION

This Dissertation is dedicated to all of the students of color, especially those in the Baltimore City Public School system, whose aim is to learn and excel, who will not accept anything less than the best, who will speak up against injustices and who will live their lives for the betterment of society.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many individuals whom I would like to thank for their prayers and support during my time in school and in completing my dissertation. God is my greatest source of support and I give all glory to God who gave me the confidence to embark on this journey and the sustaining energy to endure. Without his provisions I would not be here today. I would like to thank my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Renee Staton for always being available to advise me, her calming presence and for her belief in my vision and dreams, I’m so fortunate to have met you. I also thank each member of my committee for their support and steady presence throughout my education at JMU.

A special Thanks goes to my family especially my husband Derek L. Davis whose sacrifice and unconditional love has helped keep me from quitting. I thank my mother, Robin Wilson who always encouraged my dreams and my father Jeffrey Wilson for always bragging and supporting me. Thank you for never treating me as a step-daughter. I also thank my biological father Will Alston, who is now transitioned to be with God. His support for me continues and I thank him for helping me visualize my future and for instilling a mindset of greatness in me as a child.

I thank Rev. Andrea Cornett Scott who opened the doors to her heart and church. Thank you for mentoring me over the years and for your selflessness. To my research participants, Thank you!! To my Sorors all around the world who have prayed for me and supported me, Thank you!! To my mentors growing up, Mrs. Emelda Furlow and Ms. Rohan Lindsay two teachers who mentored me while I was a student in the Baltimore City Public School system and whose life and encouragement made me want to get my Ph.D. I’ll never forget you!

Thank you to my “Fab-Four” doctoral cohort Kristy Koser, Mina Attia and Tiffanie Sutherlin who were always willing to listen and lend a hand in support and service.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication..............................................................................................................ii  
Acknowledgements.............................................................................................iii  
Abstract...................................................................................................................v  
CHAPTER ONE ........................................................................................................1  
  Statement of the Problem......................................................................................1  
  Importance to the Field of Counseling.................................................................2  
  Operational Definitions..........................................................................................3  
  Significance of the Study.......................................................................................3  
  Research Question and Hypothesis.......................................................................4  
  Potential Benefits of the Study.............................................................................4  
  Limitations of Qualitative Research....................................................................4  
  Personal Limitations.............................................................................................5  
  Organization of the Study....................................................................................5  
  Summary................................................................................................................5  

CHAPTER TWO  
Characteristics of College Students........................................................................7  
  African-American College Students..................................................................10  
  African-American College Students at Predominately White Institutions (PWI’s)....12  
  Prevention/How to Ease the Transition.................................................................17  
  Mentorship............................................................................................................17  
  Effective Elements of Mentoring Programs for College Students ......................20  
  Role of Mentorship for African-American College Students..............................21  
  Role of Spirituality and Religion on African-American Student Wellbeing...........23  
  Spiritual Mentoring for African-American College Students..............................26  
  Mentorship Programs...........................................................................................28  
  Additional Research Needs...................................................................................28  
  Appropriateness of the Current Project...............................................................30  

CHAPTER THREE  
Helping College Students Finish Strong(HCSFS) Mentoring Program..................31  
  Methodology........................................................................................................36  
  Description of Participants....................................................................................37  
  Data Analysis........................................................................................................39  

CHAPTER FOUR  
Research Findings..................................................................................................40  

CHAPTER FIVE  
Conclusions and Implications for Further Study....................................................71  
General Recommendations....................................................................................76  
Recommendations for Mentorship Programs..........................................................76  
Areas for Future Research.......................................................................................77  
Implications/Integration of Findings into the Literature.........................................78
Limitations of Study........................................................................................................79
References..........................................................................................................................80
APPENDIX A IRB Request ..............................................................................................89
APPENDIX B Consent to Participate in Research..........................................................96
APPENDIX C Consent Statement for Focus Group.........................................................98
APPENDIX D Recruitment Email...................................................................................99
APPENDIX E Focus Group Questions............................................................................100
APPENDIX F Church Permission Letter.......................................................................101
Abstract

Many African-American college students face struggles that make a successful college career and retention difficult or impossible. Financial struggles, lack of preparation, racial climate on campus and nationally and absence of faculty of color plague the lives of students. Being an African-American student at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) can pose additional challenges, as many minority students report experiencing various acts of prejudice including lack of nurturing and resources to help them adjust successfully. Students also report the absence or scarcity of minorities in the faculty, curriculum and population as being a barrier to connection, knowledge and support. Considering the important role that mentorship plays in the lives of African-Americans, mentorship programs are a possible avenue for support for African-American college students. The purpose of this dissertation is to better understand the experiences of these students currently enrolled in the Helping College Students Mentorship Program (HCSFS). The following questions guided my inquiry: (1) How do participants describe the impact of the program (2) How do the participants experience the program (3) What experiences have been the most/least successful (3) Would participants recommend the program to someone else, why or why not and, (4) What impact do participants feel the program has had on their endurance and persistence in college? Two focus groups of five mentees each participated in the study. Implications for this study include hearing the varied needs of African-American college students through their voices, the integral role of spiritual leaders, and the impact of being involved in a mentoring program while a student at a PWI.
CHAPTER ONE

Statement of the Problem

African-American college students face several struggles that make a successful college career and retention difficult or impossible. Financial struggles, lack of preparation, racial climate on campus and nationally, and absence of faculty of color plague the lives of students (Gallien & Peterson, 2006). Due to the amount of stress being experienced by African-American college students, their needs must be addressed, especially their mental wellbeing. College students, especially African-Americans, face many difficulties including challenges transitioning to college and its demands, trouble making friends, financial pressures, isolation and difficulties being away from home, to name a few (Tinto, 1999). Many college students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have difficulty adjusting to college life. Owens et. al. (2010) calls for student affairs professionals to research adjustment and transition factors as a way to help African-Americans successfully integrate into college. In their article, First-Generation African-American Male College Students: Implications for Career Counselors, they share that many African-American males are unprepared academically which leaves many unequipped for the challenge of college. As a result, they need special support to help them adapt and succeed to their new environment, career education and counseling to help them process their career plan.

Mentorship can provide the missing support for students while they are away from home. For many students, church involvement becomes a way to help students transition successfully to college by connecting them to their spirituality and providing additional support. Mentorship and church attendance during the college years can provide students with a sense of belonging and spiritual growth during school transition.
Felder (2010) indicated that mentorship can be crucial for students who attend school in predominately white settings. Mentorship has also been shown as important for female Ph.D. students who need help acclimating to the academy and the demands of research. College life can be even more difficult for those students who are first generation college attenders and/or DACA/undocumented students in higher education (Gomez, Lopez & Overton, 2017).

Mentorship programs such as the Helping College Students Finish Strong Mentoring Program (HCSFS) have been created in response to this identification of students’ needs. HCSFS is a pilot grant funded by The Heckscher Foundation for Children with the Second Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. As a primarily university student congregation, the goal of the HCSFS program is to provide the local college student congregants with academic, financial, and social support in order for them to have a successful college career.

The purpose of this dissertation is to better understand the experiences of African-American students currently enrolled in the Helping College Students Mentorship Program and to determine the effectiveness of the program. The following questions guided my inquiry: (1) How do participants describe the impact of the program, (2) How do the participants experience the program, (3) What experiences have been the most/least successful, (3) Would participants recommend the program to someone else, and why or why not?, and (4) What impact do participants feel the program has had on their endurance and persistence in college?

*Importance to the field of Counseling*

This study has the potential to illuminate the needs of African-American college students and explore ways that they can be helped while adjusting to their college life. The American Counseling Association (2014) Code of Ethics calls for all counselors to be multiculturally competent, which includes understanding the needs of different populations and various ways to
support them. The field of counseling must understand the integral role that church leaders can play in the lives of college students for creating support and resiliency. It is the goal of this study to increase awareness and appreciation for the vital ways that church leaders/pastors and church parishioners can enrich and encourage the lives of college students. It is also a goal of this study to educate counselors on a mentorship program that is being implemented in the church environment. Counselors can use this knowledge to encourage clients to seek out mentorship opportunities that may reside within their communities. Being aware of a variety of services within the community is integral to be a well-informed counselor (American Counseling Association, 2014). This study also encourages counselors to see the importance of partnering with religious leaders to provide additional support while respecting the spiritual aspects of the individual. Church leaders and mentors are often the first line of defense in identifying and managing common stressors to severe mental illness. Counselors can share their expertise with religious leaders as well as learn from leaders as well.

Operational Definitions

Drawing from the works of Blackwell (1989) and Lee (1999), the following terms are defined as follow:
1. Mentoring – a relationship between a senior person (mentor) who knows and understands the culture that a junior person (mentee)
2. Mentee- recipient of instruction, guidance, and counseling from a senior person for professional development towards one’s educational or career attainment.
3. Mentor- a senior person or person of superior rank who knows and understand the culture (faculty, administrators, or staff) and chooses to instruct, counselor, guide and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development of the junior person.
4. Spiritual mentoring- helping a mentee grow in their spiritual development.
5. A.M.E Church- African Methodist Episcopal Church.
6. College Students – African-American college students between the ages of 18-21(Billups, 2012)

Significance for the Study
The goal of studying the Helping College Students Finish Strong Mentoring Program was to explore whether participation in the program had an impact on its mentees. If the mentees felt that the mentorship program has been effective, the additional goal would be to explore what aspects of the program are effective and why. I also worked to understand what aspects of the program the participants felt was least effective, and why. Recommendations from the mentees for improving the program in the future was an important outcome of this research because this mentorship program was in its pilot stage.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The research question for this study is “What is the impact of the Helping College Students Finish Strong?” program. In response, I considered how the participants experienced the program and their perceptions of the program’s impact. My hypothesis was that mentees would report that the Helping College Students Finish Strong (HCSFS) helped them adjust to college life, increased their chances of graduating, and provided guidance and friendship.

Potential Benefits of the Study

One of the fundamental benefits of this study is that information obtained can be used to better understand the needs of African-American college students, providing clarity regarding their difficulties and what they feel is important in helping them through their college experience. Other benefits of the study include the ability to highlight the role of spirituality in the lives of college students and the importance of mentorship programs within the church environment. Another overarching benefit is expanding information in the field of counseling about spiritual mentoring and the impact of attuning to the varied needs of the student (i.e. financial, spiritual, friendship). Finally, the study has the potential to highlight the need for
counselors and counselor educators to coordinate with religious leaders when counseling and working with the African-American college population.

**Limitations of Qualitative Research**

The limitations of this qualitative, phenomenological case study are that it is an “in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam & Tissdell, 2016, p. 37). This study is representative of a specific population of college students at the same university who attend the same Christian church. Therefore, the results are not generalizable to the entire college student and Christian population.

**Personal Limitations**

I am a mentor for the HCSFS program and a close friend of the pastor who implements the program, which can be seen as a personal bias. Taking this into account, a research assistant helped to code the transcribed focus groups.

**Organization of the Study**

The present study is organized into five chapters. A statement of the problem, purpose of the study, operational definitions, significance of the study, theoretical frameworks and limitations are described in Chapter One. Chapter Two provides a review of relevant literature pertaining to the study, along with additional research needs. Included is an overview of mentorship in the church environment as well as the needs of college students, the role of spirituality and religion on wellbeing, and effective elements of a mentoring program. Chapter Three provides a description of methodology used, including sampling procedures, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures. Chapter Four provides detailed results of the
study, including key themes from participant responses. Chapter Five presents a summary and implications for future research.

Summary

Many African-American college students have the goal of attending college in an effort to gain an education and have a successful life. However, many need several support systems to transition successfully into college and matriculate successfully. Mentorship may be one way to aid students in having a positive college experience. The purpose of this study was to explore the role of the church mentorship program, Helping College Students Finish Strong, in the lives of college students. Their experiences were explored, and data was collected to identify the impact of the program its most and least helpful aspects and offer recommendations for the future.
CHAPTER TWO

Research on the African-American college experience has gained a lot of attention in the last several decades shedding light on the need to address retention of students of color and ensure they have a meaningful and positive experience in college. Researchers have determined that African-American students face several struggles that make a successful college career and retention difficult or impossible. For instance, financial struggles, lack of preparation, racial climate on campus and nationally, and lack or absence of faculty of color plague the lives of students (Gallien Ju. L.G & Peterson, M. S, 2006). Many students of color also express having few resources for pre-college training (Padilla, 2005). Having few resources leads to few opportunities for students to prepare themselves for success (Padilla, 2005). Due to the amount of stress being experienced by African-American college students, their needs must be addressed for successful college retention and for their mental wellbeing. There are several methods that can ensure that African-American college students are retained in college and have a successful, happy experience. Being involved in ethnic clubs and activities as well as having supportive people on campus have been shown to be traits of successful African-American students (Padilla, 2005). Church involvement and faculty/student mentorship has also been shown to increase college student success (Lee, 1999; Felder, 2010) for African-American college students in particular.

*Characteristics of College Students- Tinto (1988, 2013)*

Today’s college students are described as Millennials, born between the years 1982 and 2001 (Billups, 2012). Characteristics of the millennial generation include valuing teamwork and collaboration and having an appreciation for the chance to voice their opinions (Billups, 2012). One primary difficulty that many beginning college students face is the transition from being at
home to being in college. This shift is difficult for many because of the separation from one community to another. Tinto (1988) suggested that separations from “past associations” to “incorporation in the life of the college” makes it likely for the college student to experience difficulties, either from the shift itself or the personalities of encountered people of the institution. He described the shifting transitions of college students as “separation, transition, and incorporation” (p. 442). This theory asserts that the reason that college students leave college is because of trouble navigating successfully through the stages of separation and transition into college life.

During the separation stage, students have to “disassociate” themselves from their past, which can lead to problems. Students who choose to move away from home for college and those who choose a college with a different culture from their family or the community (Tinto, 1988) are especially at risk. He posits that students must leave their former communities in order to remain in college, which creates an absence of support.

The second stage is transition to college, when the student neither belongs to their past culture, nor the future culture (in college) that they are trying to join. This is the point where students’ coping skills come into play. This time of fitting in can lead students to give up and leave college all together or to remain and struggle. In some cases, their struggles can exacerbate mental health difficulties. Students have different responses to stress, which relate to their personality, educational goals, and commitments. Without the proper mentorship or guidance, students can believe that they can’t succeed. Tinto suggests that institutions can play a role to help combat these transitional issues.

Transitions can be especially difficult for students who do not come from a formally educated family. These students will not have a frame of reference for how to be a college
student or of what is required to succeed. They may lack the preparation for this new journey in life (Tinto, 1988). Adjustment is important for students in this stage, as many students are oblivious of behaviors they need to exhibit to learn the new culture. Tinto offers the example of college students who decide to limit their time on campus, perhaps because they feel as though they don’t belong. This isn’t a productive decision as it limits the amount of exposure to the new setting, cultures, and people. It also limits their ability to meet and make friends.

Integration is the last stage. This occurs after the student has separated and transitioned into college. This stage involves students making social contact with different individuals within the community, such as faculty and staff. The college student must figure out how to fit into to the college atmosphere in order to be accepted.

Although separation and transition into the college are difficult, integration is as well. The student must still prove themselves worthy of incorporation. If the student does not make contacts with people in their community they may face loneliness and isolation, and some may chose to leave the college (Tinto, 1988). The difficulty in integrating into the new culture is often because of the scarcity of a formal system that teaches students the “do’s and don’ts” of that new culture, or the “character of local communities or the behaviors and norms appropriate to membership therein” (Tinto, 1988, p. 446).

This is a reason that mentors are crucial to teach students what the college culture may not; to guide them honestly through the hardships and serve as a buffer in which students can ask questions without the fear of feeling stupid, dumb, or less than. Tinto (1988) also refers to the role that fraternities/sororities and student unions play in helping students in college transition. However, many students attend colleges that do not have these programs, and some students do not fit in with certain ideals or personalities associated with these organizations. Some students
are introverted or simply do not have the knowledge or interpersonal skills to socialize and interact effectively with others in a meaningful way to expand their social circle.

Tinto (1988) notes that these stages are fluid and “complex” (p. 448). It is important to note that although students may be fully integrated into one society or group of people, they may not be so within another. This can also be a source of conflict for students who want all facets of their life to be congruent. Stages may occur out of sequence for some students or occur all at once, however all students transition throughout the stages to be incorporated into the college community (Tinto, 1988). Tinto recommends further research on whether student departure is culturally bound.

Tinto (2013) later suggested the additional concept of momentum. Students may have difficulty maintaining momentum, which can be especially difficult for students who come to college academically unprepared. He also presents the concepts of “curriculum roadblocks,” where students have difficulty passing certain courses which ends up slowing the college student down in their college trajectory.

**African-American College Students**

These concepts are relevant for all college students, but may be particularly important for African-American students. During Fall 2010, Black student graduation rate within six years was 38% compared to 62% for Whites, 63.2% for Asians and 45.8% for Hispanics, respectively (NSC Research Center, 2017). This recent study, headed by the NSC Research Center, accounted for part and full-time students at both two and four-year colleges. 40% of Black men completed their degrees within six years, which is the lowest of all groups studied. In their analysis of college completion at community colleges, only one in twelve Black students graduated, compared to a quarter of Asians and a fifth of White students (NSC Research Center, 2017).
Many students fail to succeed in college or to make timely progress due to lack of support and limited access to quality college preparation (Davis, 2007). Many college students experience difficulties adapting to college (Padilla, 1995), but the challenges become compounded for African-American students attending Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). Guiffrida (2013) studied African-American students and former students of PWIs to understand their perceptions regarding the impact of their families on their academic achievement and persistence. When studying leavers (students who left prior to graduation), low achievers and high achievers, he found that high achieving students mentioned emotional, academic and financial support they received from families as most important assets in college. Leavers and low achievers rarely discussed families when describing emotional support they received. Many described poor academics due to leaving their families during a time when their families faced hard times. Many described having to go home frequently to take care of their families, paying bills for family, or caring for distant family members. For some these tasks were viewed as their most important commitment (Guiffrida, 2013).

Many students report experiencing various acts of prejudice, which include lack of nurturing and access to resources, which could help them adjust successfully (Padilla, 1995). Further systemic racism has been identified as a major obstacle facing African-American women (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). In addition, it can be difficult for women of color to connect with faculty, students, and staff on campus, which results in them reaching outside of their academic discipline for support (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). They also report the absence or scarcity of minorities in the faculty, curriculum and student/staff population (Padilla, 2005).
Minority graduate students often must manage constant group stereotypes linked to their academic abilities and competencies (Thomas et. al. 2007). The lack of African-American presence on the college campus also makes it difficult for recruiting and retaining students (Howard & Hughes-Hamilton, 2003). African-American women in particular express feelings of invisibility from being a member of two marginalized groups: African-American and female (Zamani, 2003). Zamani (2003) calls for research on the varied educational, social and political experiences of African-American women in postsecondary education. Generally, the most challenging issues facing African-Americans in higher education are recruitment and retention (Howard & Hughes-Hamilton, 2003). To compound this issue, there is much diversity within the African-American experience, and difficulties occur when African-American are treated the same (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

African-American Students’ Experiences at Predominately White Institutions (PWI)

African-American students report experiencing a variety of difficulties in institutions of higher learning. Considering the history of the exclusion of and unwanted presence of African-Americans in college and the current state of racial relations in the U.S, it is no surprise that African-American college students still experience instances of hate and discrimination on campus. It is no secret that racial relations on PWIs have been tense since African-Americans have been admitted. Racial discrimination is defined as the socially organized set of practices that deny African-Americans the dignity, opportunities, space, time, positions, and rewards this nation offers to white Americans (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). Students complain of a variety of such practices and beliefs that make them feel uncomfortable and thus unwelcome on campus, including racial joking, racist skits by white fraternities and sororities, insensitive comments and maltreatment on the part of white professors, and the downplay of African-American talent,
goals and interests (Feagin et.al, 1996) Some students express feeling isolated and out of place on campus as well as culture shock (Kincey, 2007). Around the country, African-American students are facing outright discrimination but also more subtle mistreatment through microaggressions.

