RATIONALE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ORIENTATION PROGRAM FOR URBAN AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AT BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

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A Thesis
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The problem of this study was to explore social and cultural issues of acclimation faced by self-identified urban, Black/African American students at Bowling Green State University, a predominantly White institution. Included in the literature review was information about historical context, relevant racial identity theory, and current literature on the topic. Juniors, seniors, and recent BGSU graduates (from Spring 2007 to the present) who participated in the Sidney A. Ribeau President’s Leadership Academy (PLA) and/or the Office of Residence Life Students of Color Mentoring, Aiding, Retaining, and Teaching (SMART) Program were solicited via e-mail to participate in an online, open-ended survey.

Four themes occurred consistently throughout the responses from participants: denial of personal acclimation issues, the effect of quality exposure to Whites and/or predominantly White environments prior to arriving at BGSU, the benefit of participation in PLA/SMART, and the need to address certain issues to smooth transition. The recommendations from the researcher include conducting face-to-face interviews with self-identified participants in this study for more clarity about the extent and effectiveness of current methods addressing transition issues and repeating the study specifically with urban Black/African American students at BGSU who a) have had limited exposure to Whites and/or predominantly White environments, and b) do not participate in PLA, SMART, or similar programs in order to compare the responses and ascertain what needs to be done to retain Black/African American students at BGSU in higher numbers through graduation.
Note: For the purpose of this study, the terms Black and African American were used interchangeably to designate descendants of enslaved Africans in the United States. For the purpose of this study, person of color, multicultural person, and minority were used interchangeably to designate those who are not racially White.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

“To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded” (inaccurately attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson; the actual author is unknown). No one goes to college intending to fail. Every person, regardless of the degree program he or she pursues, plans to reach his or her goals. This thesis involves more than its author’s goal of graduation; it is an attempt to help others to overcome their obstacles and to obtain their objectives. It is a pursuit of success by the author.

Context of the Problem

According to the United States Census Bureau, ethnic minorities now represent 33.9% of the American population with Blacks/African Americans comprising 12.3% of the population, and it was estimated that by this year, 46% of school age youth would be students of color (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). At the Main Campus of Bowling Green State University (BGSU), the undergraduate student of color population has shown a small but steady increase, up to 15.6% in 2009 from 12.1% in 2005. In the same time frame, the Black/African American student population has grown from 7.6% to 10.7%, an increase of 3.1% (Bowling Green State University Fact Book, 2010). If this trend continues, in five to ten years, one BGSU student in every four will be non-White, and approximately 72% of those students will be Black/African American.

Students of color at BGSU often come from urban areas where they are in the majority, and many are unprepared for the reality that accompanies the transition from the urban majority to the rural minority. Many systems are in place, such as the centers (Writing, Math and Stats, and Study Skills) offered through Advising and Academic Success, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Student Support Services, and SMART, to assist these students with deficiencies in
academic preparation and differences in educational styles and experiences. There are also reactive practices to assist students with social and community acclimation; however, there is little to no proactive programming specifically to prepare urban Black/African American students for the social and cultural challenges they will face as first-year students entering BGSU.

**Problem of the Study**

The problem of this study was to explore social and cultural issues of acclimation faced by self-identified urban, Black/African American students at Bowling Green State University, a predominantly White institution (hereafter PWI).

**Significance of the Study**

Students of color (and particularly Black/African American students) at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) face a set of variables and challenges that Blacks/African Americans at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and Whites at PWIs do not (Fleming, 1984). In addition to the “normal” stresses of adjusting to college life, students of color at PWIs face tokenism and racism (overt, systemic, and ignorance-based), students of color also must deal with racial microaggressions, “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). Furthermore, these stresses may be compounded by actual or perceived weaknesses in their academic preparation, doubts about their abilities, or questions about their legitimacy as college students (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). As a result of these and other potential factors (e.g., stress induced by parent and family concerns, social life angst), Black/African Americans at PWIs seem to have to work harder to negotiate between academic and social
demands, to balance their time, to succeed, and simply to remain enrolled (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004). Familial concerns are dominant among Black/African American students. Family members, particularly those without a college degree, often expect the student to remain as involved in family issues and problems as they were when they were at home. As a result, the African American student typically makes more frequent phone calls and visits home and is not able to fully engage in the college experience (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004).

At BGSU, the one-year retention rate for students of color (73.2%) is only slightly lower than the one-year retention rate for Whites (74.9%). However, the gap widens for the two and three year rates, from a -1.7% difference to a -7.3% and a -5.1% difference respectively. Interestingly, the four and five year retention rates invert; students of color are retained at 32.9% and 8.0% respectively, while White students are retained at 26.2% and 5.5% respectively, a +6.7% and +2.5% difference respectively (Bowling Green State University Fact Book, 2010).

Furthermore, although the gap is closing, students of color consistently graduate with baccalaureate degrees at a significantly lower percentage than their White counterparts at BGSU. After six years, only 50.5% of students of color earn their degrees, with 27.2% of those completions occurring in the fifth and sixth years. This compares unfavorably with their White counterparts, who earn their degrees after six years at a rate of 61%, with 23.1% of those completions in the fifth and sixth years (Bowling Green State University Fact Book, 2010). If the ultimate goal of an institution of higher learning is to bestow degrees on students in a reasonable period of time, additional steps must be taken to relieve some of the aforementioned stresses facing students of color so that their primary focus (academics) can be maintained and their goal of graduation can be achieved in a shorter period of time.
Research Questions

In order for the problem of the study to be addressed, the following research questions were explored:

- What did Black/African American recent graduates of BGSU and Black/African American upper-class students currently attending BGSU perceive as the pervasive social and cultural acclimation issues they faced as incoming first-year students?
- If this population feels that the issues were addressed, in what manner, to what extent, and how effectively were they addressed?

Assumptions

The following assumptions undergirded this study:

- Many Black/African American students attending BGSU originate from an urban environment in which they are the majority.
- Many of these students will have had limited exposure to and/or interaction with the White majority.

Delimitations

- The study focused on urban Black/African American students, a somewhat small population.
- Students self-identified and self-selected into the study, possibly skewing the results.
- Participation was strictly voluntary, further narrowing the pool of potential participants for the study.

Limitations

The following factors limited the findings of this study:
▪ The participants in the study all were enrolled in additional support programs at BGSU; therefore, the study may not be transferable to urban Black/African American BGSU students who do not have such systems in place.

▪ The study was specific to BGSU and may only be transferable to other rural PWIs in a limited capacity.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, Black and African American were used interchangeably to designate descendants of enslaved Africans in the United States. Also for the purpose of this study, person of color, multicultural person, and minority were used interchangeably to designate those who are not racially White. Throughout this study, certain words and phrases which may have ambiguous meaning are used. Below is the researcher’s intended context.

**Acculturation**

“Changes that occur in beliefs, values, and behaviors in ethnic individuals as a result of contact with, and desired or undesired adaptation to, the dominant culture” (Berry, as cited in Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 276).

**Culture**

“All of those things that people have learned to do, believe, value, and enjoy; the totality of the ideals, beliefs, skills, tools, customs, and institutions into which a person is born” (Sue & Sue, 2008, p. 140).

**Ethnic Group**

“A socially defined group based upon cultural criteria, such as language, customs, and shared history” (Tatum, 1997, p. 16).

**Microaggressions**

“Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile,
derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273)

**Race**

“A social construction based upon an individual’s ethnic heritage [and skin color]; a concept (without biological premise) determining how people view the world” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 254).

**Racial Identity**

“‘The sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group’ (Helms, as cited in Evans et al., 2010, p. 254); the extent to which the role of race is incorporated into one’s self concept” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 254).
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Although the transition from high school to higher education is an adjustment for everyone, Black/African American students attending a PWI face additional challenges their White counterparts either do not have to consider or must consider very minimally. In this literature review, the historical importance of race and culture, Black identity development theory, and current literature on Black/African American students at PWIs are explored.

Historical Context

Race is denoted and designated differently than culture in the United States, and racial identity is different than acclimation. Racial identity is more difficult to define because race itself is more difficult to conceptualize than culture—is it a biological or sociopolitical construct? How does one determine “race”? Racial identity refers to a person’s sense of a collective or group identity based on the perception that a common racial heritage with a particular racial group is shared (Helms, as cited in Evans et al., 2010). Acculturation focuses on the psychological and sociological aspects of the adaptation process, or the transferring of rules and behaviors of one cultural group to another cultural group (Pope-Davis, Liu, Ledesma-Jones, & Nevitt, 2000).

Thus, race can be described as an outward manifestation of difference, whereas culture is an invisible aspect of an individual (and therefore can only be targeted when it becomes overt.) Race often frames the manner in which culture is viewed, and there seems to be a strong correlation: when one’s race is meaningful, his or her culture is also meaningful, and when race is not an important aspect of self to an individual, neither is culture (Pope-Davis et al., 2000).

In 1984, Jacqueline Fleming performed the first real study comparing African American student performance at HBCUs and at PWIs. Her study concluded that, regardless of region,
African Americans at PWIs have a set of acclimation issues that Whites do not have, which in turn affects their intellectual and interpersonal development (Fleming, 1984). The differences in adapting to college life between African Americans and other racial or ethnic groups can be partially attributed to the unique experiences that African Americans as a people have faced. Other Black ethnic groups (Caribbean Blacks, Africans) have generally been able to maintain their ties to the cultures within their home countries. American descendants of enslaved Africans were a conglomerate of ethnicities; most functions, symbols, and representations of heritage and tradition were forcibly stripped away and replaced by European customs and rituals so a certain amount of control could be exerted. This history cannot be ignored; it must be acknowledged and understood as a part of identity formation of today’s African Americans. Though thoroughly American in culture, Blacks in the United States have faced many challenges and contradictions in claiming their birthrights (Burt & Halpin, 1998), due to systematic and systemic racism.

**Relevant Theory**

Several models of general identity development have been recognized and respected for decades (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1959; Marcia 1966, 1980, as cited in Evans, et al., 2010); however, prior to the 1970s, no model addressed racial and cultural difference. In 1979, Atkinson, Morton, and D. W. Sue introduced a general Minority Identity Development (MID) model (as cited in Sue & Sue, 2008); in 1990, 1993, 2003 and again in 2008, D. W. Sue in collaboration with D. Sue refined the model aimed specifically at helping counselors better understand their non-White clients. The racial and cultural identity development (RCID) model is composed of five stages: conformity, dissonance and appreciating, resistance and immersion, introspection, and integrative awareness (Sue & Sue, 2008). This model can serve as a basis for understanding other models (Evans et al., 2010).
Early models of identity development specific to the Black/African American experience either were not applicable to the whole of the Black/African American experience, or were designed to point out deficiencies inherent in the Black/African American identity (Clark & Clark, 1939, as cited in Cross, 1985; Erickson, 1959, as cited in Burt & Halpin, 1998; Kardiner & Ovesey, 1951, as cited in Cross, 1985; Proshansky & Newton, 1968, as cited in Cross, 1985). Cross (1971, as cited in Burt & Halpin, 1998) pioneered a more holistic approach to studying African American identity; his theories and theoretical adaptations will be explored in detail later in this section. Many other notable Black identity development theory models have been created; two others examined here are by Banks (as cited in Burt & Halpin, 1998) and Landrine and Klonoff (as cited in Burt & Halpin, 1998).

In his 1988 theory, Banks (as cited in Burt & Halpin, 1998) suggested a cross-cultural, non-sequential construct through which people progress and regress over time. Banks saw the series of stages as attempts to define and perceive culture or ethnicity and as an aid to help individuals understand and resolve feelings within and between ethnic and cultural groups. The six stages are as follows:

- ethnic psychological captivity, ethnic self-rejection and low self-esteem, belief in negative ideologies about one’s culture, and high acculturation
- ethnic encapsulation, ethnic exclusiveness and voluntary separatism, superiority of one’s own group, and threat to way of life by other ethnic groups
- ethnic identity clarification, acceptance of self and of positive aspects of one’s own ethnic group while maintaining feelings of threat to way of life by other ethnic groups
- bi-ethnicity, functioning effectively in two cultures and beginning to demonstrate a more pluralistic view of society
• multi-ethnicity/reflective nationalism, possessing a clarified self-identity and a positive attitude toward other ethnic and/or racial groups

• globalism and global competency, demonstration of “reflective and positive ethnic, national, and global identifications and possessing the knowledge skills and commitment needed to function within cultures” (Burt & Halpin, 1998, p. 10).

In 1996, Landrine and Klonoff (as cited in Burt & Halpin, 1998) embraced acculturation as a means of explaining identity development. Acculturation, which occurs as a cyclical continuum and not a stage-theory approach, refers to the concept of participation in one’s traditional culture and participation in those beliefs versus those of the dominant culture. Significant variables that affect levels of acculturation include a person’s age, whether or not they have children, and their experiences with racism/discrimination, with the lattermost as one of the most significant (Burt & Halpin, 1998).

The first holistic approach to studying African American identity was developed in 1971 by W. E. Cross; this theory became the basis for much of the literature that followed. Cross stated in his Nigrescence model (as cited in Burt & Halpin, 1998) that Blacks develop across five stages of identity:

• pre-encounter, identification with the predominant [White] culture

• encounter, the search for identification with Black culture and the beginning of rejection of mainstream culture

• immersion-emersion, complete rejection of White culture and identification solely with Black culture

• internalization, acceptance of Black culture and tolerance for other cultures
internalization-commitment, acceptance of Black culture and committing to transcending and confronting all forms of racism (Burt & Halpin, 1998).