Microaggressions are defined by Sue, Capodilup, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal and Esquilin (2007) as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (p. 271). Microaggressions manifest themselves in a variety of ways including microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations (Sue et.al, 2007). Microassaults refer to overt acts of racial denigration intended to intentionally harm someone through bigoted acts. Microinvalidations refer to communications that discount the experiences of people of color and microinsults refers to messages that are discourteous and impervious to a person’s racial heritage (Sue et.al, 2007).

Wintner, Almeida and Mason (2017) conducted interviews with social workers working with students in Kindergarten through 8th grade to understand perceptions of microaggressions in those settings. In their research, all social workers witnessed microaggressions in their schools, more than half described staff to student microaggressions and every social worker described student to student microaggressions. Microassaults and microinsults were the most cited microaggression incidents. Students with a minority status and those with intersections of race, class and family makeup were the most targeted group. Because of these actions, the target students withdrew socially and began to lose interest in school and as a result was labeled as “behaviorally difficult,” which continues the cycle of microaggression (p. 596.) Although this study was on microaggressions within the K-8 setting, it sheds light on experiences that many
students from marginalized communities face in society and before entering college. It also points to the potential trauma that students of color face upon entering college and the continual trauma that they may face after entering college as it relates to continued experiences with microaggressions.

Interacting with white faculty members who perpetuate these acts leave many Black students feeling powerless and voiceless. The power differential between students and faculty makes college life difficult for them as “few students have the psychological and social resources to alter dramatically the social position crafted for them by professors” (Sue et.al, 2007, p. 15.)

In their study of the perceptions of prejudice and discrimination of first-year African-American and White students, Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella and Hagedorn (1999), found that African-Americans entered college with lower academic acumen than their White counterparts. African-American students had a lesser chance of reporting positive experiences with their counterparts than Whites and were more committed to graduating than Whites. African-American students’ experiences were largely affected by prejudice and discrimination. However, for African-Americans, parental encouragement had the biggest effect on goal commitment. Parental encouragement had a 4x effect on college students, goal commitment and academic, and intellectual achievement. It is important to also note that although encouragements from parents and discrimination had significant effects on college students, their social experiences were also negatively affected by perceptions of discrimination. This study explained the role that culture and discrimination play in the experiences of college students and echoes Tinto’s (1987) call for needed research in this area.

African-American students at PWIs often report that African-American faculty are the most helpful and focused on their achievements (Guiffrida, 2005). In his focus-group research,
Guiffrida’s (2005) student participants defined “student-centered” faculty as those who go “above and beyond” to assist them with “career guidance, academic issues, and personal problems” (p. 708). Students expected faculty to give much more than basic advice about courses; they expected a more involved relationship that involves “listening to students to understand their professional fears, dreams, and goals” (p. 708). Students want to discuss their future career and for faculty to help them transition to life beyond their undergraduate studies (Guiffrida, 2005). Students reported that personalized attention on the part of African-American faculty was beneficial as they would meet regularly to review the students’ “academic and personal progress” (p. 709). Students also reported that African-American faculty provided more “motivation to succeed than White Faculty” and gave more “positive beliefs in their academic abilities” (p. 712). This correlates with Tinto’s (2017) assertion that motivation is linked to persistence and that “without motivation and the effort it engenders, persistence is unlikely” (p. 255). Guiffrida’s (2015) research also correlates to Tinto’s (2017) notion that motivation can be molded and changed based on college experiences. Student-centered faculty were described as those that advocated for African-American students, linked them to financial resources, and communicated with family about “academic and personal issues” (Guiffrida, 2008, p. 710).

In her qualitative assessment of the University Transition Program (UTP) mentoring program at the North Carolina State University, Lee’s (1999) research uncovered that students expressed concern about not having enough time to complete college assignments and that the freedom and lack of structure in college is difficult. This correlated with Tinto’s (1988) assertion that the transition from high school to college is difficult for college students. Students expressed the lack of faculty time (from African-American professors) also limited options to connect with helpful resources.
In her 2010 interviews of first-generation doctoral degree recipients, Felder (2010) found that recipients noted faculty advising and support were needed for their success in college. Out of the 11 participants in the study, two emphasized the need to gain support from outside their college to cultivate and create connections. Other concerns noted were the lack of faculty diversity and the need for more personalized attention. Students also described concerns regarding the need to be the voice of diversity in their programs, which involved students leading the conversations of race and diversity. Many students feel the need to broach the topic of race instead of having educated professors broach the topic. Respondents indicated through their research that having mentors who supported their research focus was instrumental. Mentorship that they received “did serve to facilitate their socialization” (Felder, 2010, p. 469). This supports Tinto’s (1988) second stage of transition, where students must socialize with faculty and students to build relationships.

Conyers (2009)’s research on black graduate students showed that another problem that students face excelling while also still fitting in with African-American culture and not selling out. Being an educated African-American student while still maintaining an authentic connection to the African-American community is difficult. Several themes from his research were the ideas of passing and covering. These concepts involve African-American students changing their language to fit in with academia and changing language to remain connected to their own family. The second theme was the idea of fronting. This occurs when students express altering or changing their behavior to fit in with the dominant culture. Students expressed needing to present as “professional” due to the pressure to present as prepared and ready in the profession. The third theme uncovered in this research was African-American students’ need to create their own “niche” and supportive community (p. 46). Graduate students in this study defined mentorship as
occurring both “a professional and personal level by one already established in a particular area” (p. 47.) One respondent noted that where there is no mentorship, either the student creates their own network, or they try to navigate and figure out their progression and journey on their own.

In her study on the leadership experiences of Black college students at a predominately White Institutions, Donague (2015) highlights the challenges these students face, which including stereotyping, microaggressions, racialized and gendered self-presentation expectations, voicing and silencing (p. 461.) Women in the study expressed having to engage with the stereotype of the “Angry Black Women” and being cautious of the words spoken as to not perpetuate the stereotype (p. 461.), yet facing a dilemma in still wanting to have a voice. Another stereotype students experienced was being viewed in the Black Mama stereotype: the disciplinarian and mothering leader. Black women leaders in this study expressed not feeling able to fully express all aspects of themselves. There is the expectation to acclimate to a white way of life which involves rejecting their personal mannerisms, speech and choice of physical appearance (Donague, 2015). Student leaders also expressed difficulty managing conflict with their white peers in fear of appearing confrontational, hostile or angry. They said they have to constantly gauge their responses and emotions. Feelings of invisibility and of being misrepresented characterize the student leaders in this study.

Prevention

Considering that African-American college students, especially those who attend Predominately White Institutions, have many difficulties in higher education, there are some things that can be done to help give these students a greater chance of having a successful college career. School and college counselors can use their influence and position to prepare students for their educational journey (Guiffrida, 2006) by offering preparation and exposure to
the college atmosphere before students attend college. Counselors should prepare students to get involved in African-American student organizations to help the transition to college through socialization (Guiffrida, 2005), which can also help students gain a sense of belonging. It is also advantageous for counselors to connect students to resources within the college that are positioned to help them have a successful college experience (Guiffrida, 2006). Counselors can also prepare student by educating them on the culture that they will be transitioning into, which can help prepare students to not be caught off guard and to prepare appropriate ways of responding to challenges and opportunities. Counselors in the college counseling center can help students by helping them manage their relationships with family and friends who remain back home and helping them manage any emotional losses that may occur due to their departure (Guiffrida, 2006).

In Padilla’s (1995) research on the attributes of successful students of color, students expressed discontinuity barriers, which are “obstacles that hinder a student’s smooth and continuous transition from high school to college.” (p. 10). Successful students overcome these barriers by adjusting successfully to their new campus environment and fully embracing their college journey. They also view college life as a challenge worth enduring by protecting and preparing prior to entering college. They are aware of the challenges related to being a minority on campus, are knowledgeable of the need to be supported and nurtured as well as the need to have self-confidence and worth. Being involved in ethnic organizations and having informal and formal mentoring through the organization is what is needed. Padilla (2015) also found that successful students create a home away from home, seek supporting people, involve their family in their college experience and take advantage of resources offered by the university. These students become involved in campus resources that include receiving help from tutors and
faculty. They are culturally grounded, which helps them manage the lack of minority diversity on campus. Successful students prepare early and gain the knowledge needed from people with experience. As a result, they are informed of the deadlines and all better able to produce the grades needed for scholarships (Padilla, 2005).

Recommendations from the 2015 joint report from ACT and the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) on college success for African-Americans suggest several institutional recommendations for improving African-American (and all students) readiness for college. They include investing in high-quality early childhood education, establishing clear, high and common academic standards in the classroom, collecting more data that provides a true reflection of students educational experiences, addressing disproportionate discipline for African-American students that reduces class time and hinders college readiness, investing in a culturally competent and diverse teacher force, and promoting rigorous exposure and engagement in STEM fields early in students’ academic experiences (p. 3). This report also recommended school tours and camps at local colleges, investing in trained counselors to help students navigate the college entry process including helping students decide fit and financial opportunities (p. 5), educational planning, monitoring and interventions to help students “begin early and continue through their educational careers” p. 14.

For ten years, the University of Southern California hosted a four-week writing program, called the SummerTIME (Relles & Tierney, 2014). This program was an effort to prepare low-income, first generation college bound youth to prepare them for success in college. Their 2014 report, Improving College Writing Before the freshman year details the program components and findings. Relles and Tierney (2004) offer several suggestions for working suggest through their pre and post-tests they found that students improved in their writing skills. However,
through lack of follow-up they were unable to report what skills students used once arriving on campus and engaging with the coursework. One way to combat these issues is through mentoring. There are many types of mentoring mentioned in the literature such as peer mentoring, upward mentoring (Thomas et. al. 2007) and spiritual mentoring among others.

**Mentorship**

In the Oxford dictionary, the word mentor is defined as a “an experienced and trusted advisor” (Oxford dictionaries). Parks (2000) defines mentoring as “an intentional, mutually demanding, and meaningful relationship between two individuals, a young adult and an older, wiser figure who assists the younger person in learning the ways of life” p. 127. Sellner (1979) defines mentorship as “transformation, helping someone else encounter his or her deeper self” (p 10). The word “mentor” derives from Ancient Greek mythology of Homer’s Odyssey (Finley, 1978) add more info about the story here. Thomas et. al. (2007) discuss functional mentoring, or healthy mentoring, as important for the success of graduate students. Mentors who are knowledgeable, visible and powerful create a healthy relationship with their mentees (p. 179). There are a variety of definitions for mentoring and a variety of situations in which mentoring occurs. Mentorship is crucial in young adulthood as it provides an avenue for questions and helps one transition successfully into adulthood (Parks-Daloz & Daloz-Parks, 2003)

**Effective Elements of Mentoring Programs for College Students**

In her study of mentorship within the educational setting, Edwards (1998) suggests several guidelines for effective mentoring to occur. First, she suggests that mentorship be collaborative, where all stakeholders are involved. This would include mentors, mentees, faculty and religious education administration. This enables all stakeholders to maintain collaboration and influence on the process. She also suggests that effective mentorship involves a mentoring
environment. The mentoring environment should be an environment where there is “tangible show of support for faculty, respect for difference, shared values and beliefs and promotion of a continuous learning culture…” (p. 81). She also suggests that there should be a shared set of values or beliefs, a learning culture.

The University of Southern California has a mentoring program, *Increasing Access via Mentoring (IAM)* for 12th graders, with the goal of increasing college-going University of California or California State University eligible high school seniors. Their 10-year study uncovered six principles for mentoring, 1. Be clear, 2. Develop long-term relationships, 3. Tailor mentoring to meet student’s needs, 4. Evaluate progress. 5. Consider cost-effectiveness” and 5. “look to the community” (Tierney & Garcia, 2014, p. 9)

Tierney and Garcia in their 2014 report, “Getting in: Increasing Access to College via Mentoring,” highlight the need for formal mentoring programs, especially in communities with limited resources for school-aged children. They also recommend mentors from other social economic backgrounds than the children from whom children could learn and benefit. Considering the issues with transitioning to college posed by Tinto (1988), Tierney and Garcia (2014) recommend that mentors who are college graduates can guide high school mentees through pertinent college entry process (i.e., applying for financial aid) while also providing knowledge about the upcoming college experience.

In terms of faculty mentorship, Thomas et. al (2007) posits that to be effective, faculty must be visible to the mentee in order to promote role-modeling, be active within their profession and have “formal” power in the development of the mentee and in the organization involved (p. 180). They recommend that mentorship programs on college campuses develop department awards for mentoring. These awards should be both visible and competitive. Faculty should be
evaluated based on their mentorship activity with people of color as well as be recognized for recruiting, mentoring and helping to develop the minority student (Thomas et. al, 2007, p. 188).

Hughes and Howards-Hamilton (2003) discuss the needs of African-American women by stating that African-American women need “intellectual, spiritual, psychological and programmatic encouragement from everyone on the campus” (p. 102). They state in their paper that mentorship can be detrimental to minority students who are mentored by white professors who lack cross-cultural competence, lack their own development of a racial identity, or are culturally insecure.

*Role of Mentorship for African-American College Students*

Considering the complex life of college students especially in today’s society, mentorship from a variety of sources is of benefit, as mentors can serve various purposes in the lives of some African-American youth, families, and communities. College students who receive help from a variety of sources (not simply parents or teachers) have a greater chance of having the support and tools that they need to make informed decisions and be successful in their lives. Having an adult with life experience to help guide them through a stressful period can have important implications in helping college students adjust. Students who attend church may also seek spiritual guidance as well as concrete tools to navigate life effectively.

Davis (2007) studied 261 Black, non-Hispanic undergraduate students from both Historically Black institutions and Predominately White Institutions who were enrolled in the Committee Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP). Through interview and focus group data, students expressed several benefits of mentoring, which included gaining strong professional networks and skills to aid in their career. Benefits also included receiving advice on research opportunities as well as advice on how to navigate the profession through understanding rules and norms (Davis, 2007). The opportunity to ask for letters of recommendations, learn
social skills and communication skills and observe general professional behavior was beneficial (Davis, 2007). Through mentorship, students felt confident that they could reach their goals in academia. Receiving constructive criticism, learning about the grant writing process and resources, and learning about the variations in career paths were also cited as benefits of the mentorship that they received. The networking aspect of the program helped with the feeling of isolation as they expressed feeling that they weren’t alone in their pursuits.

Campbell’s (2007) research on the effects of faculty/student mentoring after one year and then eleven years showed that the dropout rate was lower for the mentored students than that of the control group. The graduation rate for mentored students was higher as well. This research shows that student/faculty mentorship pairings help students in the beginning of their college education. The final analysis showed that although the dropout rate was lower for mentees than the control group, the difference wasn’t statistically significant.

Mentorship holds various benefits for students of color. Benefits include mentors providing academic guidance, honest feedback, career development, help with personal guidance and overall helps with socialization (Thomas et. al, 2007). Mentorship also provides students of color with access to a professional network through introduction from mentors and help creating relationships (Thomas et. al, 2007). There are a variety of mentoring modalities and benefits. However, mentoring from a spiritual basis can be of benefit to African-American college students.

*Role of Spirituality and Religion on African-American Students*

African-American college women often have difficulty creating a healthy identity due to the political and social struggles in society (Watt, 2003). Due to the struggles navigating the world, they often seek support from their spirituality to gain meaning which in turn shapes their
personal identify to cope with negative experiences in society. Watt (2013)’s article, *Come to the River: Using Spirituality to Cope, Resist, and Develop Identity*, discusses how African-American females are more difficulty than African-American males with being accepted into society and have to balance being accepted in both mainstream American culture and their own African-American culture. Other difficulties of African-American college women include managing different messages about what a college degree means such as socio-economic status and historical roles as caretaker (Watt, 2013). She posits that managing these conflictual identities while overcoming negative stereotypes to redefining oneself can put an incredible amount of stress of the mental health of African-American college women. Many deal with these struggles by utilizing spiritual supports such as prayer, attending bible study to incorporate the Holy Spirit into their lives (Watt, 2013).

Church attendance and involvement provides a place of anchoring and belonging. Belonging to a church community provides a sense of belonging and allows the person, specifically the college student, a place to grow, make mistakes and learn new skills. Many college students who attend church while in school are already church attenders prior to their college career, while some may attend church while in college for the first time. Both situations position the college student to participate in various church auxiliaries and gain new friends as well as the opportunity to be mentored. Mentoring in the African-American community has a rich history. Other-mothering refers to when non-biological mothers providing for the children during slavery, through raising them, providing knowledge and teaching appropriate behaviors (Domingue, 2015). This practice occurred during slavery as a means of helping slaves or elderly persons who were without families or those whose parents were on plantations (Domingue, 2015). This other-mothering tradition continued through the Black church culture after slavery
ended (Domingue, 2015). The church environment is a place where several sources of support can collaborate at the same time to provide a sense of wholeness and help the college student gain a source of identity around other believers. Jean-Marie and Lloyd-Jones (2011) suggest from their research on students and churches that church minimizes alienation because they can form social networks. In their summary of their work with graduate students they found that churches provide spaces to “develop and practice skills” and represent an intersectionality where “faith, culture, and ethnicity engage the conscious” (p. 358). According to these researchers, there is a need for additional research that studies the specific needs of vulnerable students to better understand the impact of this intersectionality (Jean-Marie & Lloyd-Jones, 2011).

Ash & Schreiner (2016)’s studied students of color at twelve Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) by examining their psychological sense of community, student-faculty interaction, peer interactions and spirituality. Thriving, fit and the institutions commitment to student welfare affected their intent to graduate. Institutional integrity, psychological sense of community and students’ level of spirituality had large indirect effects. Faculty’s sensitivity to the needs of diverse learners and students satisfaction with peer from different ethnic backgrounds affected intent to graduate. In terms of spirituality, student’s spirituality influenced their perceptions of institutional integrity, commitment to student welfare, faculty sensitivity to diverse learners, and interracial peer relationships (Ash & Schreiner, 2016). Students spirituality helped students thrive and levels of spirituality contributed next to students thriving. This research reinforces the need for students of color to tap into their spirituality.

In their study of spirituality of a total of 3,698 (Black, Latino and White) students, Gehrke (2012) found that Black students grow spiritually in terms of “identification” and “spiritual quest” yet college attendance did not create significant changes in their equanimity. I
would like to suggest that a relationship with a mentor is the bridge for Black students to help them not only gain spiritual awareness but to also help with the piece that his research shows is not impacted their attitude and calmness when under pressure. Gehrke (2012) suggests that perhaps the reason that college does not impact their equanimity is due to their life experiences and the role that they play on attitude and temperament. In their research, they found that positive predictors of spiritual identification” and “spiritual quest” was being a male and having an organized religion. They also found that being involved in college demonstrations and charitable activities were positive indicators of spiritual growth. Their research showed that students of color entered college with higher spiritual quest than White Students and entered college with higher equanimity, but they didn’t grow while in college. Their study of different racial groups (Asian, Black, Latino) show that Black students are very interested in spirituality both in identification and quest. Gehrke (2012) suggests through the research that “the role of spirituality in the lives of students of color combined with the transformative experience of college seems to be a powerful influence on spiritual development of students of color” (pg. 46).