In 1991, Cross (as cited in Evans et al., 2010), condensed the model to four stages and emphasized differences among African Americans taking into account personal identity (PI), reference group orientation (RGO), and race salience, the significance that Blackness plays in an individual’s approach to life. In 2001, Cross and Fhagen-Smith adapted the Nigrescence model once again, utilizing a life-span perspective to account for racialized experiences, particularly in childhood (as cited in Evans et al., 2010). Three patterns emerge across six sectors of the life span, depending upon when and how a person develops his or her Black identity (Evans et al., 2010).

Current Literature

Majority group members’ perspectives on particular interactions differ from those of minority group members in fundamental ways. Blacks perceive less social and economic opportunity than Whites; nonstigmatized majority members perceive intergroup contact more positively than do minorities (Dovidio, Gaertner, Niemann, & Snider, 2001). Furthermore, Blacks reported substantially higher incidents of discrimination and reported feeling substantially less a part of the university community than did Whites (Dovidio et al., 2001).

A study by Jones et al. (2002) at a mid-size Northwestern university revealed that minority groups reported a lack of support for diversity on campus and questioned the university commitment toward diversity. These groups felt the environment reinforced both a sense of not belonging and feeling different (Jones et al., 2002). Because the representation of minorities on campus was minimal, all ethnic groups surveyed felt the expectation to be highly involved and to be the representation of ethnic minority communities in higher education (Jones et al., 2002).
Additionally, these students felt a responsibility to break and change stereotypes, represent and voice the opinions of their student community, and consciously and unconsciously represent diversity (Jones et al., 2002). Whereas some groups felt the need to be visible change agents on campus, others limited interactions to almost exclusively ethnic-specific activities (Jones et al., 2002).

Stressors are not necessarily racially external. Smedley et al. (1993) hypothesized that interactions intraracially also affects acclimation stress. The results of the study support the hypothesis that:

Sociocultural and contextual stresses play a significant role in the adaptation of minority freshmen to a PWI. Status-related pressures are associated with increased feelings of distress and pose additional demands on students’ coping resources. These stresses emerge from various sources, including contact and conflict from within and between racial and ethnic groups. As described in previous studies, the minority freshmen studied here evidenced considerable psychological sensitivity and vulnerability to the campus social climate; to interpersonal tensions between themselves and White students and faculty; and to experiences of actual or perceived racism, racist attitudes, and expectations and discrimination (Smedley et al., 1993, pp. 446-447).

Their study also indicates that:

Status-related pressures are also experienced as heightened concerns over their academic preparedness, questions about their legitimacy as students at the university, perceptions of negative expectations from White peers and from the faculty, and concerns over parental/family expectations and lack of understanding the peculiar demands of attending a highly competitive university (Smedley et al., 1993, p. 447).
Additionally, attachment, ethnic identity, and separation-individuation issues add to the adjustment of students who identify themselves as non-White (Kalsner & Pistole, 2003).

African American students often encounter difficulty in social and academic integration (Chavous, Rivas, Green, & Helaire, 2002). Black students at PWIs have higher attrition rates, lower rates of graduate school attendance, poorer academic performance, and more difficulty adjusting psychosocially (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). Black students at PWIs also “have significantly lower levels of academic integration, are less satisfied with their university, and suffer more from such interference as discrimination and inadequate study habits than White students” (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002, p. 317). Black students in mostly White schools also find themselves struggling daily with non-academic issues. “When Black students are perceived as less capable than their peers, this perception can result in low academic achievement for Black students… they are more likely than Whites to drop out of college before obtaining a degree, even though only 15% of student departures result from academic dismissal” (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002, p. 317). Black students at a PWI “describe their energy as diverted away from their studies by their role as the token representative of their race. Their perception is that they become the Black voice whenever they speak, especially about racial/cultural issues” (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002, p. 319). Additionally, Black students at PWIs “have learned to become bicultural, developing a repertoire of expressions and behaviors from both the White and Black community and switching between them as appropriate” (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002, p. 320).

Relationships with Whites prior to arrival at college and socioeconomic factors play an important role in the adjustment of Blacks to PWIs. African Americans who are from White neighborhoods and high schools show no difference from White students in general well-being at PWIs; overall, however, African Americans report lower scores in general well-being than their
White counterparts (Chavous et al., 2002). For many African Americans, adjustment problems are “a function of the culture shock that results from interacting closely with Whites for the first time in a new school setting or the incongruence between students’ ethnic culture and the culture of their college setting” (Chavous et al., 2002, p. 237). “Although it is unlikely that poorer students from race-homogeneous environments would have no exposure to Whites (e.g., intergroup interactions are likely through parental workplace, school teachers, media), students from more affluent, race-heterogeneous settings are likely to have more personal interaction and friendships with Whites as well as have access to social and academic resources enjoyed by middle-class and upper-class Whites. Therefore, both the amount of contact and the nature of the contact that African American students experience with majority group members directly relates to their socioeconomic status (SES)” (Chavous et al., 2002, p. 238).

In a study by Reid and Radhakrishnan (2003), students of color perceived a more negative general campus climate, a more negative racial climate, and a more negative academic climate. Only with academic climate did the perceptions of all minorities vary only from Whites and not from each other; otherwise, the minorities varied from Whites and from each other, with African Americans expressing more negative general campus and racial climates (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). However, ethnicity also plays a role in Blacks’ assessment of their White counterparts and campuses. Cultural mistrust, other-group orientation, and racial identity are significantly different for African Americans than for Africans or West Indians/Caribbeans: African Americans generally possess a higher level of cultural mistrust of Whites, a lower level of cultural interaction with ethnic groups other than their own, and tend to exist in higher numbers in Cross’ Encounter and Immersion/Emersion statuses (which involve the rejection of
White culture to varying degrees) than do their African or West Indian/Caribbean counterparts (Phelps, Taylor, & Gerard, 2001).

Stewart (2002) found in her study of several students of color at a PWI that there was a need to include the integrating of multiple identity facets (e.g., race, gender, class) as a component of psychosocial development. In addition to claiming space (both physical and psychological) for this development to occur, Stewart (2002) found that the students in her study perceived a lack of mentorship support from faculty and administration.

Additional barriers exist for African American students at PWIs. These students often do not feel included in the college environment and community and need an environment of institutional warmness to achieve to higher levels and matriculate successfully. In addition to alienation and isolation, Black students include racism, discrimination, intimidation, and problems with acquiring adequate financial aid as barriers to successful matriculation at PWIs (Lett & Wright, 2003).

Blacks at PWIs tend to have a smaller, more tightly knit circle of friends than their Black counterparts at HBCUs or their White counterparts at PWIs, due in part to fewer opportunities to network, fewer people with shared experiences, the constant reminders of “mismatch,” and/or the sense of “belonging-within-alienation” (Brower & Ketterhagen, 2004, pp. 111-112). Social integration of students of color at PWIs is influenced by more formal forms of association, such as student organizations (particularly cultural organizations), whereas social integration for their White peers at PWIs often occurs through informal associations (Guiffrida, 2003). Ethnic organizations help the students to form enclaves, which in turn, help the student to scale the campus to a more manageable size and feel more at ease with exploring and integrating into the larger campus community (Guiffrida, 2003).
Black women at PWIs have to contend with the dual burden of racial and gender issues. College faculty and staff often consider factors of marginalization and isolation, but in 2008, Sims stated that isolation coupled with hostility, and invisibility often leads Black women to irrelation with other students, i.e., the lack of relationship development at any level or the lack of social communication or interaction with other groups. Further, African American females “do not recognize themselves as a group functioning in isolation but rather functioning in a manner that is appropriate and satisfactory to their specific needs” (Sims, 2008, p. 698).

In 2004, Davis developed a four stage developmental process that summarizes Black students’ college experiences at a predominantly White institution: inquiry/campus incongruity, identity confusion, identity validation and goal assessment, and goal clarification. Each stage is marked by a distinct set of characteristics. At the inquiry/campus incongruity stage, students see campus as a melting pot and the world as Black and White; things are neatly defined and ideas are obtained from authority. At the identity confusion stage, students affirm their Blackness and begin searching for self understanding. At the identity validation and goal assessment stage, students view situations with more relativism, begin accepting themselves for who they are, and start committing to success (whether that entails graduation or another path). At the goal clarification stage, students begin personalizing their commitment and “re-remembering” what their individual success means to both those who struggled before and those who come after them (Davis, 2004).

Summary

With the historical effects of racism (de juris and de facto) and comparatively poorer preparation academically and socially, the transition to college for Black students can be a difficult one. Adding the pressures of being thrust into the minority, never feeling completely
“at home,” and being the perpetual spokesperson exponentially increases the challenge of obtaining a degree for African Americans at PWIs. Support systems beyond what currently exist at most PWIs must be put into place so these students are set up for success, not failure.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

In order for this thesis to effectively determine the need for the creation of a social and cultural orientation program, holistic research design, sampling design and procedures, and possible biases of the researcher were included in the methodology. Additionally, data collection instruments (including information about pre-testing of and modification to the instrument) and procedures of data analysis needed to be examined. Finally, HSRB compliance, a timeline (calendar of events), and a budget were included for the study to maintain validity.

Restatement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to explore social and cultural issues of acclimation faced by self-identified urban, Black/African American Students at Bowling Green State University, a predominantly White institution.

Research Design

Given the nature of the research problem, a constructivist approach was the most suitable for the study. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), a constructivist paradigm is appropriate when the aim of the inquiry is understanding, the nature of the knowledge is based upon individual reconstruction, and the accumulation of the knowledge is through vicarious experience. A targeted convenience sample of students was sent an email soliciting participation (Appendix A) in a web-administered qualitative open-ended survey (Appendix B). Responses resulted in an intensity sample that provided the basis for recommendations.

This design was suitable for the type of information being targeted. The problem of the study was inherently unquantifiable, relative, and dependent upon the experiences of the subjects, requiring a constructionist approach. A qualitative study provided depth, detail, and richness essential for recommendations and results. Given the abbreviated time frame, efficiency
was key; assembling a focus group would have been difficult and time consuming, and in addition to ease of administration, an electronic open-ended survey likely yielded a higher rate of return in a much shorter time frame.

**Sampling Design and Procedures**

The population being studied was the urban Black/African American student at Bowling Green State University. Third-year students, fourth-year students, and graduates within the past three years who were members of Students of Color Mentoring, Aiding, Retaining, and Teaching (SMART) and/or the Sidney A. Ribeau President’s Leadership Academy (PLA) were specifically targeted for participation. These groups were chosen as a sample due to convenience: both groups have had multiple exposures to and diverse experiences with faculty and staff at BGSU and were likely to be more open to discussing their experiences. Additionally, both groups are familiar with the researcher and were more likely to participate within the required time frame as a result. Upper-class students were targeted rather than first-year and second-year students due to the exposure to more reflective and mature thinking and processing; therefore, the quality of response was likely to be richer and more detailed.

**Possible Biases**

Though not from an urban area, as a person of color (multiracial/multiethnic) who attended a large, public PWI, my personal experiences may have affected the study. Additionally, my experiences in my current position (working in an organization that serves students of color largely from urban areas) may have affected my interpretation of the data. I attempted to check these biases through external review of the initial survey questions and through triangulation (i.e., peer debriefing and member checking).
Additionally, participating students may have self-identified as Black/African American, even though they may have been biracial, or of Caribbean or African descent. Furthermore, students may have self-identified as urban even though they technically originate from a suburban or even rural location. Because these factors may have skewed the results of the study, an attempt was made in the recruitment email and at the very beginning of the interviews to preempt them.

**Data Collection Instrument**

The data collection instrument was a web-based, researcher-created, semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions (Appendix B). Tools used for the survey included the interview guide, a site to house the guide, and a computer with internet access.

**Pre-testing the Data Collection Instrument**

The data collection instrument was pre-tested with a focus group consisting of select BGSU staff members, peers in higher education at other institutions, and current BGSU students. Minor modifications were made in the wording of the interview guide following the pre-testing.

**Procedures of Data Analysis**

The data from the web-based survey was analyzed using qualitative, descriptive measures. The results of the interview questions were clustered into categories, with emergent patterns and explanations formed to answer the research questions. The analyzed data was then used to determine if unaddressed issues of urban Black/African American student acclimation exist, if these issues had a significant effect on the population, and if the development of an orientation program is necessary, based on the needs perceived by urban Black/African American students currently at BGSU.
Protection of Human Subjects

Procedures used in this study were approved by and closely followed procedures outlined by the BGSU Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB; Appendix C). Prior to taking part in this study, participants were informed of the type and purpose of the study and were notified of their rights as determined by the HSRB.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

The request for participation in this study was initially sent to 115 juniors, seniors, and recent graduates who participated either in the PLA or SMART Program at BGSU. Thirteen of the email addresses used were invalid, leaving 102 potential participants. The results of the research include responses from 23 people.

Questions

The questions used for the open-ended survey fall into three categories. The first set of questions was designed to ascertain the amount and quality of exposure to Whites and predominantly White environments prior to arrival at BGSU. The second category of questions was comprised of the actual research questions regarding social and cultural acclimation issues as well as the extent and manner in which they were addressed. The third grouping was suggestions for programs and workshops to assist with acclimation. The instrument used to create the online survey is included in Appendix B.

Respondent Information and Demographics

The respondents were geographically clustered largely between the Cleveland Metropolitan Area (6 from Cleveland proper and 3 from the surrounding area) and the Detroit Metropolitan Area (8 from Detroit proper and one from a nearby community). One respondent chose not to answer the question and the others hailed from Akron, Chicago, Toledo, and Hamilton, OH (near Cincinnati).

Based upon the responses to the survey, at least one of the respondents is biracial or multiracial, though all self-identify as Black/African American. Fourteen of the respondents either attended high school or lived in an area that was multiracial or predominantly White; only
9 of the respondents both attended a predominantly Black/African American high school and lived in a predominantly Black/African American area.