There is very little research on mentorship programs within the church. Much of the literature on spiritual mentoring centers around discipleship within the church environment and mentorship within religious institutions of higher education. However, much can be learned from the research and recommendations that has been done in those institutions.

**Spiritual Mentoring for African-American College Students**

Spiritual mentoring is described as a particular way of interaction between mentor and mentee that goes beyond the normal career support and role-modeling to address the entire person (Buzzanell, 2009). Another difference between spiritual mentoring and traditional mentoring is that the spiritual mentor must cultivate their personal spiritual growth and that of
their mentee with the mentee being the director at times (Buzzanell, 2009). Spiritual mentors should seek opportunities to develop their spirituality such as continue to develop their career and of being a life-long learner. It is an “overlapping” process which involves spontaneous teaching, encourages continuous development and provides additional, enriching resources. It is about moment to moment processes, may involve impromptu conversations in the hall or in passing to inquire about family or how the semester is going (Buzzanell, 2009). On the college campus spiritual mentoring may involve congratulating students on accomplishments, giving advice or relaying positive comments spoken about the student (Buzzanell, 2009).

Mentorship within the church began with guidance for daily living and self-awareness and understanding for new members (English, 1998). Mentors play integral roles in the lives of African-American students in the church environment by helping them navigate unspoken rules, teaching them ways of behaving, help them gain promotions and helping them understand company and church politics (McKenzie, 1996). Many mentees especially women need help learning professional behavior and miss out on opportunities as a result (McKenzie, 1996). Female leadership/mentorship involves helping the mentee learn confidence.

Parks (2000) eloquently states that when young adults suffer or endure hardships such as a breakup, loss of relationship or illness, they suffer their sense of self, world and God are disjointed and their pleasure, purpose and what they find important. A spiritual mentor helps young mentees, navigate secular, normal issues of adulthood but spiritual conflicts as well. Mentors help them make sense of the world as they must navigate the world which is becoming increasingly complicated (Parks, 2000).

Creps (2008) presents the concept of reverse mentoring. In reverse mentoring, the younger person/student teaches an older person (in the church), which reverses the traditional
role of mentoring where the older person typically has the knowledge to share with the younger. He also uses the term teaching-up to illustrate this point. Crepe (2008) presents this concept to spiritual leaders as a spiritual discipline, a way of experiencing personal formation through exercising the kind of humility that invites younger people to be our tutors” (p. xxi). Older leaders are mentored by younger members in a way that modernizes the elders “practical relevance while the younger draw from the wisdom and integrity” of the elder”. (p.36). Creps (2008) states that friendship must precede this type of mentoring relationship, which involves humility on the part of the elder to and experience to embrace the younger member.

Simon, in her book *Mentoring for Mission* (2003), discusses how mentoring from a Christian perspective is different from mentoring in the general sense. She states that “mentoring faithful to the Christian tradition will acknowledge the sacredness and uniqueness of the personhood of those being mentored as well as the humanity mentors bring to mentoring” (p. 6). Christian mentoring isn’t simple because it requires working within the Christian ideals of charity, compassion and love for the other that surpasses secular mentoring. She continues by detailing how Christian mentoring considers the mentee as being in the “image of God” and considers human beings as having “dignity” and “infinite value” (p. 19). Christian mentoring goes a step forward in the consideration of a person’s worth as it relates to God and His emphasis on loving each other as one would love themselves.

English (1998) defines spiritual direction as “the systemic pairing of elders with novices for the purpose of indicting them into religious life” (p 3.). Spiritual mentoring has always been a part of the church tradition, as mentees or understudies often learn how to further the cause of the church and better attend to the needs of the ministry. There are a variety of the functions of mentors in the literature. English (1998) defines the functions of the mentor as someone who
teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels and befriends. The consideration of mentorship from a religious and spiritual perspective is particularly relevant for African-American college student

Several formal program have been created specifically for underrepresented groups of students. In the 2015 annual report, *The Condition of College & Career Readiness*, which evaluated African-American college readiness, the number of African-Americans who took the ACT increased 13%. However, this figure tails behind other racial groups in meeting ACT College Readiness. African-Americans were most likely to meet English benchmarks and less for reading, math and science. Research shows that “younger students who take rigorous curricula are more prepared to graduate from high school ready for college or career” (ACT and UNCF report, 2015). Their research also showed that most African-American students aspire a post high-school degree.

*Mentorship Programs*

*Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program*

The Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program is a grant competition for disadvantaged students to prepare them for doctoral studies. In order to apply students must demonstrate strong academic potential. Funds are given to higher education institutions to prepare them through research opportunities, seminars, summer internships, mentoring programs with faculty and cultural events (U.S Department of Education, 2018).

Trio programs, funded through the Department of Education, are meant to encourage low-income and first generation students to enroll in Ph. D. program. They aim to prepare students through involvement in research and scholarly activities. This program is funded at one hundred fifty-one institutions across the United States and Puerto Rico.

*Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America Mentoring Program*
The Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (2018) program is the nation’s largest donor and volunteer supported mentoring network. It provides mentorship for children between the ages of six and eighteen years old. Started in 1904, their mission is to “provide children facing diversity with strong and enduring, professional supported on-to-one relationships that change their lives for the better, forever (Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, 2018). They provide community mentorship where Bigs and Little bond together in the community through activities such as walking in the park. Two more specific programs included is are Operation Bigs where military children receive mentoring and support and Bigs in Blue which provides mentorship to youth by police. The goal of this program is to build a relationship between children and law enforcement.

*Upward Bound*

Upward Bound is a college preparatory program for high school students from ow-income families whose parent do not have a bachelor’s degree, students who are homeless, students who have limited English Proficiency, those who are in foster care and other students who are disconnected. The goal of the program is to increase the rate of high school graduation and encourage students to enroll and graduate from post-secondary education. Students receive assistance including but not limited to tutoring, cultural enrichment and academic help (US Department of Education, 2018)

*Additional Research Needs*

Additional research needs to be undertaken regarding specific mentorship programs within the church environment that work to increase the retention of African-American females. In terms of this research project, additional research needs to examine the impact of the HCSFS program from the mentor perspective.
**Appropriateness of the Current Project**

This project aims to expand the literature on church mentoring programs for African-American college students by providing support away from home. This project is appropriate for the field of counseling as it helps expand knowledge about the African-American college student experience and ways that counselors can best assist this population. It is important to shed light on ways that students can be assisted in order to matriculate through college successfully.
CHAPTER THREE

This study examined the mentoring experiences of African-American undergraduate students at a university in the mid-Atlantic region who are also enrolled in the Helping College Students Finish Strong (HCSFS) mentoring program at an AME church. It explored the factors which contribute to wellbeing and successful matriculation in college. Data from their mentoring experiences were used to examine the role of the HCSFS in their lives as African-American college students. The following questions guided the inquiry:

(1) What are the experiences of the mentees in the HCSFS program?
(2) What experiences in the program do the mentees deem most and least helpful? Why?
(3) Would mentees recommend the program to someone else?
(4) What impact did the program have on their endurance/persistence in college?
(5) What are the mentees recommendations for improvements in the program moving forward?
(6) Does the spiritual component of the program provide a particular benefit for the mentees?

Focus group questions were carefully sequenced to ensure that they had a progressive focus on the topics of the study and to invite participants to provide more detail (Wholey, Hatry & Newcomes, 2010).

Helping College Students Finish Strong (HCSFS) Program Overview

The Helping College Students Finish Strong Mentoring Program (HCSFS) is a pilot grant funded by The Heckscher Foundation for Children with the Second Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. This grant funded program is operated through local AME Churches throughout the Second Episcopal District. Located in the second episcopal district, there was one church that served as the program site collaborated with another AME church within the same local community to build a supportive community for the local college students.
Local churches within the Second Episcopal District operate their respective mentoring programs. As a primarily university student congregation, the goal of the HCSFS program is to provide its congregants who are also students from the same local university with academic, financial and social support in order for them to have a successful college career. Through its partnership with the other local AME church, students were able to be supported for the entire school year through receiving educational support, guidance, to community awareness and knowledge. Having an adult with life experience to help guide them through a stressful period can have important implications in having college students adjust.

**HCSFS Program Description**

The HCSFS mentorship program was designed to increase the graduation rates of African-American students as well as strengthen the matriculation of those students by providing social, academic, life coaching, career coaching and financial support. It aims to also strengthen their character and servant leadership skills.

Considering the variety of difficulties that college students face, such as loneliness, transitioning issues and lack of direction, the HCSFC program aims to provide assistance away from home to strengthen students and to increase their ability to succeed in life and in college.

**Mentor Selection and Participating**

Mentor selection required an application process which included an interview. Mentors must be active members of the church and be willing to open their homes to students. Some of the mentors are members of the both AME churches and some are alumni members of one of the churches. The mentors have varying academic backgrounds. When the director is able to pair students with a professional, she will do so but more importantly, the director looks for people
who will listen and encourage the students to be ethical decision makers. Mentors’ life experience is key for selection.

The mentor resource guide and training manual covers an overview of the program, including goals, the role of mentoring, a testimonial, roles and responsibilities, principal objectives as a Sista’s Keeper, how to be an effective listener, including barriers, a listening skills self-inventory, do’s and don’ts, mentor/mentee expectations and stages of a mentoring relationship. Prospective mentors also have a place to record their definition of mentoring and what their goals are for the mentoring relationship. Mentors receive specialized training in how to be an effective mentor and how to help their mentee through a variety of issues. Mentors help their mentees develop a persistence plan that is both realistic and growth focused.

*Mentee referral and engagement*

Mentees are active members of the local AME church which is primarily a college aged congregation. They must demonstrate academic potential for being retained, which means that they must have over a 2.0 GPA and have full-time student status. The director also considered financial need because of the program’s ability to provide some financial incentives for students. She was especially thoughtful about whether she felt that the students could benefit from an off-campus support system. If they were experiencing issues related to homesickness or a lack of support at home, then they are strong candidates. While the mentees and mentors are supposed to interact naturally, group events are also scheduled, and mentors and mentees are encouraged to be there. There are also financial incentives that assist with book, tuition, housing and emergencies. Since the director is a college administrator and also the mentees’ pastor it is easy for her to glean that information. The mentees also complete an application that helps to determine their potential for program success.
Key components of the program

HCSFS Goals

The HCSFS program was designed as a means of supporting African-American students through their matriculation through college to strengthen their chances of graduating on time. The program was positioned to be an extension of the love and care these students would receive from loved ones in their home environment. Additionally, the program was geared to be a proactive measure to address student problems, including homesickness, confusion, and general lack of guidance. As a support away from home, the program provided localized support where students have easy access to a familiar face with whom to connect. Students are also able to taste familiar foods by receiving home cooked meals from their mentor; a luxury that many college students lack when away from home. Being away from home can lead to students feeling detached from their cultures and familial sources of support. Having a local mentor can bridge the gap between their new situation, offering educational support and the guidance and community awareness students need. Having an adult with life experience to help guide them through a stressful period can have important implications in having college students adjust.

Mentorship provides the missing support for students while they are away from home. A specific type of mentorship that may be particularly relevant for African-American students includes attending to their spirituality. For many students, church involvement becomes a way to bridge that gap and connect to their spirituality while helping them to survive college. Mentorship and church attendance during the college years can provide students with a sense of belonging and spiritual growth during school transition.

Mentorship, both in the form of institutional and community mentors (including church leaders), has been identified as being crucial in supporting students, especially those from
marginalized communities who need academic, social, and personal support that is “readily available” (Tinto, 1999 p. 3).

The researcher worked with the Director of the HCSFS mentoring program in order to contact eligible participants for the study which included students who were involved in the program from its inception. An email was then sent out to the identified participants. The email included a brief statement of the researcher, a summary of the purpose of the study and included a Consent to Participate in Research form. Potential participants were asked to respond to the researchers email by indicating “Interested” or “Not Interested” in a response email. Potential participants were encouraged to contact the researcher with any potential questions pertaining to the study. The Director of the HCSFS program sent reminder emails to the identified students to help foster participation.

When participants arrived for the focus groups, they were given the consent to participate in research form to sign along with the Consent Statement for Focus Group form. The Consent Statement for Focus Group defined focus groups, the goal and how the researcher would conduct the focus groups. Participants were also verbally told about the ground rules and encouraged to speak whatever they wanted to and to respect each other as they may have differing opinions. Wholey et. al. (2010) encourages researchers to inform participants of this information along with informing participants that there are no wrong answers. They were told that there were no right or wrong answers and that the goal was to gain understanding into each of their own personal experiences with the program. At the end of each of the two focus groups, blank sheets of paper were left for participants to write any information that they wanted to share but for whatever reason did not during the focus groups. They were told that they could write whatever they wanted and did not have to include any identifying information. After being invited to share
any remaining information that they may not wanted to share during the focus groups via pen
and paper, no participants did so.
Chapter Three

Methodology

The Research Method - Focus Groups

The data for this study were collected through focus groups. A focus group is an “interview on a topic with a group of people who have knowledge of the topic” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 114). The advantage of focus group data is that it produces “a very rich body of data expressed in the respondents’ own words and context” (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rock, 2007, p. 39) and allows for a variety of input and interaction. It also provides a more thorough understanding of mentees’ actual opinions (Edmunds, 1999) without seeking to gain a consensus or single solution (Whooley et al., 2010). Focus groups are a qualitative research method that originated out of social psychological studies (Merriam & Tisdell; Stewart, Shamdasani et.al, 2007) and are used in a variety of fields due to their ability to address the theories, procedures, and research purposes of different disciplines. Fields such as psychotherapy, program evaluation, gerontology and marketing have used focus groups to address various questions and issues (Stewart et.al. 2007). Focus groups are helpful because they yield in-depth answers and allow for brainstorming and the generation of insights and creative ideas due to the live interaction of the group (Edmunds, 1999).

Groups held specifically with college students can lead students to feel affirmed, relaxed, and accepted (Billup, 2012). These feelings of connection are what makes focus groups more effective as students feel more comfortable expressing themselves in a group (Billups, 2012). Benefits include the ability of the researcher to gain multiple perspectives, allowing the researcher to gain access to different feelings and perceptions that may be more difficult to gain individually through interaction and input (Billups, 2012; Edmunds, 1999).
In their discussion of quantitative research, Stewart et.al (2007) state that qualitative research “is a contact sport, requiring some degree of immersion into individuals lives…it is unique from other forms of research due to its emphasis on meaning over measurement” (p. 12). Similarly, phenomenology involves focusing on the experience itself. The task of phenomenology is to understand the “essence” or basic structure of experience (Merriam & Tisdell, p. 26). Focus groups use a purposeful sample of a homogeneous group of people who share similar characteristics in order to gain insight into their experiences (Whooley, et.al. 2010). The homogeneity of the group provides a greater chance for participants to share their personal experiences and listen to others because of the amount of comfort gained from having commonalities with the others (Whooley, et.al, 2010). This sample allows for the results to be generalizable to the specific population being studied (Edmunds, 1999).

Focus groups with college students specifically can lead students to feel affirmed, relaxed and accepted (Billups, 2012). These feelings of connection are what makes focus groups more effective as students feel more comfortable expressing themselves in the group. Benefits include the ability for the researcher to gain multiple perspectives, gain access to different feelings and perceptions that may be more difficult to gain individually (Billups, F. 2012). When conducting focus groups with college students, purposes should be clearly articulated along with an agenda or outline (Krueger, Casey, 2009 & Raines, 2003 cited in Billups, 2012).

**Description of Participants**

The participants used in the study were Full-time undergraduate students, from a liberal arts college in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. Some of the participants were in the program for one year and some of them have been in the program for two years. Some participants were
in each of the participants identified as African-American and was between the ages of 19-21. Participants were recruited from the Director of the program to ensure purposeful sampling. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) encourage the use of purposeful sampling to include participants who are the most knowledgeable about the topic being studied. Mentees of the researcher and the researcher’s husband were excluded from the study to illuminate bias.

The initial sample of included eleven self-identified Black/African-American students. One student dropped out of participation after arriving, which resulted in 10 participants. It is recommended that groups which might cover personal or sensitive information or experience with the topic being studied have smaller groups of five to eight people each, because larger groups can lead to sharing of less detailed information due to time constraints (Wholey et. al, 2010). Six participants were 19 years old, three were 20 years old, and one was 21 years old. Nine participants identified as Female, one participant identified as Androgynous. Two participants self-identified as Freshmen, four self-identified as Sophomores, three self-identified as Juniors and one self-identified as a Senior.

**Implementation**

The two focus groups were held at an A.M.E. church where all participants were members. This site was chosen so that participants would feel comfortable and appreciated (Wholey et. al, 2010). Considering that the two focus groups were held during exam week and at lunch and dinner times, pizza and drinks were provided to participants before the focus groups. It was the researcher’s goal to provide a comfortable environment and show the participants researchers appreciation for their sacrifice of time. Participants mingled with the researcher and the other mentees before the start of the focus groups. Wholey et. al. (2010) encourage researchers to hold the focus groups in an environment that is comfortable, convenient, and
familiar to the participants. The location of the focus group should be accessible to potential participants (Edmunds, 1999). The church where the focus groups were held is within walking distance from the university, which is a convenient location, especially for those without transportation. Wholey et. al. (2010) also emphasize the role of the moderator as one perceived as open and willing to listening to anything. Mingling with participants before the start of the focus groups provided an opportunity for the researcher to meet the participants and get to know them in order to communicate trust and develop rapport.

Data Analysis

In order to generate a sample of ten focus group members, two focus groups were planned. Researchers recommend conducting two or more groups depending on the topic to ensure representation as well as an opportunity to compare groups (Edmunds, 1999). Qualitative analysis was my primary method of collecting and exploring college students’ reflections due to its emphasis on meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, and the use of an inductive investigative strategy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37). The study was therefore a qualitative, phenomenological case study, described by Merriam and Tisdell as “an in-depth- description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 37).

Case Study analysis provided an opportunity to document and highlight the unique experiences of this “bounded system” of college students in this specific mentorship program at a specific small church in the Shenandoah Valley (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Each focus group was prompted with five questions to gain information into the experiences of the participants in the mentorship program. The investigator used open coding or initial analysis of each transcribed interview to identify important themes and ideas of participant dialogue. A research assistant helped to code the data.
CHAPTER FOUR

Research Findings

The researcher held two focus groups designed to assess participants’ experiences in the HCSFS mentoring program. The researcher was interested in understanding mentees’ overall experiences in the program, experiences that they deemed most and least helpful, whether they would recommend the program to someone else, whether the program had an impact on their endurance and persistence in college, whether the spiritual component of the program provided a particular benefit for them, and any recommendations for the program. Analysis of the data from the focus groups revealed the following for each research question. Note that names reported here were changed to protect respondents. In the analysis of the focus group responses, the following themes emerged: career exploration and validation; comfort/familiarity with food; assistance transitioning through college; increased connection with mentors and other mentees; needing a role model; importance of having spiritual guidance for spiritual growth and trust; needing financial help; needing consistency in a changing environment; and wanting an African-American mentor.

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of the mentees in the HCSFS program?

Positive experiences with emphasis on career exploration and validation

The first research question pertained to respondents’ general experiences and perceptions of the program. Although the researcher’s goal was to gain general information, what was received in response was participants’ interpretation of that question as inquiring about positive
and negative experiences. All mentees discussed having positive experiences in the HCSFS program. Different mentees offered different reasons that contributed to those experiences being positive. Characteristics of the program which participants described as positive were: having a mentor in the same field; mentors and mentees having similar personalities; having an older, experienced role model and leader; and having someone to give concrete strategies.

Representative quotes are used below to illustrate themes. In all cases, respondents’ names have been changed to honor confidentiality.

Cathy: I think my experience so far as a mentee has been really good, especially because my mentee is kind of in the same field as I am. We’re both like, in health care. So, she gives me advice, you know, beyond like, church. And so, I think that that’s really important. I have the opportunity of, like, next week working with her, interning with her, so I think that that’s important.

Karen: My experience with being a mentee actually is really good because my mentor and I have the same personality… and we didn’t realize it at first until, like, September…so, my mentor, she calls me when she knows that I haven’t -- when she hasn’t heard from me, or she’ll pray for me when she knows I’m having a rough day. But it also goes to the same thing, like we as mentees can pray for our mentors too… Well, it makes me very happy seeing someone who has the same personality as me because they’re able to understand me more than someone who’s different.

Flora: Well, my experience with my mentee was really good. You know, me as a freshman, you know, being new, it’s always good to have someone that’s older than you, you know, to help with stuff. I learned a lot from her. Like, she taught me how to like, manage my time as a freshman… It made me feel good because she knows what she’s talking about, and when I took her advice it actually helped me out a lot with school and studying and preparing for exams and stuff.

When asked how her mentor specifically helps her, she responded by stating that she offered specific strategies, the response is below:

Flora: Well, when -- I’m going to talk personal. Like, when I study or whatever I’m the type that’ll like, cram everything and then I’ll forget later, and she basically, you know, tells me to you know, like, take my time, talk to Jesus about it in between breaks and stuff.

Beverly: Well, since I’ve been in the program I’ve been able to like, (inaudible) a lot more. I mean, we talked on a regular basis but I know that like, if I need something she’ll be there to give it to me or if I talk to her she’ll be there to talk to me. Just a phone call or text away. And
like, before I joined the program, I was like, coming to church a little bit. I’d be here like, some Sundays, not all Sundays. But now, I come a lot more and (inaudible) help me grow and find my relationship with God. Oh, and she feeds me.

A general sense that became clear throughout the conversations with the mentees was how connected they felt with their mentors. Mentees discussed how their connection with mentors, especially as it related to career similarities and mentor personality, informed the bond and led to closeness. This career and personality connection provided validation for mentees because of the knowledge that they gained. They specifically shared how they felt about the matching and the impact that they felt it has made on her life.

Jenny: I would have to say that I think that the matching for the mentors and mentees went well, because if it’s not like, something specific in your field and it’s something that’s like, in your personality, like they kind of have some of the same personality traits…So, I think the matching was really well. I know I think personally for me I really appreciate my mentor because I know what I -- as a person who wants to go into health care, I don’t know like, what type of, like, facility -- whether I want to like, work at the hospital or work at a health department or like, assisted living homes. So, like, her giving me advice on how each one works I think is very good. And I think it’s important that -- you know, having a mentor who’s had some experience, some real experiences. So, like, what they’re saying to you is not nothing that’s off the wall.

Karen: Well, the matching is -- the matching is really good because as I said earlier my mentor and I have similar personalities. Like, you may not see it in the beginning but as they get to know you and you get to know them you’ll really see, like, “Hey, I have some similarities with my mentor and they have similarities with me,” and it makes it easier to go to them when you need them and for them to relate to you and give you the best advice.

Mentees’ responses are consistent with mentoring literature which states that mentees who have a mentor early in their career are more likely to get a bachelor’s degree. Beegle’s (2003) research indicated that mentors helped expand their network of support and made them aware of opportunities and helped them understand social capital. Mentors help students learn effective communication styles and behaviors to thrive in college. Through their relationships, they gained important contacts and even learned how to fill out financial aid forms and learned
effective study skills. Support received from mentors also helped reduce stress pertaining to poverty.

Comfort/Familiarity through Food

One unexpected theme that emerged from more than one participant was that mentees emphasized the food that mentors gave them. They discussed the important role that eating home cooked/non-dining hall food played in their experience within the mentorship program. They found such comfort and familiarity through home cooked, personal food. Below are some comments as it pertains to this.

Samantha: Because, like, the first couple of things that we did were food. Like, I went to her house and she made dinner and it was fire…So, it was such a relief because the dining hall food is actual trash, so it was good to not have it because that’s stressful for me, because food is -- has been a big part of my life. Like, before I came to school my whole family cooks so we make lots of good foods, like life, love and the pursuit of happiness for me. So, coming here and having trash food is stressful, so having good food from my mentor was a huge de-stressor for me. And she’s also, like, a great person, so we started developing our relationship and finding all the similarities between the two of us, and it’s good to see someone like me out being successful because my mentor is in grad school. She’s going to get her Master’s probably around the same time we are, actually…So, it’s -- I don’t know. She’s a huge motivator for me. It’s like, “Oh, look at you out there being great.”

Tammy: So, my mentor is a community member. She goes to Allen Chapel and one of the biggest things I got from our relationship has been just the mentorship of an older person because a lot of my goals when I filled out the sheet had a lot to do with me growing up and being more of an adult, more independent of my mom. And so, going to school away from home, being the first one, was kind of hard, and having an adult that’s in the town that you’re in to kind of check in on you, make sure you’re like, holding it together and getting -- not getting things done, but just making sure that you’re yourself was a really big help for me. Really impacted me. And like, she checks in and one of the first things I remember is like, when I was sick. I was supposed to go over to her house and I went over and she was like, “Oh, you’re sick,” and gave me some ginger ale, and it was like, the old lady kind. It was the Seagram’s ginger ale, like bottles. (overlay) Yeah, it wasn’t that… Yeah, it wasn’t that ginger ale that you just buy, you’re like, “Oh, this is $1.99.” Like -- so, just stuff like that really -- really, to me, shows the culmination of our relationship where like, she helps me out, you know, as a grown up.

Samantha: But I mean, even to the extent of like, what Tammy said. Homecooked meals, even -- because even if the dining hall food wasn’t good, you still want food that tastes like home, if that makes sense… And so, I don’t want to eat pizza to take a break from dining hall food; I want
home food to take a break -- Yeah, pizza is that “I’m hungry at midnight. I need to eat something.” Pizza is a struggle food. I don’t want that.

Tammy: But to me, like, a good homecooked meal has a cooked vegetable. I was a vegetarian before I got here, halfway to last year. So, one thing I really admired is that my mentor, she did try to learn some vegetarian things for me to eat until, you know, I switched to eating meat. But yeah, she… I like when she makes greens and green beans. To me, a whole meal includes a vegetable, so… Yeah, and a lot of the dining hall food is starch and meat, and so to me that was a big part of me being comfortable, me feeling like I can eat here.

These findings are consistent with Dunbar (2017)’s research as described in *Breaking bread: The Functions of Social Eating*, which showed that people who eat socially feel better about themselves and are more likely to feel socially and emotionally supported. This literature also showed that those who ate in the evening rather than midday and whose conversation included laughter and alcohol had enhanced feelings of closeness. When adults over the age of 18 were asked how often they ate with different members of their extended network, 15% indicated that they hadn’t had a meal with a family member in six months, 45% reported that they hadn’t had a meal with an old friend, 70% indicated that they never had a meal with a neighbor, 15% without a work colleague, and 37% indicated that they never had a meal with a community group. However, 65% felt that there was someone that they should connect with and 75% felt that the connection would be forged by eating a meal together. McLeane et al (1998) indicated that mentoring relationships are more successful when the mentor and mentee engage in a range of activities while offering guidance. This research may underscore the mentee’s desire, like those of those researched, to connect over food, and may highlight the particular need for students who are away from home and lacking home cooked meals.

Silva et al.’s (2017) study of 390 college students of at least 18 years with 10% over age 31 indicated that they experienced homelessness, unpredictable housing and food insecurity. 47% of students with housing instability stated that it affected their ability to attend class, and
81% of those students indicated that their housing instability impacted their ability to perform in class. 64% of students reported “severe” troubles, indicating that they often/sometimes did not eat for one or two days because of lack of money for food. Approximately 2% reported some form of food insecurity over the past year.

The importance of being fully accepted in spite of such difficulties was highlighted by Helen, who talked about how her experiences with her mentor offered her the friendship that she needed by having someone on an equal level who will not judge her.

Helen: Me and my mentor, like, I think we’ve become really good friends and I think that’s really what I needed more than like, a leader or like, a mother figure. I needed a friend. So, she’s that for me and we talk about a lot. We hang out, like -- she takes me out to dinner or (inaudible) or something like that, you know. Talks to me, like, not like -- not like an adult would, but like, as a friend, like as an equal.

When asked how she feels by having a friend mentor relationship, she responded by stating:

“It makes me feel good. Makes me feel a little bit, like -- not that she’s brought down to my level, but like, I’m not really intimidated by her. Like, (inaudible) intimidated by the people that are above me… and so, it makes me -- it makes me like, more open to talk to her about certain situations.

Helped with the Transition to College

Some mentees discussed how it felt to have a mentor that cares and someone they can confide in. They also discussed the culture shock in attending a college located in a rural area and how their mentor helped with the adjustment, and for one in particular, how mentorship helped with her choosing to remain in school. Emotional problems were also a theme that materialized throughout the discussions, and the role that mentorship played in helping to combat those problems was evident. Mentees talked about how their mentors helped them remain in college as follow:

Jenny: Well, kind of like, pinging back to all of what Helen said about, you know, feeling comfortable with like, your mentor, because I know like, sometimes it can be hard to kind of say stuff to like, certain people, and so having a mentor you can kind of... Confide in, and kind of
like your safe haven in a way. I think that’s really good… I feel like -- feel comfortable for -- for example, like, since [student’s mentor] is in like, the health care field, she like, understands I’m going through the same. Like, I want to stay in health care but I don’t really know like, where, like health care I want to go to. So, to have somebody who understands that, you know, it’s okay not to have everything together right now, it’s like, important because you know, sometimes with your family other people kind of put like, timelines on how, like -- you should be doing this by this and this and at that time, and so all that pressure. So to have somebody who like, understands is like -- like, ‘I’ve been through that, but like, I still made it.’ It’s really, like, helpful.

Tammy: It affected me because it made me really feel that there was somebody here that cared about me. Like I said earlier, I’m not from Virginia. I’m not from a town like this, so it’s a big culture shock to be here. And so, to have somebody who’s from the area who can tell me, like, to calm down. Like, ‘Nothing is going to be open after 10:30. Like, calm down,’ was kind of a help for me.

Tabatha: Well, coming off of her -- yeah, I’m not from here, either. So, I’m like, really from the city, so like, being in a small town kind of like -- you’re like, “Whoa. I don’t know why I’m here. Why did I choose here?” But my mentor -- she’s from a city, too, so I connected with her more and like, being able to also have a mentor that understood, like, all my emotional problems I was going through at the time. I knew there was somebody there to talk to and I meet with her every Monday, so we’ll talk; she would see how I’m doing. She’ll ask if I need help, and if I needed it she would provide that help for me. Like, I’d sit down in her office and actually do my homework because I needed the guidance because I didn’t know what to do, and being also the first person to go to school was really hard. So, I’m glad I had someone to look up to but also had the same similarities as I -- as I did, so we’d go out, we’ll talk and we’ll do other stuff that made our relationship bigger.

Samantha: [In reference to her mentor] Makes me want to stay here, because I have no desire [to stay, otherwise.]

Tabatha responded by saying that the personality similarity is enough so that “You can stick it out.”

The mentees’ responses correspond with the literature pertaining to the difficulties that some students of color face when transitioning to college. Attaining a college degree is often the means by which African-American students gain access to the job market and to opportunities that result. Gaining a college degree can be the solution to the reduction of poverty and help close wealth gaps given the labor market and more globalized economy (Bryant, 2015). Many
African-American women are the only ones in their community to attend college, and many are the only woman of color in many classes, which leads to being misunderstood and having to deal with stereotypes (Watt, 2013). First generation college students, low-income students, and those from minority racial and ethnic groups face bigger challenges than other ethnic groups when it comes to career readiness. Many are unprepared for college and thus will be unprepared for the American labor market (Bryant, 2015). Bryant (2015) calls for attention to be placed on the deficiencies in the public-school system where she cites two primary problems, particularly for low income students; one problem being lack of college preparation in the earlier grades and lower teacher expectation. Respondent comments about needing a mentor to help them navigate college is consistent with the literature, which talks about the role of mentors for African-American women in particular. Howard-Vital and Moran (1993)’s research on mentoring for African-American women administrators showed several characteristics and functions of the mentoring that they received which included building confidence, heightened self-esteem, increasing motivation and helping them navigate their role and expectation in organizations.

Another theme throughout the focus groups was how the program has helped build relationships amongst the mentees. One of the ways that mentees were able to make more friends is because of having shared mentors. Mentees talked about how they were able to build a relationship with other mentees they normally wouldn’t know or encounter on campus. Although this theme of connection between mentees does not appear in recent literature, it highlights the importance of having a community and source of shared experience as a potential protective factor for students and is therefore worthy of additional study.

The importance of having someone normalize feelings and experiences was also bought up by one mentee.
Jenny: I feel like -- feel comfortable for -- for example, like, since [mentor] is in like, the health care field, she like, understands I’m going through the same. Like, I want to stay in health care but I don’t really know like, where, like health care I want to go to. So, to have somebody who understands that, you know, it’s okay not to have everything together right now, it’s like, important because you know, sometimes with your family other people kind of put like, timelines on how, like -- you should be doing this by this and this and at that time, and so all that pressure. So to have somebody who like, understands is like -- like, “I’ve been through that, but like, I still made it.” It’s really, like, helpful.

Jenny talked about how her mentor, who’s successful in her field, inspires her. Her mentor helps to normalize her feelings of not having her career mapped out which is in contrast to the pressures that she feels from others. There are multiple levels of support that Jenny receives from her mentor which are normalizing her feelings, providing practical knowledge about her career of choice and confidence in her ability to succeed.

*Positive Experiences with Honest Mentors with Similar personality*

Mentees described the role that having the same/similar personalities play in developing a healthy, enjoyable mentor relationship. One talked about how both she and her mentor smile a lot and how that commonality makes it easier for her to approach her and connect. Other mentee responses are below:

*Rebecca:* My mentor, like, she tells me what it is; I tell her what it is. We have an understanding. We’re pretty much the same person, kind of. Sometimes. She’s helped me choose (inaudible) so I like that.

**Research Question 2: What experiences in the program do the mentees deem most and least helpful? Why?**

The researcher first asked participants to talk about experiences that they deem most helpful and why. Financial Benefits was a topic that mentees expressed appreciating along with citing other helpful experiences.

*Financial Benefits.*
There was a lot of energy and excitement when respondents discussed financial benefits. This was overwhelmingly the most discussed benefit of the program. Several mentees talked about the benefits of having financial help in the form of paying for their books, money towards tuition and the room deposit. One mentee discussed how paying for tuition was difficult with a father out of work a mother in the hospital. She described this help by stating that “school is more manageable. Below are some quotes which express their sentiments of financial benefits.

Karen: I am a first-generation college student, and then being raised by a single parent. So, college is very expensive, and this program has helped me tremendously financially because there’s been times where I’m not sure if I’m going to be able to come back because I haven’t paid -- I don’t understand the balances on my account…Rev paid my deposit for next year so I didn’t have to worry about it. I could focus on like, the balance that I had on my account -- to get that paid off.

Beverly: The tuition help. I need to relax. The program has helped me for my books, it’s helped me for tuition. They even offered to help pay a fee for a class I was going to take but decided not to take. So, that’s definitely a big part because my mom had six kids and she’s a single parent, so tuition here is kind of steep and -- yeah, so that’s definitely been a good thing… Honestly, I would try to figure out “Oh, how am I going to get tuition paid this semester? How am I going to get books so I can, you know, take these classes?” and it’s helped me to like, de-stress and worry a little bit less about how I’m going to come back next year or how I’m going to register for my classes, or how I’m even going to get housing, because we have to pay our housing deposit before we even try to get a room. So, it’s been easier, taking a lot of stress and a lot of stuff off my shoulders.

Tammy: One thing that really helped me was -- because I paid my own tuition, books usually were like, an afterthought. Like, usually I worked hard all summer just to pay my tuition, so by the time it was time to get books I’m like, “Oh…” And so, for me over the summer, like in the beginning of the summer I got -- not in the beginning, but right before we got back to school I got a call like “Hey, do you need any, like, money for books?” And it was like, “Oh, my goodness. Like, wow. I don’t have to try to push eighty hours in this week because I’ve got somebody helping me out with books,” and so for me that was a stress relief at the beginning of the school year because I knew that when we got to school I needed my books within a couple of days. And I’m a History major so we don’t use a lot of textbooks; we use a lot of novels and we have to get them in quickly. And so, being able to get books before I have to, you know, read them for a week and hurry up and move on to the next thing was really important.

Tabatha: Another thing with like, the tuition thing, like I didn’t even know it paid for tuition. I wasn’t even aware at first. But then it was like, “Oh, you need books? Do you need someone to pay for your books?” I was like, “Well, I already paid for them but I didn’t know y’all paid for it,” so that was just kind of a relief for me but I always kind of just pushed myself just to pay for
it, but if I did need somebody to pay for it I had somebody that would help me, so that was actually a relief too.

Samantha: Another thing outside not having to pay for books is I did not know how my tuition was getting paid for the last semester. Just the question I had -- whatever my balance was -- and I was like, “Well, this is huge and I don’t have it, and my mom is in the hospital and my dad’s not working, so I don’t know where this money is going to come from.” The money from the program knocked like, half of that off, so it’s more manageable and payable. Now it’s paid, so that was really -- the whole situation was super duper stressful, but now that it’s paid it’s done and I don’t have to worry about it anymore, and that is a fabulous feeling.

One mentee stated that having her move-in deposit paid for by the program was a “huge relief,” and another used the word “helpful” to describe her feelings of having her textbooks paid for and not having to think about it. Another mentee shared her experience of being a first-generation college student being raised by a single parent and the difficulty of that reality. She continued by stating that she could focus on other balances that had to be paid when her deposit was paid for by the program. Another mentee talked about the added benefit of being able to get her books in advance due to the payment of her books. Although one mentee bought her books, she stated that being in the program gave her piece of mind with knowing that if she needed help, she would have it.

The financial needs of students, especially African-American students, are consistent with the literature that says that students struggle with financial problems, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Grable and Joo (2006) studied the financial knowledge and attitudes of behaviors of 110 college students, 53% of which were African-American students, and found that African-American students were more likely to hold credit card debt balances than non-Hispanic Whites. Significant factors that affected their financial behaviors were racial background subjective debt, their financial knowledge and credit card debt. Credit card debt level was directly related to student’s financial stress level and African-Americans had higher levels of stress and more credit card debt. Grable and Joo (2006) recommend, along with
traditional support for successful college transition, that African-American students receive mentoring and counseling with money management skills and orientation sessions around topics of personal finance. Jod, Grable and Bagwell (2003) estimate that 70% of college students utilize credit card cards, with the average of age of acquiring a credit card 18 years.