Respondents may have come from a pool of students outside the targeted range. In trying to help the researcher, some students forwarded the survey link to many others without checking the limiters created by the researcher. Based upon the data for the gift card drawing, at least one respondent falls outside the targeted age demographic.

No information was solicited regarding gender, grade point average, area of study, or rank/alumni status.

**Summary of Data**

Three people reported varying degrees of culture shock, seven others mentioned adjustments to the racial realities at BGSU, and many hinted at changes that they made to acclimate more smoothly, but none of these people directly reported those incidences as major social or cultural adjustments. Only two people specifically reported transition issues. One respondent said:

I have never been much of a social butterfly and kept to myself, so it was hard to connect with some of the other students, especially black students. I'm more inclined to go to the botanical gardens or visit a museum, which isn't something most kids my age were interested in doing. I was also teased for ‘being white’ which numbed me to wanting to socialize with others. This left me a bit confused, since one of the reasons I went to the high school I did was to be around others like me more often. This somewhat backfired in high school because of my personality, but I could see it more clearly at BGSU.
Another stated that:

I think my biggest adjustment problem had to do with me not knowing how to approach other people. It seemed to me that everyone already had their friends and those people who they were close to and I did not feel as if I would fit in or be accepted by them. I was not from Cleveland and I was not from Detroit, so I already did not have something in common with most of them. I came in 2006 when most of the African-American population was either from one of those two cities so I did not know how to break the ice.

In both instances, participants reported handling their situations themselves, never reaching out or asking for help, despite participating in either SMART or PLA. One credits maturing and the other credits getting involved for success.

Eight participants mention PLA or SMART as having a positive effect on their transition, and three mentioned specific roles or organizations that helped (the RA position, UNIV 100- Women of Color section, Precious Stones, and Ethnic Student Center). Two participants mentioned friends from home and another two mentioned getting involved in general as help, while another had attended community college while in high school, preparing him/her for what was to come. Despite the challenges the respondents faced, only one entertained the idea of leaving BGSU but did not seriously pursue it. He/she looked into other institutions casually, but did not send in an application for transfer.

Only one person found no real need for an acclimation program; three did not find personal need for such a program but found potential value in it for others and offered suggestions for topics. All respondents but one claimed that they would participate in a program if it were offered.
Themes

Though there were some differences among respondents, four themes occurred consistently throughout the responses from participants: denial of personal acclimation issues, the effect of quality exposure to Whites and/or predominantly White environments prior to arriving at BGSU, the benefit of participation in PLA/SMART, and the need to address certain issues to smooth transition.

Denial of Personal Acclimation Issues

There was a definite lack of connection between the idea of acclimation issues existing and how personally impactful the issues were. Respondents overwhelmingly denied having personal acclimation issues; however, many of these same students provided evidence that issues were indeed present, particularly isolation. Following are excerpts from the participants that address this issue:

• “I was fortunate to have many black girls on my floor, but my classes did have a lot more [W]hite [A]mericans. I found myself being one of the few [B]lack people in my class: male and female.”

• “Growing up in Detroit made me used to the city life. Huge downtowns, lots of houses, lots of attractions, etc. When I came to BG I noticed the cornfields. When I saw that I felt that coming to BG was going to be a regret. I noticed how small downtown was and the number of houses that were alone. BG was a HUGE difference from Detroit.”

• “It was a bit of an adjustment to interact with people such as at gas stations when first arriving at BGSU but I always made sure I treated people with the courtesy my mother always taught me regardless of their ethnic background.”
• “My first semester at BGSU was horrible. I was having issues with professors, I felt like I was alone, and my grades were very poor. If it had not been for organizations like Precious Stones and Ethnic Student Center, I would have failed out of BGSU. I feel like my transition was bad because I was running away from a bad situation at home. My mind was not focused on the right things to succeed.”

• “When I first came to BGSU it was a culture shock and I can honestly say for the first time I really felt like a minority when walking around campus or sitting in class.”

Because participants did not see these examples as impactful issues, few provided insight into handling of the situations, and none mentioned an effect on their academic performances or progress to graduation.

*The Effect of Quality Exposure to Whites and/or Predominantly White Environments Prior to Arriving at BGSU*

A majority of the respondents (14) attended high school and/or lived in Multiracial or predominantly White areas. Many of the respondents credited their prior exposure to Whites and/or predominantly White environments as easing the transition. Comments from the participants include:

• “My transition was quite easy. My experience in a predominately white environment made the transition smooth because I was used to it.”

• “My experience at the Christian school made it very easy for me to regularly code switch and fit into my environments relatively easy. During my days at the Christian school, I would leave my black neighborhood to come to the predominantly white school, and looking back I would say it was a good experience for me…”
“Because I attended a majority white high school I believe that it helped me to better adapt to the BGSU environment. I understood how to interact will those of the majority. It helped me to be able to compete in higher education against the majority. My experience was very beneficial to my life and I enjoyed every bit of it…”

“Prior to BGSU I had been in predominantly White environment but I was exposed to their cultures due to my schooling experiences in high school. Those experiences [definitely] aided in my transition into BGSU and allowed me to ‘fit in’ sooner than many of my peers.”

“When I began my freshman year at BGSU, I did not have difficulty adjusting socially or culturally because I was used to the same type of atmosphere since I graduated from a [predominantly] White high school.”

“I would describe my transition to BGSU as being very smooth. I naturally gained many new [friendships] and experienced success in the classroom. My transition was affected by my outgoing personality and open-minded approach; [having] exposure to a predominantly White environment in high school was key.”

For two respondents, exposure to a predominantly White environment had an adverse effect on acclimation to BGSU. One person responded:

Yes. My environment was very racist. I was reminded of the color of my skin every day of my life. I believe that it made me steer away from white people. I did not care for white folks for a long time. I only talked to people of color, unless a white person proved him or herself to be a good person.

Upon arrival to BGSU, this person’s interactions improved slightly:
I still didn't like white people, but they were fine. I am not as prejudice as I was. I think that [I] have grown a lot. I do not interact with that many people in general, however now I do not mind the color of someone's skin. I try to focus on the person's heart.

The other person faced acclimation challenges in high school: “Yes. I had recently transferred to a [predominantly] white school from a [predominantly] African American school. It was definitely a culture shock. I felt left out.” When given an opportunity at BGSU to interact with the White majority, perhaps due to the high school experience, this person chose to self-segregate: “Mostly I interacted with minority groups of BGSU, such as Latinos, Africans, African Americans, and West Indians.”

Those persons with little to no exposure to Whites or predominantly White environments handled the cultural and atmospheric changes differently than those who had quality exposure prior to their arrival to BGSU. Those without exposure faced a somewhat more challenging adjustment to BGSU and their relationships with Whites were somewhat more tenuous. Interestingly, respondents treated the examples of challenges they faced as trivial or having minimal effect; they portrayed themselves to be unfazed by racial encounters or racist comments they faced. Sample statements from the participants are as follows:

- “When I first got to BGSU the quality of the interactions I had with white people was poor. None of the white students I came into contact with seemed motivated or as if they really deserved to be in college. My interactions with faculty were minimal at best, only academic pursuits were discussed.”