Beegle’s (2003) focus group interviews with college graduates who came from generational poverty indicated that they felt a great deal of shame and humiliation from growing up in poverty. Feelings expressed was that they felt that poverty was their fault and that they lacked many basic needs like having food money and issues with basic appearance. Seeking help, building confidence and becoming knowledgeable about resources are essential for students from generational poverty to become successful (Beegle, 2003).

Along with the stress of adjustment to college in terms of leaving family and forming more peer groups is the increased financial burden on students (Archuleta, et. al; Gallien, 2005) Their research of 180 college students who sought services as a university peer financial counseling center showed that students from low-income families, independent students and minority students were more financially at risk due to loans after graduation.

*Level-Headed Voice of Reason*

Several mentees discussed the importance of having a level-headed mentor who was their voice of reason. It was important for them to speak to someone to help them sort out irrational beliefs and someone to help them make appropriate, logical decisions that were based truth. Respondents stated that they enjoy having a mentor to talk to when making decisions. One mentee discussed how important it has been for her to have a level-headed person to help her make campus decision about program and campus activities. She talked about how her mentor let her vent and confronted her on irrational decisions while provide oversight. Mentees talked
about how having their mentors provide words of encouragement and engaging in strategies and problem solving with them is helpful. This, they stated, helps them keep a level head. They discussed the importance of having someone who was observant and paid attention to their needs. Some discussed how along with being level-headed they appreciated a mentor who was observant enough to notice when something was wrong and warranted attention. One mentee in particular talked about how her mentee helped her when she was having some mental health difficulties. Her mentee noticed that she needed help even when she tried to hide it. The support provided made her want to stay in school which resulted in her actually wanting to attend class.

Tabatha: My mentor -- we share the same mentor. So, our mentor, she’s really, like, there for us when we need it because this semester has been rough. So, like she was saying earlier, I was preparing to be up out of here. I wasn’t going to come back. I wasn’t going to look back. I was going to go home and (inaudible), and like, I went to my mentor and she was like, “Something’s different about you,” and I was just like, “What are you talking about?” She was like, “You can’t fool me.” So, she was able to like, you know -- even though I didn’t have to say anything to her, she knew that something was wrong with me and she was able to kind of get me out of what I was, you know, down about and she made sure to check up on me when I needed checking, because since I’ve been at school I’ve been so busy so I don’t get to like, call home as much and stuff like that. And yeah, I didn’t want to go to class, I didn’t want to do anything. So, she was able to kind of like, give me that push that I needed and stuff like that, which was really good for me because you know, when I’m at home I’m a very family-oriented person and being here and being away from my family was kind of hard and stuff like that. And my mentor was like, my second mom, so it’s really good that she’s here and she’s here (inaudible).

Tammy: Also, like, a level-headed person to talk to when you’re making decisions. I know for me I had a couple of decisions to make this year dealing with not just -- well, stuff at home but also a couple of decisions about things on campus, programs and stuff like that, and so like, I called my mentor and she listened to me, let me rattle on and on about why I don’t want to do something, and she kind of explained to me that I wasn’t making a rational decision. It was out of emotion. And so, having somebody there like an adult with oversight who is not in the situation kind of gives you -- I don’t know. To me… Yeah, tell me that if I want to make an adult decision then I need to make a decision like an adult. That’s what she told me.

This is consistent with Parks (2000) assertion that young adulthood is full of contradictory cultural signals which make it difficult for them to navigate the world. Life becomes more
complicated, topics become more controversial and it becomes difficult to tell when one has actually reached adulthood when the indicators are becoming more unclear (Parks, 2000).

She states that when young adults have an environment that is non-motivating, is distracting or exploited they may never reach their reach their full potential due to their circumstances.

*Joint services with mentors*

Respondents spent a lot of time discussing the need and desire to connect with their mentors in a variety of ways. One of those ways that was expressed several times by several mentees was having joint church services with mentors. In fact, several desired to have more time spent with their mentors through joint services. Some stated that scheduling time during the week is difficult so the requirement of joint services allows for more time to connect. This time also allows for time to meet other mentors in order to network. Mentees discussed how helpful it was for them to have mentors who attended the local church. This was a comment voiced by more than one mentee. They stated that being linked to another church in the community where the mentors attend gives them something to look forward to as well as the added benefit of food being a part of the church service.

Jenny: I think my -- one of my good experiences is sometimes when, you know, instead of having church here we go to like, [an AME church]. Many of our mentors -- some of the mentors are from [an AME church] and I know, like, for my mentor, she works at the Health Department so like, she’s very, very busy… And so, sometimes we might not see each other as often as we’d like to. So, I think the opportunity of like, seeing each other in church is like, good, because I kind of like, get to spend time with her… and catch up

Samantha: I thought that was how it was supposed to go. Anyway, so when the mentors go to Allen, I have something else to look forward to when we do joint services because then my mentor is there and I’m like, “Hey, how you doing?” So, that’s always good. And then also, when we do those services (inaudible). That’s not really the program, but I like food.

Several mentees expressed the appreciation for having joint services with their mentors.

Students expressed that this provides for the opportunity to see mentors in church in a structured
way which gives them time to catch up. A mentee placed a great emphasis on this as it helps her see a mentor in her church leader role which is also like this particular mentee. She described how her mentors modeling of church involvement behavior helps with her relationship with God.

Jenny: I think my -- one of my good experiences is sometimes when, you know, instead of having church here we go to like, Allen Chapel. Many of our mentors -- some of the mentors are from Allen Chapel and I know, like, for my mentor, she works at the Health Department so like, she’s very, very busy.

Parks (2000) state that mentees need more than one individual to be challenged, they need a “trustworthy network of belonging” (p. 134.) She calls this network a mentoring community who provides space for mentees to have ideas and opportunities that go beyond one individual’s support. These communities involve more than one mentor but a team of mentors where all respect and challenge each other, she also defines this as co-mentoring. These communities involve trust and engagement amongst all involved. These communities or tribes help them enact their reality, provide assurance, coherence and connection between who they were and the person that they want to become which in turn leads to new awareness and change (Park, 2000).

In terms of spirituality, Parks (2000) state that mentoring communities are needed to confirm their worthiness and faith. They also hold the mentee accountable when they may not be living up to the challenges of complicated issues, issues of diversity, morality and display a weaker faith. Mentoring communities are essential to the development of their adult faith by helping them make meaning and live out their purpose, asking appropriate questions, teaching appropriate habits, helping them encounter diversity and provide overall physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual support to help them become grounded in the world. (Parks, 2000)

Mentees stated that they like being reminded to keep in touch with their mentor. Being reminded to keep in touch with their mentor was expressed as helpful, and perhaps reminded them that they were important to someone else. Several mentees discussed the “relief” of having
a relationship with someone who cares about them and to have a relationship by choice and not by obligation.

Tammy: Another thing in the program I feel was really just kind of being told to keep in touch with your mentor, because for me -- like I said, my mentor is an older woman. She has her own stuff going on. But sometimes, like, for me, it’s a relief. It’s kind of a relief to just take a step back from running around, getting things done for school, getting things done for class, to say, “Hi, how are you?” or for somebody to ask you how you are and it’s not in passing, it’s not as a precursor to them asking you for something. And so, casual conversation -- that aspect of just talking to somebody because you like them, not because you have to work with them. That was the big thing. I feel like that’s a lot of what we do.

Mentors provide emotional safety and space for the mentee to be present and provides cognitive and emotional support while helping them gain insight, this relationship help solidify how they view their future self (Parks, 2000). Research shows that mentoring relationships with young adults in difficult life circumstances are helped by having an older mentor who can provide networking contact with other people who can assist them in their life (Mc Learn et.al, 1998). Their research also indicates that at least four hours per week on the phone is effective.

A Dependable Mentor

Several talked with fervor when describing how helpful it has been to have a dependable mentor who is “there for us when we need it.” One mentee stated that she has a mentor who checks up with her and is aware of her needs. She described a time when she lacked motivation and “she was able to give me that push that I needed.”

Tabatha: Even when I was sick. Like, she was like, “What do you need?” because I caught the flu, and she was like, “Okay, we’re going to get you this flu medicine, da, da, da,” because I didn’t have the money for medicine. It was kind of expensive. She was like, “You know I got you,” stuff like that, so (inaudible)...Yeah, I like that about my mentor, too, because my mentor is -- she is on campus, so when I do meet her every Monday -- most of the time when I meet with her I’m always stressing about something, and she can just see right through me. She’s like, “What now? What are you stressing about?” and she just tells me, like, “Take a quote out of the jar just to give you some words of encouragement.” So, to push me, saying “You can do this. It’s going to be fine. We’re going to get through it.” It’s that. So, we’re just going to talk about it and we’re going to try to find different ways to solve the problem and stuff like that, and that was
really big for me because half the time when I try to make a decision, it just doesn’t come out the way I want to and I don’t like asking nobody to help me make the decision, but she was just always there because she would always see right through it. She’s like, “You just need to stop stressing. It’s going to be fine. Like, chill out.

Mentees emphasized the importance of their mentees calling them on the phone, meeting and having what was called “stop by’s.” This was defined as the mentors dropping by to offer home cooked meals and or attending outings such as softball games. Mentees like when they are asked about their needs, dropping off food, softball games, asking if mentees need as well as the unexpected communication. There was a collective expression of their appreciation for mentor’s sacrifice of time. This sacrifice of time, they stated makes them feel “more connected’ and “special.” Whole day changes if the day was bad due to the check-ins. One mentee talked about how her mentor makes her feel “important” consider her busy life with children and two other mentees. Another mentee commented that she likes to have a set date to meet since both are busy and this mentee prefers face to face communication compare to phone communication.

Gabby: I think -- sometimes my mentor does like, random stop-bys and something like that or she just like, randomly calls or (inaudible) -- “I have something for you if you want to come get it,” or something like that. She just comes by and it’s like -- it makes me feel good because it’s like, unexpected and she’s just like, thinking about me.

Flora: I know my mentor and I -- we went to a few softball games because her daughter is a softball coach, and then we’d like, go out to eat and then, you know, before she like, drops me back off she’ll be like, “Do you need anything from the store? Do you need me to like, get you anything?” And so, kind of like… you know, not knowing somebody for like, so long and them doing something like, so nice for you and just taking time out of the -- time out of their day to just like, do stuff for you that they didn’t have to do -- I think it’s really special. It makes you feel like, special.

These are all reasons why people get mentors. The literature says that mentors should be truly be seen by their mentees and that this awareness of who they are is what leads to the formation of the self. They recognize needed support and dependence while letting the mentee know that they believe in their potential because they understand the vulnerability of young
adulthood (Parks, 2000). Parks indicated that the art of mentoring lies in their ability to help but also assess the readiness of the mentee in handling relationships and opportunities. They then guide them accordingly by providing them counsel when they are raking on too much or are too deeply involved in something or in a difficult situation that they may not be able to navigate on their own.

The researcher then asked the participants to explain any experiences that were least helpful and why.

One focus group did not have any feedback for least helpful aspects of the program. A strong sentiment from members of the other focus group was that they did not like the mandatory journals. They expressed not liking having to sum up their relationship in written form. They feel that after hanging out with their mentees they often forget details of what happened and found it difficult to itemize in writing. They also didn’t like having to date the form. This was expressed as feeling difficult, especially when mentees didn’t always have face to face meetings with their mentors. They also shared that they don’t always want to write about confidential things that they talk about with mentees. One mentee stated that this was particularly difficult for her and her older mentor. Participants also expressed that journals take away from the purpose of having a mentor. They were able to give really concrete examples of their feelings below:

Tabatha: They keep trying to get us to write like, journal entries and (inaudible) hang out with our mentor. That don’t work. I don’t even want to write my journal entries for class.

Beverly: If it doesn’t work it’s because we’re not an assignment. Like, we have a relationship.

Samantha: That’s the worst part. Me and my mentor are like, night owls, so if I was going to date something it’s not going to happen because we probably started at 10:00 and ended at 2:00 in the morning, so whatever the date is, it doesn’t matter because I fell asleep and can’t remember the day anyway. Because I don’t remember that I’m supposed to journal because I hate journaling in general….I think that’s it, because like, the journal to me is just an unnecessary part that I
wouldn’t have even remembered if you hadn’t said it already. Like, if you didn’t say “journals” I would have forgotten that we had journals.

Tammy: I like to journal but I don’t like to journal as like, an assignment. And for me, my mentor is an older person. She’s been sick, so she gets surgeries and stuff. So, we don’t always get to meet face-to-face. So, do I write a journal on the phone conversation? And if we’re writing a journal on a phone conversation, what can I really say? Because sometimes I tell her things that I don’t necessarily want to go into a report.

Samantha: It’s weird, because like, it’s a personal relationship, so if I’m going to have this personal conversation with you I don’t want it in a report somewhere.

Tabatha: Another thing is it’s not like, “Oh, journal,” and I remember it. It’s really at the end of the semester I get an email saying, “I need your journals,” and I’m like, “What journal?

Other words to describe the journals were “Unnecessary” and “Tedious.” Participants did have recommendations instead of the journals, including giving verbal reports in which they are asked specific questions about the mentors. They believed this would be more meaningful, as it would be shared face to face. They did reference a time when a speaker, whom they referred to as either “the elder” or “Bishop” came and spoke to them about the mentoring program. They stated that that was meaningful. The verbal reports, they suggested, would be “better than typing.” They also shared that having to turn in their emails at the end of the semester is not helpful because of their tendency of not staying up to date with their writings throughout the semester. Turning them in at the end of the semester causes a frenzy in conjunction with them not remembering what happened.

They also recommended writing their mentors thank you cards and making gifts for their mentors:

Tabatha: I feel like that would be nice for like, you know, making them for like, our mentor because if you have a good, strong relationship with them you should know, like, the things that they like. So, it shouldn’t be that hard to, you know, think about something and put something together and give it to them because you know.

Samantha: I could just come and say “This was great. I appreciate it. Thank you for the funds,” and you can see it on my face that I liked it and I appreciated it and it’s easier. You can’t communicate all that emotion talking through a paper.
Research Question 3: Would mentees recommend the program to someone else?

“This generation needs a role model”

The overwhelming response to this question was “Yes.” Respondents felt that they need a mentor for a role model and for spiritual guidance. The idea of having a role-model was a theme discussed throughout the focus groups and was especially emphasized when participants responded to this question. Mentees like having a role model that they can not only gain knowledge from but someone that they can look up to and model themselves after.

Karen: Yes. I say that because whether you’re a first-generation college student or not, a mentor is a mentor and everybody needs a role model, especially your first year. That person to say, ‘Hey, you can do this.’ Gives you encouragement. All the way up to your senior year, writing theses, seeing -- hearing you cry all hours of the night.

Jenny: I would say yes, I would agree. I would recommend this program to other people because I think that it’s important -- kind of like what they both said, what they both mentioned -- is that it’s important to have a mentor, especially -- it’s really important to have a mentor that -- I feel like in this program, like, God meant -- made them meant to be these mentors. And so, I feel like it’s important to have somebody who is kind of like, a spiritual guidance. You know, a person who, unlike your family or like, your friends -- somebody like -- like, your mentor knows you but they don’t know you as well as maybe your family and friends are, so they can (inaudible) when you -- like, for example, have to vent or say something to them when you have a lot of stuff on your mind, they won’t necessarily judge you compared to somebody who’s like, a friend or like, a family member. I also recommend the program because if you do need -- the program really does help a lot, you know, financially when you’re in need, but I think it’s also important that you’re involved in order to like, get into the program. I think that’s important because this program is under, you know -- under a church and starting from a church. I think that’s important to like, understand that, you know, this is not just a program that you just come in. Like, yes, I do recommend it but you also have to kind of be involved in like, church and show that you represent Christ.

Tabatha: Yes. I would recommend the program to someone else, because like, it’s literally in the title: Helping college students finish strong. Like, that’s really what it helps you do. And like, the program as a whole, I’m happy that we have it here and (inaudible) because without it, I would have been lost. I would have been drifting off in la-la-land... Like, I feel like, you know, I would not probably be coming to church because when I was at home we didn’t like, go to church. Like, we wouldn’t even -- like, we believe in God, we pray and stuff, but just going to church and stuff just wasn’t like, our scene. So, I wouldn’t be -- like, I feel like my faith wouldn’t be as strong as it is now. I would probably be still stressing trying to figure out how I’m going to like, pay for stuff and get through school and stuff like that, because even -- even though I work all
summer and put money towards my tuition, somehow there’s still a lot of money left over for some reason. So, I mean, this program just is really helpful with getting through the semester.

“It’s not for everyone”

However, although mentees generally recommend the program, they also shared that the program is not for everyone, especially those not willing to complete all of the requirements of the program. Mentees stated that they feel that it is important that potential mentees are involved in order to be qualified to get into the program. They felt that mentees need to understand that involvement is important in order to represent Christ. Involvement such as helping out, lending a helping hand, and taking leadership roles in the church, especially since the mentors are church leaders, was important for effective participation. One mentee stated that she wouldn’t recommend it to just anybody “because it wouldn’t fit for everybody.” For this particular mentee, knowing who her mentee was was her deciding factor. Already having an established relationship with that person was the key to her wanting to be in the program. It was also shared that they would recommend the program to someone who wants to better themselves.

Beverly: I don’t think I would be here because I wouldn’t have even recommended it for me. I was only in it because I knew that my mentor was going to do it, and I don’t think I would have wanted to do it if it was anybody else.

Tammy would recommend the program but her recommendation would come with some disclaimers to the potential participants.

Tammy: I think I would recommend it but I would tell who I’m recommending it to to kind of take it seriously. Like, try to get to know your mentor not just so that you can get what you want out of the program but also because -- I don’t know, I found something valuable in making personal -- like, building relationships with other people. And it gives you a (inaudible) and an anchor, and a lot of us are literally just floating around, just going from one place to the next just kind of in the motion of things, and so I would just recommend that they take it seriously and try to build that personal connection because it will be one that lasts more than just while you’re here.

Tabatha would recommend the program to people who aim to improve their lives.
Tabatha: It took me a while, but you know, we’re here. I would -- I would recommend it to someone that’s willing to like, try to better themselves. Like, if you’re really willing and someone’s actually going to be there to like, consider helping you and you’re willing to do it, then I would recommend this program to someone like that that wants to better themselves as a person and as a student, so yeah.

Tabatha’s comment about the mentoring program not working for everyone was echoed by other respondents. Some students do not or are not able to commit fully or thoroughly to the program.

*Spiritual Guidance*

Finally, mentees also shared how they would recommend the program due to the ability to grow spiritually and because of how it helped some start going back to church and live out their spirituality. Mentees discussed the importance of having someone who is of the same faith, someone who will pray for them and support them spiritually.

Flora: And so, I think -- and I also think, you know, when you have somebody -- a mentor who’s spiritual, it’s just something about that person that’s just like, different than anything else. Like, they live their life in kind of a way that you kind of want to, like, live yours, and I feel like having a mentor who is, you know, spiritual, you’re going to look at them and be like, “That’s how I want to, you know, walk with my faith. Like that,” and so, having somebody who can like, help you along the way get to that point I think is beneficial.

Gabby: I guess it’s kind of like that lifeline (inaudible). Like, having someone who -- who is the same kind of faith as you, they know about it, too…. you know that the advice they give you is coming from somewhere that won’t harm…

Flora: Knowing that somebody has your back and like, whatever you tell them is very confidential. You don’t have to worry about telling anyone else.