- “I began to carry my behavior and how I interacted in high school to BG but it didn't always work. Being here was worse compared to [high school] because most of the students and teachers in this White environment in BG weren't taught how to interact with other
ethnicities like I was. They don't always treat me with respect as I try to do to them which hurts and makes me dislike them.”

• “When I first arrived at BGSU I found myself amongst a lot of white people and it was a different experience as far as daily habits and culture differences. For example there were only 6 African-American people on my entire floor including male and female and I lived in McDonald. I took the experience as a learning one.”

• “It was pretty normal when I first came, I didn't feel uncomfortable. Until I had some incidences in class where students made negative racial comments, not towards me towards debates, and other things we would talk about, and I didn't like it. As of now things are good, you can't let the actions of one person outweigh the good in others.”

• “I adjusted pretty well coming into BGSU. I had a few racial encounters with some girls in my dorm and other people on campus because I was a major Obama supporter. People would write racist comments on my dry erase board on my door. But, besides that, my interactions were pretty decent.”

• “When I first came to BGSU it was a culture shock and I can honestly say for the first time I really felt like a minority when walking around campus or sitting in class.”

• “Being the only [B]lack person in a class and having the feeling that everyone was looking at me was something I have to adjust [to].”

• “When I first arrived to BGSU, I would say the quality of my interactions with people within this predominantly white environment is a little skewed because I looked at White people as the stereotypes I knew prior to BGSU, I assumed that White people were the same as how they were depicted the media.”
Many of the respondents directly credited their participation in PLA or SMART as partially or fully assisting with their successful adjustment to BGSU. Each of these programs has components of acclimation (both overt and indirect) for its participants, and each has persistence to degree attainment as a goal. Some examples that support benefits afforded by participation in PLA/SMART include the following:

• “…I found myself being one of the few black people in my class: male and female. However, it was not difficult to me because of my experiences and the fact that I was in the SMART program.”

• “Yes and that is why I became a part of the S.M.A.R.T. Program. It was [wonderful] and my mentor really helped me to make the transition to BG even better!”

• “My transition was pretty smooth. I kept to myself besides the few people I met at orientation or had classes with. I felt that BGSU was a home away from home especially because I did not want to be back in Detroit. The SMART Program really helped get me accustomed to the campus and community. I attended most of the programs as a mentee and really enjoyed the friendships that I gained from it.”

• “My transition seemed to be pretty smooth because I had the PLA helping me along the way. It was outside of the PLA where things became challenging. I forced to interact with some of the most rude and closed minded White people.”

• “No I didn't really have problems adjusting to BG but that's only because of the PLA. The PLA assisted everyone in their transitioning.”

• “My transition to BGSU started off on a rocky road. I did not enjoy it and really did not know many people. I then talked to my RA, who was a African American, and she
introduced me to a young lady who was a mentor in the SMART program. Through her I joined SMART, she became my mentor, and I met one of my very good friends. The SMART program truly helped my transition to BGSU.”

• “The PLA program really helped my transition.”

One student, when asked if a program addressing social/cultural differences between home and campus would have helped upon arrival to BGSU, put it bluntly and succinctly, “I suppose so. SMART helped.”

The Need to Address Certain Issues to Smooth Transition

Although the respondents overwhelmingly claimed not to have acclimation issues, all but one would have participated in a program addressing social/cultural differences between their home environments and BGSU. When asked what topics and issues a transition program should address, the respondents presented a variety of ideas.

The majority of the suggestions were for diversity courses such as “The different types of differences,” “Stepping outside the box,” and “Understanding and accepting the diversity of different cultures.” Others recommended diversity-type courses that include communication, interaction, and culture seminars, such as “How to interact well with everyone on campus,” “Communication skills (especially since different cultures perceive different meanings),” “How to interact with different cultures/races,” “How to avoid using stereotypes to pre-judge,” “Branching out of your ethnic group,” “How to see the individual and not their race,” and “Cultural beliefs.” As one respondent phrased it, “The program should encourage a support system amongst minority communities while not segregating themselves from the rest of the university. This program should include a session for White students to attend as well. I feel as though no matter how much the Black community is prepared for coming to a college as such,
sometimes [it’s] not just us. [A lot] of White students have [no] idea how to treat a Black person respectfully and that is what makes the transition worse for Black students.” Another agreed, saying, “There should be as many activities comparing similarities among students as possible. Part of the reason students have trouble adjusting to college, especially at BGSU, is their lack of belonging. If the sense of belonging is triggered, the problems associated with being an outcast would reduce. Also networking workshops to stress that also there are differences, we all need each other in the future one [way] or another.”

The other large grouping of program recommendations were about acclimation itself, handling the unfamiliar, and dealing with microaggressions: “Having a white [American] roommate”; “… How to adjust to college life as a minority in residence halls and in classrooms”; “How to cope with feeling alone or like you can't relate to anyone around you, what to do in a situation where you feel like people are discriminating against you, how to handle situations in which the people you are interacting with are culturally insensitive”; “How to fit in”; “How to ignore/address comments made about your race”; “How to handle being the only black student on your class”; “Issues like how to deal with potential nightlife issues (ex. confrontations at clubs or parties) and different situations in managing your emotions if you get different stares that you haven't encountered or don't usually encounter”; “How to feel comfortable in a predominantly different racial/ethnic environment”; and “How to address racial/ethnic conflicts on campus.”

Some less popular but repeated ideas were centered about dealing with issues from home: “Home away from home,” “How to balance home issues with school issues,” “How to know which friends from back home are your real friends,” and “Separating home life from college life.” A few people suggested programs focused on success: “Being successful in a world where
you are often mis/under represented,” “How to NOT fit into the [common] stereotypes that students of color can often fall in to at a predominately White institution,” “What it takes to be a leader,” and “Successful minorities.” As one recent graduate stated:

Climbing through socioeconomic ladders would be a great topic. Having graduated last Saturday and having returned to the inner city until I get a job, that's an issue I didn't realize until my final year. I come from the working class and will be part of the middle class (WHEN I get a job!) and to say it feels awkward is an understatement.

One respondent suggested a more tailored approach:

What would be important would be to address the issues of the students and incorporate those into the program. Also having some current BGSU students talk about their experiences and how they got through them would be beneficial to the students.”

Another provided a holistic overview: “A program of this kind should allow those attending the program to talk about how they feel and have some type of icebreaker that promotes 1:1 interaction between people from different places so that they can start to become receptive to people from different places.