Tabatha: I feel like it did because back home, after my grandmother passed, you know, we stopped going to church. So, I hadn’t been to church in several years. So, when I started coming up here to (name of college) I actually found a church to go to kind of just to rebuild by relationship with God and it kind of -- it helped me because I see more benefits throughout my time here. Like, maybe something I would have not seen if I didn’t have a stronger bond with God, so I feel like it really helped me a lot.

Beverly talked about how joining the HCSFS program, her mentor and friends have helped her reconnect with church.

Beverly: …or else I would be cleaning the whole house while everybody was in church. So, I wouldn’t enjoy being in church as much and I’d be like, you know, “Why am I here?” I’d fall asleep in church and get in trouble for it. But like, since I joined the program and like -- like,
when I first came here I didn’t go to church for like, the whole first semester or anything. I was
like, “I’m not going to church.” (inaudible) but like, a lot -- like this year I noticed -- I really
noticed how my relationship with God changed. Like, I would come here and I would just be
having a ball. Like, I’d be singing all the songs. So, when I first came here I was like, “This is
weird. I don’t know these people, I don’t know, like -- me being here.” Like, she would be like,
“Hey, are you going to come to church with me?” or like, some of my friends, they’d say, “Hey,
you going to come to church?” “Yeah, I guess.” But now it’s just like, “Hey, you going to come
to church with me?” So, like, it’s definitely helped me like, build my relationship and I’m
actually happy to have a church home and stuff like that because I don’t have one when I go
home and my mom will be like, “Oh, (inaudible),” I’ll be like, “Yeah, girl. You want to go to
church?” They’ll just be like, “Go to church?” I’m like, “Yeah, you know.” I feel like having a
relationship with God is a good thing to have even if, like, you know, (inaudible). This program
has definitely made my relationship grow, so --.

Tammy: I was actually -- my mom was a minister, so I grew up in church. I always went to
church and so for me, going to church was important. But when I first got to (name of college) I
stopped going to church because -- honestly, because I didn’t see any churches that looked like
mine. When I got here, I just was nervous about going to a church that didn’t have the same, like,
name, I guess -- denomination, yeah. I was nervous about going to a church with a different
denomination and a lot of it was, like, “Y’all about to do communion and I don’t know if y’all
believe the same thing I do. Y’all singing this song. I don’t know if y’all mean it the same way I
do.” It was just -- I don’t know. To me, I was just nervous about being at a church that wasn’t
mine. And to me, when I got here it was a lot of self-reflection and really just wondering why I
was so apprehensive to go to church when I say I love God and I say I really like church but I
refuse to go because I’m not comfortable. And so, yeah, for me it was -- like, this program kind
of told me to go to church so that I could go to church and realize God is God no matter where
you are, and that I really did need that connection when I got like, to school, because I really
don’t know how to function without spirituality. I really don’t.

Tabatha: I have one more things to say. For those of us that I do see in church like, every
Sunday constantly -- it definitely helped me to build a relationship with the people that I don’t
really like, you know, talk to on campus but I see in church. So, if I see them on campus, even if
we’re not, like, you know….Two peas in a pod, I’ll be able to go up -- “Hey, how you doing?”
and stuff like that. So, I feel like that was also a good thing, and yeah. So, it helped me kind of
build my relationship with other people.

Rebecca: I wouldn’t -- I’m not a people person…all of my friends are in the program, pretty
much, so I’m around my friends, I’m around people that I like. Life is good.

Research Question 4: What impact did the program have on their endurance/persistence in
college?

“We are still here”
The theme of this section is “We are still here.” This section is titled this due to respondents reporting that they felt that the program helped them persist and continue with their education at their university. At this small university, there were multiple changes occurring related to the scope of the university, mission and student body. These changes clearly felt that these changes have had an impact on them. They stated that having a mentor that was stable in an ever-changing learning environment helped with their persistence. It was important for them to be able to take information to someone who understands. Mentors who were stable helped them to persist.

There was a consensus amongst all of the mentees that the program has impacted their endurance and persistence. It was shared that the mentoring program is the reason that some are still students at their college. Some shared that they are not happy with some of the changes going on in the college and that the mentoring program provides a sense of stability.

Beverly: We are all still here.

Some mentees talked about the importance of having consistency in their lives as it relates to the changing dynamics of their college atmosphere. Some stated that they don’t feel that adults listen to their complaints, which is in contrast to their mentors who do listen and who try to fix the problems.

Samantha: As the only college student that is currently finishing out of the strong -- y’all can finish strong next year or whatever. I’m finishing now and I’m out. It’s so weird, because the school is doing all this nonsense and it’s nice to have something that’s not changing, because my mentor is still the same person. She’s been the same person since I met her…The school is becoming consistently more problematic just as time goes on, so something beautiful in a world of darkness.

Tabatha: And like, as a student here a lot of the adults that have more life experience don’t really listen to what we have to say... Yeah, on campus or anything like that. Like if we make complaints, they’re like, “Yeah, we’ll fix it,” but it never gets fixed. But like, from a personal aspect with my mentor, it’s like, you know, if I’m feeling some type of way about something I’ll be like, “Girl, let me tell you.” And I’ll let her know like, this is how I’m feeling about stuff
that’s going on and she’s an adult that will like, listen and try to see what she can do to help, you know, fix the problem and stuff like that. Even with stuff that’s not like, going on on-campus, with stuff that’s going on in the same community and stuff like that. She’ll try to get, you know, us really involved in more community stuff so we’re more aware and stuff like that.

Tammy discussed how her mentor helps “keep you from going crazy.

Consistency and stability in a changing community

The respondents in this study were students during a time when the University that they attended were undergoing several institutional transitions including a shift from being a single-sex university to a co-educational institution. Mentees discussed the stress that they felt from being students during that time and the importance and impact of having a stable mentor in a changing educational environment. One mentee in particular stated that it was helpful to have a person (her mentor) in her life that was stable and unchanging while in a school that was ever changing.

The Importance of African-American Mentors

One mentee talked about the importance of having a Black mentor who is also physically local and who can normalize her experiences. Having a mentor of the same culture makes this particular mentee feel that they can also be as knowledgeable and successful. It was also shared that having a mentor who is of the same culture as well as successful helps model for them their ability to succeed also.

Tammy: For me, it’s like, a grown black person to talk to, because before I came here I didn’t know very many white people. Like, probably my teachers. And so, when I got here -- I mean, there are black people here but there aren’t very many black adults on campus to turn and talk to every time something happens, and so for me I don’t like feeling like I’m burdening someone, and so I don’t want to run to Rev’s office every time something happens just because I know she doesn’t just look out for me or just her class; she looks out for almost every person of color on campus. And then, my advisor is a black woman but she has her own family and she’s, you know, doing her own thing in another town, and so for me it was having somebody close by who was black who I could say, like, I’m sick of something or I don’t like how something is being
handled and she doesn’t look at me like I’m crazy or like, what I’m thinking is happening is made up.

Mentees shared how having a Black person of color gives them a role model and someone to model their lives after. Below is Tabatha’s response:

Tabatha: Having, like, a person of your color is a very good aspect because you have someone you can look up to that’s your color that you know, that is successful, and it’s like, you can be this person. You can be as knowledgeable as I am. You can do all these great things. You’ve just got to push yourself in the midst of everything that’s going on. So, I feel like it’s very important having someone of your color be a mentor to you.

Rebecca: Also, anybody who’s not a black woman -- anything that they tell me, like advice-wise, I’m just going to take it with a grain of salt. I’m not going (inaudible).

Tammy: Every person of color on campus. And then, my advisor is a black woman but she has her own family and she’s, you know, doing her own thing in another town, and so for me it was having somebody close by who was black who I could say, like, I’m sick of something or I don’t like how something is being handled and she doesn’t look at me like I’m crazy or like, what I’m thinking is happening is made up.

Tammy continued to expound on the impact that having a Black mentor has had on her experiences as an African-American college student. She explained how she is able to vent her classroom frustrations to her mentor who she fees helps her process things. Her response is below:

Tammy: For me, I study History and African-American studies and usually -- sometimes, but not -- most of the time I am one of the only black people in the classroom learning about black history, black culture. And so, a lot of times you hear things around you that sound and feel wrong but you don’t always want to be that person to say, like, “That was racist,” or “I’m sick of that,” and you know, when you hear those things you kind of just -- sometimes I just hold it in and let it out when I get out of class because I don’t want to come off as that angry black girl or the one always ready to flip the chair. And so, having a black person to talk to and say, like, “When she said that, it made me feel some kind of way,” and she can understand that I’m not being dramatic or she can understand why that would make me feel, like, a weighing thing, is relieving. Like, it relieves me because sometimes you sit in a classroom and you look at a teacher and they’re not saying anything, and it’s like, “Do you not see the problem with that?” and so having a black person to come to at the end of the day and make sure your head is screwed on right is helpful.
One particular mentee discussed how having a mentor who is an instructor helps her
because her mentor understands her position as a student who has needed help with her
professors. She stated that she can talk to her mentor about her struggles because of this
commonality. Another mentor added that having a mentor who is successful, gives her hope for
her success.

Samantha: Oh, we did? Okay. I feel like that’s good, because like, my mentor is in grad school,
so I was going to go to grad school, I was going to go to law school, but same difference. After
undergrad, you go somewhere else. So, it’s still that I see someone who looks like me doing what
she wants to do and being really good at it, and I’m like, “Okay, this is realistic. That’s great.

Research Question 5: What are the mentees recommendations for improvements in the
program moving forward?

Joint events for Networking

Mentees shared a desire to congregate in order to network and connect. Mentees
discussed their desire for more communal events where they can both get together with their
mentors as well as meet the mentors of other mentees. They shared that it is often hard to
schedule time with their mentors and that scheduled events could help. They also discussed
having set gatherings that are required. One mentee stated that the events don’t have to be
spiritual in nature but that it could be perhaps a game night or a picnic. This they stated would
help them with networking and help them gain additional resources. They described wanting to
meet other mentors and “connect.”

Jenny: I would like if we had like, more events that kind of like, made us all come together.
That’s what I think I would recommend because I know with a lot of our mentors they work, or
you know, just life in general -- just life in general is very busy, and so sometimes it’s really hard
to sit there and kind of like, “Oh, you want to meet on Friday at this time? Oh, you want to meet
on Wednesday at this time?” because sometimes it’s always a time conflict. So, I think if it was
like, set, like, events or like, set gatherings that we all were kind of like, required to come to -- I
think that would, like, help. And even -- like, every event doesn’t have to be like, a church event.
It can be just an event where it could be like a mentor/mentee game night or like, we could do like, fun activities and stuff like -- or a picnic or something…

Flora: Even -- my bad. like, even if you don’t see your, like, mentor every day, maybe something should be set aside. Like, maybe once a month, something like that. Maybe a weekend like once a month.

Jenny: Because -- just because we’re assigned to a specific mentor doesn’t mean that like, that’s just our mentor and we can’t, you know, communicate with other mentors. So, I think -- so, if, you know, this person might know something about this and if your mentor didn’t that gives you like, an opportunity during these times to kind of, you know, connect.

Gabby: Yeah, (inaudible) -- yeah, the time for like, networking or -- because, I mean, you can be everybody’s mentor is like, valuable. They know what they know because of their life experiences. And so, they have valuable resources that everyone is going to use. And so, the people in the program should be able to access those resources.

Mentees discussed wanting to eliminate the journals and complete surveys instead. They talked about a particular time during the beginning of the year when the Bishop came and asked them questions about what they wanted in a mentorship program. They shared that they like the face to face interaction and also stated that this is what they prefer instead of providing written journal articles. They want to be given specific, actual questions about the impact of the HCSFS program instead of giving details. They continued by stating that they would prefer to write Thank you cards to the Bishop instead of journal articles.

_Evaluating fit for program_

Some of the mentees expressed the recommendation to have the potential mentees screened more thoroughly to ensure that they are willing to fully participate in the program without simply being in the program for the financial benefit. Mentees felt that there wasn’t enough church attendance on the part of many of the mentees, and that many did not communicate with their mentor like they felt that they should have. Mentees shared that they would like for mentees to be “analyzed” more upon acceptance into the HCSFS program. They shared that they felt that some of the mentees to not attend church or communicate with their
mentors, yet they expect financial help from the program. They also shared that they do not see all mentees at the joint services.

Tabatha: I feel like before, like, putting certain students in the program, the students need to be analyzed just a little longer to see if they’re actually going to do what they’re going to do -- yeah, and then -- because I noticed there was a lot of people this year that are in the program that don’t hang out with their mentors, they don’t talk -- don’t even talk to their mentor.

Closure

Mentees would like an end of the year program as another means for the group to get together. One mentee noted, “The group atmosphere is actually pretty nice.” Another suggestion was for the end of the year joint gift giving celebration where mentees and mentors can either buy or make gifts for each other. There was another suggestion about how to utilize the desired group meetings. One such suggestion was for there could be a discussion about mentor/mentee relationships and how to cultivate them during joint services while dinner is occurring. Another suggested topic was about how to communicate with mentors and mentees intentionally. As it was shared that some mentees do not initiate conversations with their mentors.

Samantha: And we have a tapping ceremony at the beginning of the year. Do we have something at the end of the year? We should have something at the end of the year.

Research Question 6: Does the spiritual component of the program provide a particular benefit for the mentees?

Spiritual perspective helped with feedback

When asked whether the spiritual component of the program provided a particular benefit, mentees answered “Yes.” One mentee shared that having a mentor that is a spiritual person help with understand things from a spiritual perspective. Mentees also talked about the trust that they have in receiving and sharing information with their mentors and how spirituality lends itself to that trust. It was also shared that the spiritual component of the program help with
mentees ability to receive feedback and advice. It was shared that they are more likely to take advice that is perceived as genuine. Mentees shared that they felt good having a spiritual mentor.

One mentee stated that there is “someone to pray for you.”

This perspective was showed by the quotes below.

Flora: And so, I think... when you have somebody -- a mentor who’s spiritual, it’s just something about that person that’s just like, different than anything else. Like, they live their life in kind of a way that you kind of want to, like, live yours, and I feel like having a mentor who is, you know, spiritual, you’re going to look at them and be like, “That’s how I want to, you know, walk with my faith. Like that,” and so, having somebody who can like, help you along the way get to that point I think is beneficial.

Gabby: I guess it’s kind of like that lifeline... Like, having someone who -- who is the same kind of faith as you, they know about it, too... you know that the advice they give you is coming from somewhere that won’t harm... I’m more likely to take her advice... It makes me feel better that she -- she is that kind of like, really good person. That her advice means something, and she -- she might have went through the same thing spiritually or you know, for school purposes. She wouldn’t give me advice that might take me in the wrong direction.

Made mentees more spiritual

Tabatha: I feel like it did because back home, after my grandmother passed, you know, we stopped going to church. So, I hadn’t been to church in several years. So, when I started coming up here to (name of college) I actually found a church to go to kind of just to rebuild by relationship with God and it kind of -- it helped me because I see more benefits throughout my time here. Like, maybe something I would have not seen if I didn’t have a stronger bond with God, so I feel like it really helped me a lot.

Beverly: Or else I would be cleaning the whole house while everybody was in church. So, I wouldn’t enjoy being in church as much and I’d be like, you know, “Why am I here?” I’d fall asleep in church and get in trouble for it. But like, since I joined the program and like -- like, when I first came here I didn’t go to church for like, the whole first semester or anything. I was like, “I’m not going to church.” (inaudible) but like, a lot -- like this year I noticed -- I really noticed how my relationship with God changed. Like, I would come here and I would just be having a ball. Like, I’d be singing all the songs. So, when I first came here I was like, “This is weird. I don’t know these people, I don’t know, like -- me being here.” Like, she would be like, “Hey, are you going to come to church with me?” or like, some of my friends, they’d say, “Hey, you going to come to church?” “Yeah, I guess.” But now it’s just like, “Hey, you going to come to church with me?” So, like, it’s definitely helped me like, build my relationship and I’m actually happy to have a church home and stuff like that because I don’t have one when I go home and my mom will be like, “Oh, (inaudible),” I’ll be like, “Yeah, girl. You want to go to church?” They’ll just be like, “Go to church?” I’m like, “Yeah, you know.” I feel like having a
relationship with God is a good thing to have even if, like, you know, (inaudible). This program has definitely made my relationship grow, so -- (inaudible).

Tammy: I was actually -- my mom was a minister, so I grew up in church. I always went to church and so for me, going to church was important. But when I first got to (name of college) Baldwin I stopped going to church because -- honestly, because I didn’t see any churches that looked like mine. When I got here, I just was nervous about going to a church that didn’t have the same, like, name, I guess -- denomination, yeah. I was nervous about going to a church with a different denomination and a lot of it was, like, “Y’all about to do communion and I don’t know if y’all believe the same thing I do. Y’all singing this song. I don’t know if y’all mean it the same way I do.” It was just -- I don’t know. To me, I was just nervous about being at a church that wasn’t mine. And to me, when I got here it was a lot of self-reflection and really just wondering why I was so apprehensive to go to church when I say I love God and I say I really like church but I refuse to go because I’m not comfortable. And so, yeah, for me it was -- like, this program kind of told me to go to church so that I could go to church and realize God is God no matter where you are, and that I really did need that connection when I got like, to school, because I really don’t know how to function without spirituality. I really don’t.

Tabatha: I feel like it did because back home, after my grandmother passed, you know, we stopped going to church. So, I hadn’t been to church in several years. So, when I started coming up here to (name of college) I actually found a church to go to kind of just to rebuild my relationship with God and it kind of -- it helped me because I see more benefits throughout my time here. Like, maybe something I would have not seen if I didn’t have a stronger bond with God, so I feel like it really helped me a lot.

Schownrhale et al (2018)’s research on faith based approaches in the treatment of Black people with high blood pressure showed that faith based approaches can affectively impact and reduce systemic blood pressure in the church setting. Their research was conducted in thirty-two churches within New York City. Their study was titled, The FAITH study (Faith-Based Approaches in the Treatment of Hypertension) involved them comparing the effectiveness of a Therapeutic lifestyle change (TLC) intervention and motivational interviewing (MINT) versus health education (HE) alone. On blood pressure reduction on Black people who have uncontrolled hypertension, 373 participant who self-identified as Black and at least 18 years old. 172 congregants were assigned to the MINT_TLC group and 201 were assigned to the HE group. There were 11 weekly TLC and MINT session monthly by lay health advisors. The HE control
group received only one TLC session and 10 sessions on health topics by local expertise. The TLC and MINT group had reduced blood pressure at 6 months whereas the other group had reduction at 9 months. Researchers attribute the large effect to several reasons including delivery of group sessions with individual motivational interviewing counseling sessions that served to reinforce maintenance of lifestyle behavior change. Also, the delivery of FAITH were by trained LHA’s from the same churches as the participants. These people were also recruiters of the study.

*Trust and Confidentiality*

Mentees also shared that it is important to know that they have support and “knowing” that somebody is there to support them. One mentee discussed the impact of having information that they share remain confidential. Confidentiality appeared to be an important component. An illustration of this is seen in the below quote.

Flora: Knowing that somebody has your back and like, whatever you tell them is very confidential. You don’t have to worry about telling anyone else.