Whether or not they consciously recognized that their experiences were indeed acclimation issues or that prior exposure to predominantly White environments aided in their transition, many of the participants affirmed that current programs were beneficial. Further, with their suggestions, they implied that more (intentional) programming would be helpful in aiding students with acclimation to BGSU.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Results

The results of the survey provided interesting and valuable information. Four themes emerged from the data: denial of personal acclimation issues, the effect of quality exposure to Whites and/or predominantly White environments prior to arriving at BGSU, the benefit of participation in PLA/SMART, and the need to address certain issues to smooth transition. Participants did not view themselves as having personal issues with acclimation when transitioning to BGSU despite providing evidence to the contrary. As suggested by Chavous et al. (2002), students who had little to no exposure to predominantly White environments had a more difficult time acclimating to BGSU than did those who either lived in or attended high school in multiracial or majority White settings. BGSU programs such as PLA and SMART that have acclimation components are valued by participants and are seen as an asset in the transition process. The vast majority of respondents would have participated in an acclimation program (if offered) to further smooth their transition to BGSU and offered topics they would have found beneficial or interesting.

Data from the four emergent themes can be related to the research question “What did Black/African American recent graduates of BGSU and Black/African American upper-class students currently attending BGSU perceive as the pervasive social and cultural acclimation issues they faced as incoming first-year students?” Isolation, dealing with racism (intentional and unintentional), diversity, communicating cross-culturally, and dealing with issues, friendships, and relationships at home were the most pervasive points of discussion. And though a relationship to the research questions “If this population feels that the issues were addressed, in what manner, to what extent, and how effectively were they addressed?” can be established, it
cannot be ascertained with great detail. Some of the respondents dealt with issues on their own. Many more stated or implied that participation in PLA and/or SMART was an asset in acclimating to BGSU, as was getting involved on campus. However, determining the extent and effectiveness in these involvements is not evidenced by the participants’ responses; it can only be inferred that, since respondents are juniors, seniors, or recent graduates, some amount of persistence was achieved and therefore some effectiveness can be attributed to the manner in which the issues were addressed.

**Implications**

In 1984, Fleming stated that Black students face special problems at a PWI that Whites do not. She mentions issues such as isolation, interacting across racial lines, and institutional abandonment (Fleming, 1984). And while things have presumably improved, this study provides evidence that these issues still exist 26 years later, even when systems are in place to assist students with their transition to PWIs.

Based upon the student responses, more needs to be done to address acclimation issues at BGSU. All respondents were participants in either PLA or SMART, programs that have components of acclimation, and many of them still struggled with issues, despite interpreting the issues as minor or trivial. Because participants did not see the issues as impactful, few provided insight into handling of the situations, and none mentioned an effect on their academic performance or progress to graduation. Given this information, two important questions should be considered:

- Did the students overlook these issues because they are truly non-issues, because the students lack the ability to connect external events to personal issues and experiences, or
is it because these issues are expected responses/anticipated norms and the students have
subconsciously developed coping mechanisms?

• Is the expectation that these issues should have been seen as impactful a sign of racial
desensitization, generational difference, or something else?

Regardless of the answers to these questions, the fact remains that all respondents participated in
either SMART or PLA, which provided them with support and preparedness, and there were still
issues. This begs another set of questions: What is being done to introduce Black/African
American students who do not participate in either program to the issues that they may face
specifically as a Black/African American student at BGSU? How do those students handle
issues of acclimation? What support systems are in place for those students when issues arise?

Cole and Arriola (2007) recommend a two-pronged approach in Black/African American
students’ acclimation to a PWI: orientation to address maintaining heritage and identity and a
separate orientation to help with intergroup relations. Using this idea as a framework, more
deliberate programming could be implemented. First, intentionally address the unique stressors
that urban Black/African American students face in order to alleviate them: the challenges of
dealing with those at home, how to address overt racism and microaggressions, coping
techniques, and breaking stereotypes. Whether it is part of the Orientation and Registration
programming, the BG Experience, or part of Welcome Week, some introduction to the racial
reality of BGSU should be in place. Second, intentionally provide opportunities to interact with
those who are culturally unlike one another and do not presume that these exchanges will happen
automatically or naturally. Decreasing Discrimination and Stereotypes (D-DAS), a student
organization on campus, was founded for that purpose and would be an ideal forum for such
conversations. By developing a series dedicated to issues such as these and starting in a “safe”
space with like-minded others, comfort and understanding (and eventually, allies) will be built and cross-cultural communication would be far less intimidating for all the participants.

Rodgers and Summers (2008) adapted Bean and Eaton’s (as cited in Rodgers & Summers, 2008) retention model to include elements of racial identity, noting that attitudes and institutional fit (including a sense of institutional loyalty) must be addressed before intermediate outcomes of social integration and academic performance can be ascertained. BGSU must make bigger strides in demonstrating commitment to racial diversity and inclusion. With only one (White) Latino male among the BGSU President’s Cabinet and one African American trustee, that commitment is not very evident at the highest levels of the institution. Furthermore, BGSU must take more responsibility for providing mentors and role models who have lived similar experiences to Black/African American students. With the Early Separation Plan, several key African American faculty who regularly interact with undergraduates are leaving, and while the student body is apparently becoming more diverse, the faculty and administration appear to be moving in the opposite direction. Study after study shows a correlation between a student’s connectedness to campus and persistence to degree. If students do not see themselves reflected on campus, they will be less likely to connect to it, particularly academically. “With few African-American faculty as role models and mentors, multicultural students tend to have little interaction with faculty, reporting reticence toward approaching majority faculty” (Jones, 2001, p.10). And, if more faculty and staff of color cannot be recruited or hired in these difficult budget times, more must be done to increase awareness, understanding, and interconnectedness by current (White) faculty and staff, particularly those who may be seen as insensitive at best or racially hostile at worst.
Rodgers and Summers (2008) also pointed out that positively affecting Black/African American students’ self-efficacy will positively impact their coping skills, and that by adopting a bicultural identity, students will better maintain their ties to African American culture while better incorporating themselves into the larger culture of a PWI. More must be done to “challenge and support” Black/African American students, to help them redefine “Blackness” in the classical mold (achievement and success of eras such as the Harlem Renaissance) rather than the caricature that popular culture has made “Blackness” to be (the self-degradation by rappers, athletes, and actors that celebrate ignorance, irresponsibility, and classlessness). Once again defining “Blackness” and Black success in a manner that promotes pride, self-reliance, and character will force students to invest more deeply in their education and believe more in themselves. More must also be done to encourage involvement in organizations beyond the typical Black/African American student groups, whether that entails pushing the students to join organizations they might not otherwise (in addition to promoting membership within Black/African American groups) or urging Black/African American student organizations to collaborate intentionally and frequently with non-Black organizations. Remaining Black/African American BGSU faculty and staff must increase their visibility on campus and interaction with students in order for this to be achieved. It is not enough to be seen walking to and from a meeting or standing in front of a class; those who have lived through the difficulties of acclimation and who are true models of “Blackness” must actively engage Black/African American students to help them create this new bicultural identity, and they must, with genuine care and concern, push the students beyond the limits that the fear of failure (and the fear of success) have caused them to impose upon themselves. Doing so could have a major impact on the performance of current students.
Recommendations for Further Study

Though this study provided some insight into Black/African American experiences at BGSU, much more research is required. The researcher recommends following up with those respondents who self-identified as participating (by submitting their names for the gift card drawing) and attempting to conduct face-to-face interviews with them to obtain more detail about their means of acclimation and to ascertain the effectiveness of the means utilized to help in the acclimation process so that current programs can be improved or new programs can be established.