*Shared Mentors*

Mentees who had shared mentors expressed really liking this dynamic. One mentee stated that she and a mentee share the same person and now have a closer relationship because of it. They talked about how having joint time as a threesome allows them to get to know each other. They also shared that they like how the mentor spends individual time with each but also has joint meetings. It was also shared that mentees would not have chosen to have interacted on campus with their fellow mentee if it wouldn’t have been for having the same mentor.

Helen: So, mentors have to be shared. But I think -- I think that’s actually a good thing because I’m sharing my mentor with another college student and we’ve become a little closer, and we can understand her better because of our personality match with one another. It’s just like -- I guess it just brought us closer because we do the same things. Like, she does -- she does things for us.
She does the same things for us … And so, we go through and we either eat dinner, you know, stuff like that and she brings us both along so we both like, talk to each other a lot more and it’s brought us closer. I mean, I noticed her before but we didn’t like, hang out or anything. It kind of made that bond with another student here.

Other Comments shared by Respondents

One mentee shared an additional comment regarding her feelings about mentorship programs and her thought that they need to continue:

Jenny: I just wanted to comment that I feel like college mentorship programs are needed, I think, everywhere. Like, beyond your involvement, because I don’t -- as a college student, sometimes you lose yourself and sometimes you just get like, off track… And you know, sometimes when you get to college you’re still trying to like, discover yourself, and I feel like having a mentor who says like, “It’s okay to like, discover yourself.” Kind of like when we mentioned earlier having another opinion. So yeah.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions and Implications for Further Study

This study focused on the experiences of African-American college students enrolled in the Helping College Students Finish Strong (HCSFS) mentoring program at one institution. The researcher asked five questions during two focus groups to gain insight into students’ experiences in the program and the components of the program that are most and least helpful; to learn whether the spiritual component of the program provided any benefit; to discover whether participants would recommend the program to someone else; and to determine which recommendations they had for the program. The researcher wanted to gain understanding of the overall experiences of the mentoring program and student’s general perceptions. What I received
in response was their positive and negative experiences of the program. After asking these questions, several themes emerged. These themes were mentees needs for financial help, comfort received through food, mentees need for attachment, need for advice and guidance, desiring an African-American mentor, needing help through transitions and attunement with mentor through similar personalities.

**Financial benefits**

All mentees expressed positive experiences in the mentoring program. The most commonly shared benefit of the program centered around the financial benefits of having tuition assistance, whether directly to their financial accounts or money towards their move-on deposit or books. Students in the mentoring program had financial needs which they expressed caused stress. The financial assistance helped them to focus on other financial debts, register for a room and for classes. Financial difficulties caused many of them stress especially when parents were unable to provide financially due to illness or lack of employment.

**Comfort through food**

One unexpected theme that emerged for more than one participant was that people emphasized the food that mentors gave them. They found such comfort and familiarity through food, which suggests the potential power for mentors to offer a sense of belonging and welcome for students who feel removed from the comfort of home. The connections that mentees felt through their mentors was more than about eating food, it was the relationship that was birthed and formed around a communal table, where they could look each other in the eyes and be honest with each other. Food became the medium through which they could share stories and reconnect with their culture. Participants talked about how important it was for them to eat home
cooked food, food with vegetables and food that their parents make at home. Having food prepared by mentors or eating with mentors bridged the gap between the college experience and its food to a more personal touch and taste. When mentors connect with mentees over food, it's similar to addressing basic attachment needs. Not only are mentees being physically fed but they are being fed within their spirit. There was a parallel theme of being spiritually fed at the same time. Mentors and mentees not only ate food together but they talked about their life as a college student and as a spiritual person as well.

*Need for attachment*

All mentees had a sincere desire to form an attachment with someone. Many of the mentees were first generation college students. One mentee in particular talked about being a first generation college student and the impact of her mentor on her college experience. These African-American mentees need someone within the same community as their college to form a bond with. This need for attachment is especially important when their culture isn’t woven within the college experience. Students need someone to hug them, cook for them and call them to check in on their lives. A mentee talked about how difficult it is for her to attend a college in a different geographical area than she was raised. Attending college in a different area where you’re the ethnic minority is difficult along with having to learn the norms of that community. One mentee discussed how her mentee helped her come to terms with the fact that the community’s stores closed early which is earlier than stores close from her community of origin. Students need someone to walk that journey with them and someone to have a deep, emotional and spiritual bond.

*Need for advice and guidance*
The results of the focus groups also showed benefits such as the impact of having a mentor who listens, helps them manage mental health concerns and someone to give advice and guidance. Participants needed someone to help demystify the academy and help explain the college experience. It was important for them to have someone to listen to them vent especially when it pertained to talking about microaggressions on campus and their experiences as African-American women. One mentee in particular talked about the stereotype of the Angry Black Woman and how sometimes that stereotype can be placed on her. This particular mentee discussed how she has conversations with her mentor about her feelings to get a gauge of her thoughts. Another mentee discussed how she had some mental health difficulties that her mentor helped mediate. It was important for her to have someone with knowledge of how to assist with mental health difficulties. This particular mentee’s mentor helped her by checking in on her and guiding her through those difficult times. Many of the students talked about how mentors listened to them in their time of need by helping to calm them down.

Importance of African-American mentors

Several mentees discussed the importance of having successful African-American mentors with whom they could vent frustrations related to racism. Many talked about the difficulties faced on their campus as a person of color. They also talked about needing someone to share these frustrations with. Further, having successful mentors helped serve as a model and encouragement for mentees to believe that they too can become successful. Mentees discussed
how having a successful mentor is a “motivator.” Many mentees have no prototype from which to model their behavior. Many do not have someone within their immediate family or circle that embodies what they hope to attain. Having African-American mentors who are successful provides the opportunity to learn first-hand knowledge and wisdom. Mentees talked about how being paired to someone within the same field that they aspire helps with trust because they know that their mentor has had to navigate that particular industry and wouldn’t give them false information about their career. Concrete knowledge pertaining to career choice and information about the local community also served as support.

*Help with transitions*

Mentees discussed needing someone to help them through their transitions in life. As mentees transitioned into college and navigate through the college system, mentors help them adjust to the different changes within themselves and the college. The participants in this study were adjusting to the change in their college from an all-women’s institution to a coeducational institution. Some mentees discussed how difficult this transition was for them. One mentee discussed how it was good to have a mentor who was stable and unchanging which was in contrast to her college environment. Some mentees discussed not feeling as if adults within the institution were listening to their needs but that they could go to their mentor and have a listening ear. Not only did the mentor provide a listening ear but this particular mentee’s mentor would offer advice on how to become active in the local community.

*Attunement through similar personalities*

Mentees also discussed the importance of having a mentor who shared a similar personality. This common personality helped mentees have an easier bond with their mentor as the foundation of the personality connection allowed for a commonality. Mentees appeared
energized when discussing their feelings related to having a similar personality mentor. One mentee actually described her experience as a mentee as “really good” due to she and her mentor having the same personality. This particular mentee stated that it makes her “happy seeing someone who has the same personality as me because they’re able to understand me more than someone who’s different.” This echoes the apparent desire for comfort expressed by the mentees who mentioned their appreciation for familiar food. Other mentees appreciated mentors who were older. Having older mentors helped some have trust in the quality of the advice. One mentee noted that “it made me feel good because she knows what she’s talking about.”

*Importance of having a spiritual mentor*

The spiritual component of the program provided trust that enabled mentees to believe in the good intention of the advice of their mentors. They believed that the mentors’ Christianity gave them credibility. Respondents believed that mentors genuinely cared for them. Participation provided increased church attendance for some and allowed some to grow spiritually with their relationships with God. Mentees discussed other experiences within the program which included discussions about increased church attendance and how they were provided with specific knowledge and tools to help mentees succeed.

Another conversation that was discussed by more than one mentee was the importance in having joint worship services with their church and the other A.M.E mentoring congregation. These joint services provide an opportunity for mentees and mentors to catch up, especially if they have lacked consistent time together. Respondents shared that being a part of the mentorship program provided a place for them to make friendships with people who they would not have been close to without involvement in the program.

*General Recommendations*
Although the most cited component of the program that was least helpful is the journal entries, the process of writing down goals and having to examine and evaluate their goals was an expressed positive impact. Respondents felt this process helped “to lead you along through the year without maybe backsliding.” In addition, the spiritual component of the program appeared to provide significant benefits for many students. One mentee shared that her mentor saw her mentees as “true children of God” who are involved in their church. The spiritual connection between the mentor and mentee helped mentees trust their mentors, giving them a heightened sense of credibility.

These responses highlights the importance of matching mentors with mentees in intentional ways to ensure that students feel valued and understood by their mentees. The mentees clearly wanted both parties in the mentorship relationship to take their bond seriously, and to make the most of the opportunities afforded to them in this experience.

Recommendations for Mentorship Programs

Based on the results of this study, it was recommended that future mentorship programs seek finances through scholarships and grants in order to provide financial help to mentors. Mentees cited the importance of having financial help with books and fees. However, it would be important to consider creative ways of ensuring accountability that do not rely solely on the completion of journals. Based on my results, it would be important to find a different way to record student experience without frustrating students with journals, which seemed to diminish the important connections and meaning that students derived from the mentorship experience.

It is also important to have a closure event in order for the mentees to communicate their appreciation and have the chance to give back to their mentors. His research may help to suggest specific ways for mentees to find closure and formally express their gratitude to their mentors.
Bowman and Small’s (2012b) research on the spiritual growth of religiously privileged and marginalized college students showed that students’ perception of faculty support impacted and fostered their development. When they felt that they had faculty support, students could explore questions of meaning and purpose and discuss religious and spiritual matters with faculty. Incorporating trained faculty could be an important addition. They were then more likely to explore their spiritual identities and search for meaning. Bowman and Small (2012b) call on educators at religious institutions to provide opportunities for students to explore their spirituality, reflect on their spiritual beliefs and be involved in their religious communities. This research on the spiritual growth of religiously privileged and marginalized college students showed that students’ perception of faculty support impacted and fostered their development. Similarly, the participants in this study highlighted the importance of a spiritual connection with their mentors, and with a larger community, in helping them persist in school. The role of the church in African-American communities, especially as a means of providing mental health care and support, is evident among these participants.

Areas for Future Research

The scope of this research examined the experiences of the Helping College Students Finish Strong (HCSFS) mentoring program at a local mid-Atlantic college. Future research might further build on this study by incorporating multiple mentoring programs being implemented at different churches to compare different programs and different institutional settings. This could shed light on different formats of various programs and thus helping to understand the different needs of mentors and mentees.

Additional research needs to include gaining insight into the perspectives of the mentor. Examining mentor experiences, their needs and challenges as well as the impact of the mentoring
experience on them, could provide insight into how to support mentors and on potential barriers to connection between mentors and mentees. Also, it would be helpful to study the mentoring experiences of males and female mentors to examine any differences as well as studying different mentoring styles that mentors implement. Additionally, the perspectives of a male mentees could be beneficial as it could shed light on any specific needs that they have compared to females. In addition, more research is needed to study retention and success for students who are minorities.

Implications/Integration of Findings into the Literature

As the mentoring literature remains underdeveloped in the area of spiritual/church based mentoring for African-American students, future studies should investigate how the program actually helped them from a spiritual basis. What was it about the interactions with the mentors that actually helped them? It would be beneficial for these positive aspects of the program to be researched more, especially in terms of spirituality and mutual connection. It would also be insightful to understand the experiences of the mentors from a spiritual perspective.

Tinto’s model for effective retention seems to be contradictory to what some of the students and some researchers say is actually needed. Students may need to retain their ties to home in order to be successful and feel supported. Further, if the institution would offer support to help students adjust successfully to college, the students may have an easier time making the connection between the student and the school.

Limitations of Study

A limitation of the study is that the researcher is a mentor in the HCSFS program. To eliminate bias, the researcher excluded her mentees and her husband’s mentee. In spite of this,
mentees may have felt compelled to be positive because of their knowledge of me being a mentor. Another potential limitation is that all participants were recruited by the Director of the program. Although mentees were informed that lack of participation wouldn’t warrant any negative consequences, they may have felt an obligation to participate or say positive things.

Another limitation was that the focus groups were held during exam week. It may have been more helpful to have more voices represented if more participation having them at a different time of year would have yielded more participation due to increased availability. Nevertheless, a sufficient number of mentees participated in the study, and one focus group clearly felt empowered to speak honestly about their dissatisfaction with the journal-writing aspect of the program. This candor suggests that some of these limitations were addressed sufficiently to offer helpful observations regarding the overall program.

The Helping College Students Finish Strong (HCSFS) mentoring program in the Mid-Atlantic region emerged through this study as a vital component of the participants’ experience in college, and, as evident in the “We are all still here” comment of one student, may be an important factor in increasing college persistence and success. In an era in which race relations are tenuous and race-related inequity are notable, support staff in secondary and higher education settings are encouraged to consider the potential benefit of mentorship programs for African-American college students. Mentorship programs that are structured to offer intentional partnerships between mentors and mentees that are based on mutual respect and similarity, and housed within a spiritual community, are certainly worthy of additional study and support.

References


Birmingham. Alabama


Billups, Felice (2012). Conducting focus groups with college students: Strategies to ensure success. Association for Institutional Research. Number 127


And ethnic matching effects. *Mentoring & Tutoring*, 15:2, 135-148, DOI: 10.1080/13611260601086287


Davis, J.L Helping College Students Finish Strong Grant Manual


APPENDIX A

James Madison University
Human Research Review Request

FOR IRB USE ONLY:

| Exempt: | ☐ | Protocol Number: | 1st Review: | Reviewer: |
| EXPEDITED: | ☐ | IRB: | 2nd Review: | Reviewer: |
| FULL BOARD: | ☐ | Received: | 3rd Review: |

| Project Title: | Exploring the role of the Helping College Students Finish Strong Mentoring Program (HCSFS) on African-American College Students college experience |
| Project Dates: | From: 4/2/18 To: 6/1/18 |
| (Not to exceed 1 year minus 1 day) | MM/DD/YY MM/DD/YY |

| Responsible Researcher(s): | Cierra R. Davis |
| E-mail Address: | Davis4cr@dukes.jmu.edu |
| Telephone: | 540-214-7742 |
| Department: | Graduate Psychology |
| Address (MSC): | 7401 |

| Please Select: | ☐ Faculty | ☐ Undergraduate Student |
| | ☑ Administrator/Staff Member | ☑ Graduate Student |

(if Applicable):

| Research Advisor: | Renee Staton |
| E-mail Address: | statonar@jmu.edu |
| Telephone: | 540-568-7867 |
| Department: | Graduate Psychology |
| Address (MSC): | 7401 |

| Minimum # of Participants: | 10 |
| Maximum # of Participants: | 12 |

| Funding: | External Funding: | Yes: ☑ No: ☐ |
| | Internal Funding: | Yes: ☐ No: ☑ |
| | Independently: | Yes: ☐ No: ☑ |

| If yes, Sponsor: | Virginia Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (VACES) |
| | n/a |

| Incentives: | Will monetary incentives be offered? Yes: ☐ No: ☑ |
| | If yes: How much per recipient? n/a In what form? n/a |

| Must follow JMU Financial Policy: | http://www.jmu.edu/financemanual/procedures/4205.shtml#.394IRBApprovedResearchSubjects |
Use of recombinant DNA and synthetic nucleic acid molecule research:
☐ Yes  ☐ No x
If “Yes,” approval received:  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Pending
IBC Protocol Number(s): n/a
Biosafety Level(s): n/a

Will research be conducted outside of the United States?
☐ Yes  ☐ No x
If “Yes,” please complete and submit the International Research Form along with this review application:
http://www.jmu.edu/researchintegrity/irb/forms/irbindernationalresearch.docx.

Certain vulnerable populations are afforded additional protections under the federal regulations. Do human participants who are involved in the proposed study include any of the following special populations?
☐ Minors
☐ Pregnant women (Do not check unless you are specifically recruiting)
☐ Prisoners
☐ Fetuses
X☐ My research does not involve any of these populations

Some populations may be vulnerable to coercion or undue influence. Does your research involve any of the following populations?
☐ Elderly
☐ Diminished capacity/Impaired decision-making ability
☐ Economically disadvantaged
☐ Other protected or potentially vulnerable population (e.g. homeless, HIV-positive participants, terminally or seriously ill, etc.)
X☐ My research does not involve any of these populations

Investigator: Please respond to the questions below. The IRB will utilize your responses to evaluate your protocol submission.

☐ YES  ☐ NO  Does the James Madison University Institutional Review Board define the project as research?
The James Madison University IRB defines "research" as a "systematic investigation designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge." All research involving human participants conducted by James Madison University faculty and staff and students is subject to IRB review.

☐ YES  ☐ NO  Are the human participants in your study living individuals?
“Individuals whose physiologic or behavioral characteristics and responses are the object of study in a research project. Under the federal regulations, human subjects are defined as: living individual(s) about whom an investigator conducting research obtains:
(1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual; or (2) identifiable private information.”

☐ YES  ☐ NO  Will you obtain data through intervention or interaction with these individuals?
“Intervention” includes both physical procedures by which data are gathered (e.g., measurement of heart rate or venipuncture) and manipulations of the participant or the participant's environment that are performed for research purposes. “Interaction” includes communication or interpersonal contact between the investigator and participant (e.g., surveying or interviewing).

☐ YES  ☐ NO  Will you obtain identifiable private information about these individuals?
“Private information” includes information about behavior that occurs in a context in which an individual can reasonably expect that no observation or recording is taking place, or information provided for specific purposes which the individual can reasonably expect will not be made public (e.g., a medical record or student record). "Identifiable" means that the identity of the participant may be ascertained by the investigator or associated with the information (e.g., by name, code number, pattern of answers, etc.).
Does the study present more than minimal risk to the participants?

"Minimal risk" means that the risks of harm or discomfort anticipated in the proposed research are not greater, considering probability and magnitude, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. Note that the concept of risk goes beyond physical risk and includes psychological, emotional, or behavioral risk as well as risks to employability, economic well being, social standing, and risks of civil and criminal liability.

CERTIFICATIONS:

For James Madison University to obtain a Federal Wide Assurance (FWA) with the Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP), U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, all research staff working with human participants must sign this form and receive training in ethical guidelines and regulations. "Research staff" is defined as persons who have direct and substantive involvement in proposing, performing, reviewing, or reporting research and includes students fulfilling these roles as well as their faculty advisors. The Office of Research Integrity maintains a roster of all researchers who have completed training within the past three years.

Test module at ORI website http://www.jmu.edu/researchintegrity/irb/irbtraining.shtml

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Researcher(s) and Research Advisor</th>
<th>Training Completion Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIERRA R. DAVIS</td>
<td>09/11/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RENEE STATON</td>
<td>02/10/2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For additional training interests, or to access a Spanish version, visit the National Institutes of Health Protecting Human Research Participants (PHRP) Course at: http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php.

By signing below, the Responsible Researcher(s), and the Faculty Advisor (if applicable), certifies that he/she is familiar with the ethical guidelines and regulations regarding the protection of human research participants from research risks. In addition, he/she agrees to abide by all sponsor and university policies and procedures in conducting the research. He/she further certifies that he/she has completed training regarding human participant research ethics within the last three years.

Principal Investigator Signature ___________________________ Date __________________

Principal Investigator Signature ___________________________ Date __________________

Principal Investigator Signature ___________________________ Date __________________

Faculty Advisor Signature ___________________________ Date __________________

Submit an electronic version (in a Word document) of your ENTIRE protocol to researchintegrity@jmu.edu.

Provide a SIGNED hard copy of the Research Review Request Form to:
Office of Research Integrity, MSC 5738, 820 Madison Drive, Burruss Hall, First Floor, Room # 109
Following are the components for a complete research protocol. Please use this template to complete your protocol for submission. Each category must be addressed in order to provide the IRB sufficient information to approve the research activity. Please use as much space as you need but adhere to the overall 10-page limitation.

For additional detail on each category, see: [http://www.jmu.edu/researchintegrity/irb/irbsubmit.shtml](http://www.jmu.edu/researchintegrity/irb/irbsubmit.shtml)

**Purpose and Objectives**

Please provide a lay summary of the study. Include the purpose, research questions, and hypotheses to be evaluated. (Limit to one page)

The purpose of my study is to explore the effectiveness of the pilot Helping College Students Finish Strong (HCSFS) mentoring program in helping African-American college students adjust to life in college. I also intend to explore what aspects of the program mentees deem most and least important and identify ways that the program can be improved. Giving “voice” to mentees in the program is important to strengthen the evaluation of the program and to enable counselors and others to understand (through the actual voices of African-American college students) what types of support they deem most helpful. This examination is crucial to understanding what the specific needs of this population are and how to best address them. This mentorship program is unique because it is tailored to helping its college student congregants both spiritually and academically by linking them to local church congregants that are easily accessible. The participants receive academic/life skills, help accessing resources, financial support, and guidance in learning respect for themselves and others.

**Procedures/Research Design/Methodology/Timeframe**

Describe your participants. From where and how will potential participants be identified (e.g. class list, JMU bulk email request, etc.)?

**Methodology and Research Design**

A qualitative case study approach through the use of focus groups will be used in the evaluation of the HCSFS Mentoring Program. Focus groups seek a variety of input and interaction, in this case allowing for a more thorough understanding of the mentees’ actual opinions (Edmunds, 1999). I will include data gathered from ten mentees through two separate focus groups. Qualitative analysis will be my primary method of collecting and exploring college students’ reflections, due to its emphasis on generating deep meaning, using the “researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis” and employing an “inductive investigative strategy” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37). Case Study analysis provides an opportunity to document and highlight the unique experiences of this “bounded system” of college students in this specific mentorship program at a specific small church in the Shenandoah Valley (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each focus group will be prompted with six questions each.

**Timeline**

April 2018 - Conduct two HCSFS focus groups in Staunton, VA.
May, June, July 2018- Transcription, Coding and Data Analysis
August-November 2018- Report Findings (Write Results and Discussion for Dissertation)

**Data collection sources**

Ten eligible HCSFS mentees will be invited to participate in the focus groups. Eligibility to participate will be based on involvement in the HCSFS program from its inception. The Director and Pastor of the HCSFS will be asked for referrals of students. To decrease the likelihood of dropouts, focus groups will be held at Christ Our Redeemer A.M.E Church (COR) located in Staunton, VA, and are planned to last approximately one hour. Group interviews will be facilitated by myself since I am familiar with the students’ experiences at the church, university, and mentorship program. I am currently a mentor to students in the program. I was also a student at Mary Baldwin University during the years of 2001-2005 and a member of COR during those years as well.

**Data Analysis Techniques**

The researcher will ask five semi-structured open-ended questions pertaining to overall satisfaction, experience, impact, and recommendations during each focus group to garner feedback about the program. These focus group meetings will be recorded on the researcher’s laptop computer, which is password protected.
Each interview will be transcribed by a reputable professional transcription service that upholds research standards of confidentiality. James Madison University provides this service. The transcripts will be placed in a file and sent in an encrypted email. The researcher will then use open and axial coding, looking for themes and coding using content analysis.

How will subjects be recruited once they are identified (e.g., mail, phone, classroom presentation)? Include copies of recruitment letters, flyers, or advertisements.

The subjects will be identified and recruited by the director of the HCSFS mentoring program. I will then contact them via email with further instructions pertaining to the research, including an informed consent and location and time for the focus groups.

Describe the design and methodology, including all statistics, IN DETAIL. What exactly will be done to the subjects? If applicable, please describe what will happen if a subject declines to be audio or video-taped.

This study will utilize a qualitative case study approach through the use of focus groups in order to explore the role that the HCSFS Mentoring Program has in the lives of African-American college students. After potential participants are identified, they will be contacted via email with information about the study and with information about the location and time of the group interviews. Potential participants will be asked to complete a consent form before participating in the focus group. Along with the consent form, participants will be asked to complete a demographic form that asks questions pertaining to age, race, gender.

A qualitative case study approach through the use of focus groups will be used in the evaluation of the HCSFS Mentoring Program. Focus groups allow for a variety of input and interaction. It will provide a more thorough understanding of their mentees’ actual opinions (Edmunds, 1999). Yin (2009) defined case study research as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real life context” (p. 18). The “essence” of the case study is its ability to “illustrate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result” (p. 17). Potential participants will be notified on the consent form and during the focus groups that participation is voluntary and that they can drop out anytime.

All recordings will be saved on a secure, password-protected computer and phone, both of which are accessible only by the principal investigator to help ensure confidentiality. Participants will be given pseudonyms and those pseudonyms will be used to name files to help ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms will only be connected to participants’ identifying information (i.e. name, age, race, year in school and university affiliation) in a single document and the principal investigator will have sole access to this document, which will also be stored as an encrypted file on a password protected computer. Recordings will be stored on two password-protected devices (computer and phone) and hard copies of transcripts will be stored in a locked file in the research adviser’s until the project is completed or a maximum of 2 years. All audio and video files stored on the password-protected laptop will be encrypted using Microsoft Encrypting File system with Windows 10 Pro.


Emphasize possible risks and protection of subjects.
This research poses no risks to participants greater than those of daily living or of other participants sharing information discussed during the focus group.

What are the potential benefits to participation and the research as a whole?
Potential benefits from participation in this study include the mentees’ ability to contribute to the HCSFS program and contribute to any needed changes or suggested improvements to help the program in the future. Their involvement in this research also helps the field of counseling and counselor education, as it will help educate counselors about the needs of college students based on their own voice opinions and needs, as well as the role of church mentoring programs in the lives of African-American college students.
Where will research be conducted? (Be specific; if research is being conducted off of JMU’s campus a site letter of permission will be needed)
Christ Our Redeemer AME Church, 208 N. Central Ave. Staunton, VA. 24401

Will deception be used? If yes, provide the rationale for the deception. Also, please provide an explanation of how you plan to debrief the subjects regarding the deception at the end of the study.
No, deception will not be used.

What is the time frame of the study? (List the dates you plan on collecting data. This cannot be more than a year, and you cannot start conducting research until you get IRB approval)
The researcher will meet with five students on April 13, 2018 and five students on April 20, 2018.

Data Analysis
For more information on data security, please see: http://www.jmu.edu/researchintegrity/irb/irbdatasecurity.shtml.

How will data be analyzed?
The transcripts from the focus groups data will be analyzed by the researcher using content analysis.

How will you capture or create data? Physical (ex: paper or tape recording)? Electronic (ex: computer, mobile device, digital recording)?

Each focus group will be audio recorded on a password protected HIPPA compliant computer and password protected phone. All audio files will be encrypted using Microsoft Encrypting File System (EFS) with Windows 10 Pro. Recordings will be transcribed by a reputable professional transcription service that upholds research standards of confidentiality. Once the focus groups have been transcribed, the original recording of the transcribed focus group will be destroyed. Transcriptions will only be viewed by the principal investigator and possibly a small team (< 3) of coders, as is encouraged for qualitative data analysis. If a small coding team is utilized for the analysis of these data, coders will have graduate training and research experience. If a small coding team assists the principal investigator in the coding of transcriptions, those coders will only have temporary access to transcriptions that utilize a pseudonym during collaborative coding sessions with the principal investigator present. Any identifying information contained within the transcription (e.g. if the participant names her/his university, self, or other persons in the interview) will be redacted for the purpose of coding with additional coders. After codes have been consolidated and the coding process is complete, transcriptions coded by the coding team will be destroyed.

Participants will be able to alter or redact anything shared in the interviews through a member-check process that will be made available to them during the data analysis. The principal investigator believes that qualitative data of this nature belongs to the participants and it is her goal to ensure each participant has access to the data analysis findings if they wish.

Recordings will be stored on two password-protected devices (computer and phone) and hard copies of transcripts will be stored in a locked file in the research adviser’s office until the project is completed or a maximum of 2 years. All audio and video files stored on the password-protected laptop will be encrypted using Microsoft Encrypting File system with Windows 10 Pro.

Do you anticipate transferring your data from a physical/analog format to a digital format? If so, how? (e.g. paper that is scanned, data inputted into the computer from paper, digital photos of physical/analog data, digitizing audio or video recording?)
Any data in a physical format may be scanned into digital files and stored on the same secure computer as the rest of the research materials. The physical copy of the data will be destroyed after it is scanned into a digital copy.

How and where will data be secured/stored? (e.g. a single computer or laptop; across multiple computers; or computing devices of JMU faculty, staff or students; across multiple computers both at JMU and outside of JMU?)
Audio and video recording will be done on a password protected HIPPA compliant computer. All audio and video files will be encrypted using Microsoft Encrypting File System (EFS) with Windows 10 Pro. Signed consent forms will be scanned into an encrypted file on the password-protected laptop. The folder where these forms are stored will also be encrypted using Microsoft EFS. All digital data (i.e., recordings and transcriptions of interviews) will be destroyed following the completion of the project.

If subjects are being audio and/or video-taped, file encryption is highly recommended. If signed consent forms will be obtained, please describe how these forms will be stored separately and securely from study data. Signed consent forms will be scanned into an encrypted file on the password-protected laptop. All digital data (i.e., recordings and transcriptions of interviews) will be destroyed following the completion of the project.

Who will have access to data? (e.g., just me; me and other JMU researchers (faculty, staff, or students); or me and other non-JMU researchers?) If others will have access to data, how will data be securely shared?

_only the principal investigator and the research adviser will have access to the data._

Reporting Procedures

Who is the audience to be reached in the report of the study?
The intended audience includes mental health providers, especially those who work in college counseling centers, community agencies, and churches. This research is relevant to the disciplines of counselor education, school psychology, school counseling and college and career counseling.

How will you present the results of the research? (If submitting as exempt, research cannot be published or publicly presented outside of the classroom. Also, the researcher cannot collect any identifiable information from the subjects to qualify as exempt.)

After the study is completed, the data will be used for state and national professional presentations and potential publication. Aggregated results only will be used. In addition, the results will be discussed with the director of the HCSFS upon request. Participants will not be identified by name or university affiliation in any write-up for analysis, any writing for publication, or any academic presentation. Participants’ responses will be discussed in aggregate and using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

How will feedback be provided to subjects?
Individual participants will make results available upon request. The director of the HCSFS will receive aggregated summary of the results in a manner that suits her.

Experience of the Researcher (and advisor, if student):

Please provide a paragraph describing the prior relevant experience of the researcher, advisor (if applicable), and/or consultants. If you are a student researcher, please state if this is your first study. Also, please confirm that your research advisor will be guiding you through this study.

Cierra R. Davis is a Licensed Professional Counselor in the state of Virginia. She has a bachelor and master’s degree in psychology and community counseling, respectively. She has experience counseling children, adolescents and adults in a variety of settings on a variety of issues. As a part of her doctoral training, she has supervised prospective masters level school counselors and clinical mental health counselors at JMU. This is her second study, having completed her first study as a requirement for her master’s degree. Her dissertation research advisor, Dr. Renee Staton will be guiding her through this study. Dr. Renee Staton is a Professor in the Department of Graduate Psychology and has supervised student research projects here since 1999. She has published in national journals such as _Counselor Education and Supervision_, _The Professional School Counselor_, and _The Journal of Mental Health Counseling_ and is committed to enhancing her students’ research and data-gathering experience.
APPENDIX B

Consent to Participate in Research

Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study
You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Cierra R. Davis from James Madison University. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of the pilot Helping College Students Finish Strong (HCSFS) mentoring program in helping African-American college students. Other purposes include exploring what aspects of the program mentees deem most and least important and exploring ways that the program can be improved. The ultimate goal is for counselors and others to understand through the actual voices of African-American college students what types of support they deem most helpful. This study is important in understanding what the specific needs of this population are and how to best address them. This study will contribute to the researcher’s completion of her doctoral dissertation. Choosing not to participate in the study will not affect your ability to participate in the HCSFS program.

Research Procedures
Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. This study consists of your involvement in a focus group that will be offered to you and other mentees at Christ Our Redeemer AME Church at 208 N. Central Ave, Staunton, VA. 24401. You will be asked to provide answers to a series of semi-structured open-ended questions related to your involvement in the HCSFS mentoring program and ways that the program can be improved. The focus group will be audio taped.

Time Required
Participation in this study will require _90__ minutes of your time.

Risks
The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study (that is, no risks beyond the risks associated with everyday life).

Benefits
While there are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research, the indirect benefits are the opportunity to share your experiences of the HCSFS program in order to help us understand what helps and hinders successful implementation of the program. Your involvement in this research also helps the field of counselor education understand the needs of African-American college students and the role of church mentoring programs.

Confidentiality
No personal identifying information about any participant will be released. Your identity will not be disclosed. Pseudonyms will be used in place of participant names, and no identifying information, including job title, will be attached to the pseudonym. The recordings and transcripts of the interviews will be stored on a password protected computer belonging to the researcher and in a locked cabinet in an office in Graduate Psychology. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches up individual respondents with their answers, including digital audio files and participant lists, will be destroyed after analyses have been completed. The researcher reserves the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented regarding generalizations about the responses as a whole. Quotes from the transcript may be used in the formal report to demonstrate themes. Any quotes used in the report will be attributed to pseudonyms and will not contain any identifying information.

The results of this research will be presented at the 2019 Virginia Association of Counselor Educators and Supervisors conference and other state and national professional conferences. It will also be used for a potential publication. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that your identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole.
Participation & Withdrawal
Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

Questions about the Study
If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Cierra R. Davis
Graduate Psychology
James Madison University
Davis4cr@dukes.jmu.edu
statonar@jmu.edu

Renee Staton, Ph.D.
Graduate Psychology
James Madison University
(540)568-7867

Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject
Dr. David Cockley
Chair, Institutional Review Board
James Madison University
(540) 568-2834
cocklede@jmu.edu

Giving of Consent
I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

☐ I give consent to be audio taped during my interview. _______ (initials)

______________________________________
Name of Participant (Printed)

______________________________________    ______________
Name of Participant (Signed)    Date
APPENDIX C

Consent Statement for Focus Group

Thank you for participating in our focus group today. Each person here was chosen for this focus group because you have a valuable opinion and voice on this topic. Each person has something to contribute. As the investigator, my intentions for this focus group are to discuss your experiences as a mentee in the Helping College Students Finish Strong (HCSFS) program and its effectiveness. Today, I hope that our focus group will provide insights into your experiences and ways we can improve the program. This interview is part of my dissertation research at James Madison University, and my chair and committee have briefed me on appropriate ethical behavior and non-maleficence, including your confidentiality.

To ensure that everyone understands how a focus group works, I offer this explanation: In traditional interviews, the interviewer questions a single person. The interviewer attempts to help the interviewee describe personal experience from one’s own perspective. In focus groups, the attention instead is placed on the thoughts and feelings of the group as a whole. The interviewer asks questions that help identify themes on a certain topic. Thus, I am more interested in the collective nature of the group’s thoughts and feelings, which includes agreement and divergence on certain issues.

Before we begin, I must inform you that care will be taken in protecting your identity. Pseudonyms will be used during data collection and analysis and in any subsequent written reports. As with all group activities, I cannot guarantee that other focus group members will maintain your confidentiality. I encourage all of you to make a pledge to each other that the information shared in this focus group will not be shared with anyone outside of this group. I’d like to record our focus group (via password protected phone and computer) so I don’t miss any of it. I don’t want to take the chance of relying on my notes and maybe missing something you say or inadvertently changing your words in any way. If at any time you’d like for me to turn the tape recorder off, all you have to do is ask me and I’ll turn the recorder off. After the taping, the tape will only be heard by the sole author and a professional transcriptionist. The tape, transcripts, and all data analysis will be kept in a locked file.

After the focus group, at your request I will send you the transcript via secure email and ask for you to check over the content to ensure that the transcript is accurate. I will then send you a later secure email attachment with the analysis of the focus group, and ask again that you review the analysis and provide feedback on its accuracy. Due to the confidential nature of this focus group, I ask each participant to not forward or send these emails to people outside of this focus group. Your feedback is very important to me. Decisions regarding the analysis and content of the written report are open to discussion. I am truly grateful for your willingness to participate. I hope that your experience in this focus group will in itself be worth your time and investment.

After we open up the dialogue, I would like to request some basic demographic information including your email address. This email address will be kept confidential. I felt that it would be less burdensome to send you email attachments with the transcript and analysis than meet again with you all individually. However, if any person would prefer to meet face-to-face to review transcripts or analysis, I will happily accommodate them.

I understand the purpose of this focus group and give my informed consent to participate in this focus group.

_______________________________________
Name

_______________________________________
Signature

_______________________________________
Date
APPENDIX D

Recruitment Email

**Dear Dr. [Participant]**

I am a doctoral candidate in counselor education and supervision at James Madison University. My dissertation research seeks to understand and describe the effectiveness of the Helping College Students Finish Strong mentorship program. This research seeks to also explore ways that the program can be improved in the future to thus bring awareness to the needs of African-American students and mentorship programs. I’m writing to ask if you, a mentee in the program, are willing to participate in a 60 – 90 minute focus group interview about your experiences in the program.

If you are willing to participate, your participation would consist of one 60-90 minute focus group which will be located at Christ Our Redeemer AME Church in Staunton, VA. You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to your experience as a mentee, overall experience in the program, its impact and your recommendations for improvement. With your consent, the focus group will be audio recorded and then transcribed. Your responses will be kept confidential, and this research poses no more than minimal risk to you as a participant. Following transcription and analysis of the interview, you will be contacted again for a member-check process to ensure that I understood you as accurately as possible.

An informed consent document providing further information about this project is attached to this email. If you are interested in participating, we will review this document again together prior to the focus group. If you are interested in being a part of the focus group, please send a secure email back with the subject line: “Interested.” If you are not interested in being interviewed, please send a secure email back with the subject line: “Not Interested.”

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me anytime by email or phone at (540) 214-7742

Thank you for your consideration,
Cierra R. Davis
Ph.D. Candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision
James Madison University
APPENDIX E

Focus Group Questions

1. Tell me about your experience as a mentee in this program.
2. What experiences in the program have been the most/least helpful? Why?
3. Would you recommend the program to someone else? Explain
4. What impact do you feel the program has had on your endurance/persistence in college? Explain.
5. What are your recommendations for improvements in the program moving forward?
6. Do you believe the spiritual component of the program provided a particular benefit? Explain?
March 12, 2018

Cierra Davis
1370 North Hampton Court
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

Dear Mrs. Davis:

I am writing this letter to invite you to use Christ Our Redeemer A.M.E. Church as a site for your research to explore the Helping College Students Finish Strong Mentoring Program. Feel free to interact with the mentors and mentees and to access any program documents we have to further your study. If I can be of any assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Rev. Andrea Cornet-Scott
Rev. Andrea Cornet-Scott
Pastor

God Our Eternal Parent, Christ Our Redeemer, Humankind Our Family