It would be beneficial to repeat the study. Gender demographic information should be obtained to determine if acclimation differs for men and women, especially since the research indicates that experiences do. Also, future research should specifically target urban Black/African American students at BGSU who a) have had limited exposure to Whites and/or predominantly White environments prior to their arrival at BGSU, and b) do not participate in PLA, SMART, or similar programs in order to compare the responses. This could provide a better picture of the issues and of what needs to be done to retain Black/African American students at BGSU in higher numbers through graduation. This study could also be repeated with other target populations (Latinos, other students of color, first generation college students, adult learners, international students, etc.) to determine their transition issues and whether or not overlap exists in areas of acclimation.
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APPENDIX A
REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION
Subject Line: Ana Brown Needs Your Help!

After YEARS of procrastination and struggle, I am nearly finished with my thesis, but I am not quite there, and I really need your help.

I have a very short window of time to finish, and I need participants to fill out an online open-ended survey describing their first year transition issues from home to BGSU. The open-ended survey is free response and should take about 20-30 minutes of your time.

My research may be important to the recruitment, retention rates, and graduation rates of urban Black/African American BGSU students, and your participation will help.

To thank you for participating, you can enter a drawing for a $25 Visa gift card.

Participation in this open-ended survey is completely voluntary, and your relationship with me will not be negatively affected if you choose not to participate.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact me; my information is below.

If you are interested, willing, and able, please click here (hyperlink) to complete the open-ended survey. The link will only be active until May 14th, so please act quickly.

Thank you in advance for your help!

~ Ana

Ana C. Brown
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Before beginning this open-ended survey, please note:
- This survey is completely voluntary. You may decide to skip questions. You are free to withdraw at any time.
- The only identifying data intentionally being collected for purposes of this open-ended survey is hometown. Other
  identifying information may be self-disclosed but will not be requested.
- Every effort will be made to protect your privacy but anonymity cannot be guaranteed.
- By completing this open-ended survey, you have been informed that some identifying information may be used or
directly quoted in the thesis.
- Completing this open-ended survey indicates that you consent to my use of your responses in my research.

Where are you from? (If you are from a suburb or exurb of one of these cities, please select other and specify your town.)
- Columbus
- Cleveland
- Cincinnati
- Toledo
- Dayton
- Youngstown
- Akron
- Canton
- Detroit
- Chicago
- Other (specify)

Please describe the racial/ethnic makeup of the area in which you live.

Please describe the racial/ethnic makeup of the high school you attended.

Prior to coming to BGSU, did you have any significant experiences in a predominantly White environment? What type of
experiences did you have? How did they affect you?

Prior to coming to BGSU, describe the quality of your interaction with people within predominantly White environments.

When you first arrived to BGSU, describe the type of experiences you had in this predominantly White environment.

When you first arrived to BGSU, describe the quality of your interactions with people within this predominantly White
environment.

How would you describe your transition to BGSU? What affected your transition?

Did you have difficulty adjusting socially/culturally to BGSU? If yes, how did it affect you academically? If no, please
explain why and skip the next three questions.

If yes, what were social/cultural issues that you faced in adjusting to BGSU?

Were those issues addressed? How? By whom? How effectively were the issues addressed?

If you considered leaving BGSU (as a result of the difficulty adjusting socially/culturally), describe the degree to which you
pursued it.

Would a program addressing the social/cultural differences between home and campus have helped you when you first
arrived to BGSU?

How likely would you have been to participate in a program addressing the social/cultural differences between home and
campus when you first arrived to BGSU?

What topics/issues should be included in a program like the one described above?

I appreciate your participation in this survey. As a thank you, I invite you to enter your contact information here (hyperlink)
for a chance to win a $25 Visa gift card.
APPENDIX C
HSRB APPROVAL
April 2010

Hello. My name is Ann Brown. As you may already know, I presently coordinate the SMART Program and I was previously Assistant Director of the President's Leadership Academy. I am in the final stages of completing my master's thesis in the College of Technology under the advisement of Dr. Kathy Hoff. The topic is "Rationales for the Development of an Orientation Program for Urban African American Students at Bowling Green State University (BGSU)", and I need your help. Whether you are currently a student or you are a former student at BGSU, as someone who self-identifies as Black/African American, you may have encountered transition issues that affected your academic performance, your time to graduation, or your retention. I would like to know more about your experience and use it in my study.

This study could have an important impact on the retention and graduation rates of Black/African American students, who are coming to BGSU in greater numbers than ever before. This could also have a serious impact on recruitment and diversifying campus. Though there are no direct benefits to participating in this open-ended survey, you may leave a legacy on campus (pending the outcome and any implementation of programming) that affects the BGSU experience for your younger siblings, nieces, nephews, cousins, and maybe someday, your children.

This study is a one time, web-administered, free-response, structured qualitative open-ended survey. You will be asked a series of open-ended questions related to your experiences prior to arriving at BGSU, your experiences once you arrived, the assistance you received in transitioning, and the recommendations you would make. The survey itself should take about 20-30 minutes to complete. After completing the survey, you may then choose to submit identifying information for entry into a drawing for a $25 gift card as thanks for participation.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip questions or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your grades, class standing, or your relationship with Bowling Green State University, the Sidney A. Ribeau President's Leadership Academy, the Office of Residence Life, the SMART Program, or with me.

The only identifying data intentionally being collected for purposes of the open-ended survey is hometown. Other identifying information may be self-disclosed but will not be requested. Every effort will be made to protect your privacy but anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Identifying information that you disclose may be used or directly quoted in the thesis. Results will be stored in a password-protected file on a limited access computer in my office. You may choose to disclose identifying information for entry into a drawing for a $25 Visa gift card as thanks for participation. Data for the drawing will be stored separately from survey data. Please note that (1) some employers may use tracking software, so you may want to complete your survey on a personal computer, (2) you should not leave the survey open and unattended if using a public...
computer or a computer others may have access to, and (3) you should clear your browser cache and page history after completing the survey.

Risks associated with this study are minimal and are no greater than those encountered in normal daily life. You determine the level of disclosure. Risk of a breach of confidentiality are also minimal given the security protocol listed in the previous paragraph.

If you have any questions about this study or about your participation in the research, please feel free to contact my advisor, Kathy Hoff (khoff@bgsu.edu, 419/372-7557) or me. My contact information is:

Ana C. Brown  
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Office of Residence Life, BGSU  
227 Saddlemeire Student Services@Conklin  
Bowling Green, OH 43403  
419/372-9428 (Office Phone)  
419/372-0477 (Fax)  
419/345-8835 (Cell Phone)  
ahbrown@bgsu.edu (email)

You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hrsrb@bgsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research.

Thank you for your time.

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I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

Proceeding to the open-ended survey questions and completing them indicates that you consent to my use of your responses in my research.