Exploring Black Women's Character Development and Ethical Leadership Development
at Spelman College

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This dissertation titled
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at Spelman College

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Abstract
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Exploring Black Women's Character Development and Ethical Leadership Development at Spelman College
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Character development is a central function of higher education. This phenomenological study describes Black women’s personal lived experiences with character development and ethical leadership development at Spelman College, America’s oldest historically Black college for women. The following research question guided the study: How do students at a historically Black women’s college describe their experiences with character development and ethical leadership development? The study also explored student’s thoughts about the academic and co-curricular programs that best prepared them to be ethical leaders.

Interviews were conducted with 10 graduating seniors from the Class of 2014 Women of Excellence Leadership (WEL) series offered by the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement at Spelman College. Eight alumnae members of the WEL program were also interviewed to provide their thoughts about character development and ethical leadership development. Participants were asked to share the learning and skills they attributed to their experiences as undergraduate students and campus leaders. Finally, the Director of the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement was interviewed to provide an administrative perspective on character development and ethical leadership development.
The theory referenced in this study is Gilligan’s (1988) work on women’s development which illustrates that women are more concerned with care, relationships, and connections with other people as they engage in moral and ethical development. The findings of this study suggest that a supportive environment and expectations for success, educational programs that focus on conscious Black feminist-activist development, opportunities to become leaders and learn about leadership, and faculty and alumnae interaction, mentoring and support influence character development and ethical leadership development of students at Spelman College. In addition, the participants shared expectations for seeking excellence in themselves, paying it forward or giving back to the community, and being a part of the Spelman legacy of global leaders.

Thus, the findings of this study will contribute to understanding women’s character development and ethical leadership development in a historically Black women’s college setting, and expands the available research on college and character development. This study also provides insight into an integrated educational approach to the delivery of programs and services that support women’s character development and ethical leadership development in college and university settings.
Dedication

To my family

My mother and stepfather, James and Joyce Moore

Grandparents, Eddie Bullard, Marie DeVold, and Alex and Ruby Rodger

and my daughter, A. Blake Ferguson
Acknowledgements

A very special thank you to my Dissertation Committee for helping to shape and mold this project into something that I am extremely proud to share with students, faculty, colleagues and fellow practitioners in higher education. This dissertation evolved out of many hours, days and years of conversations with Dr. Peter Mather who remained patient and extremely supportive of me, even as I was over 700 miles away. Dr. Mather inspired a love for the process of research, writing and learning as he challenged me and encouraged my intellectual endeavors with this dissertation. For his unwavering commitment and willingness to always be available, no matter the day or time, I am eternally grateful.

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In closing, I hope that those of you who are reading this dissertation find insights that inspire you to continue to be the most excellent student affairs practitioners and leaders who guide, challenge, and support students on their educational journey.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Moral development and the formation of character have always been central to the mission and purpose of higher education since the early colonial colleges (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). Early American colleges and universities served as the training ground for a “learned clergy” and a “lettered people” (Rudolph, 1962, p. 6). As women’s colleges and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) grew in their importance and relevance to higher education, they too emphasized the importance of character development, leadership, and civic engagement as part of their mission, values, and goals.

Throughout early American history, moral development is associated with the pervasive theme of organized religion in higher education (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). With the rise of the state supported public university model of education, colleges and universities once run by missionaries began to limit their religious affiliations with churches and other religious organizations. The exploration of various academic and co-curricular models of education signaled an identity crisis in higher education with the diminished role of the church in the daily operations of colleges and universities.

With the multitude of challenges facing society today, parents, higher education officials, and policymakers questioned the role of higher education in shaping the character of students (Bok, 2001). Pervasive ethical leadership challenges of civic leaders as evidenced in the Iran-Contra Affair in the late 1980s; the Savings and Loan Crisis of the 1980s and 1990s; the Whitewater Controversy of 1992; the Travelgate Scandal of 1993; the Enron Scandal in 2001; the Wall Street debacle of 2008 and various
Senate, House of the Enron Scandal in 2001; the Wall Street debacle of 2008 and various Senate, House of Representatives, and, even presidential ethics violations lead one to question the personal, ethical, and social responsibility of our current leaders. Derek Bok (2001) stated that moral issues are at the core of campus dialogues, while Hersh and Schneider (2005) suggests that college and universities need to incorporate ethics, values, and personal and social responsibility into educational programs.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities also reaffirmed moral education as central to the role of higher education. The author(s) of Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College, a national panel report “calls for higher education to help college students become intentional learners…” who are also “responsible learners…that can adapt to new environments, integrate knowledge from different sources, and continue learning throughout their lives” (Ramaley & Leskes, 2002, p. v). The report’s authors further stated that,

…education should foster intellectual honesty, responsibility for society’s moral health and for social justice, active participation as a citizen of a diverse democracy, discernment of the ethical consequences of decisions and actions, and deep understanding of one’s self and respect for the complex identities of others, their histories, and their cultures. (pp. xii)

Thus, it is expected that K–12 and higher education institutions take responsibility for preparing students to be good citizens who are informed, engaged, open-minded, and socially responsible.
Significance of the Study

Previous research studies such as the Sierra Project (1982), Colleges that Encourage Character Development (1999), What Works in Character Education (2005), and Leadership Education as Character Development: Best Practices from 21 years of Helping Graduates Live Purposeful Lives (2012), introduce readers to the concept of character development and describe the role of higher education in meeting the responsibility for character development of college students. These are fairly significant longitudinal and other studies that examine intentional educational programs designed to promote character development and ethical leadership development of college students at predominantly white colleges and universities using mostly quantitative methodologies.

The advantage of these quantitative studies is that they are useful in studying large numbers of people in a relatively quick manner, and they usually provide valuable information that can be generalized to a specific group or population. However, complementary, qualitative research can lend depth to educators’ understanding of the phenomenon of character development in higher education. One could argue further that the lack of educational representation of HBCU’s in these studies limits the diversity of literature on college and character development.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Prior to 1865 it was a crime to teach a Black person to read or write (Brubacher & Rudy, 2007). Christian churches such as the Congregationalist, Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist supported northern education missionaries who introduced higher learning
through academy and normal schools (Brubacher & Rudy, 2007). Wilberforce University, founded by Methodists, and Lincoln University, sponsored by the Presbyterians in 1854, developed educational models that would teach basic skills such as reading and writing to Black students. Hampton, Fisk, and Talladega later developed as the first institutions to provide secondary education skills. In addition, missionaries expanded their purpose to include producing teachers and ministers educated in the arts and sciences and liberal arts tradition.

The second Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890 established separate Black institutions of higher learning that focused on industrial, mechanical, and agricultural education, and prohibited the distribution of federal funds to states that discriminated against Black students in their admission to state colleges. The passage of the Morrill Act of 1890 brought about growing educational demands, changing faculty roles, and the increase in coeducational, Black and women’s colleges (Nuss, 2001). Many decades later, the Higher Education Act of 1965 defined historically Black colleges or universities as an institution whose principal mission is to provide quality education and training of Black Americans. The act clearly defined the role of HBCU institutions in higher education and created amendments that would qualify these institutions for direct federal aid.

In the 21st century HBCU’s face declining enrollments, declining financial resources, limited academic support services, and public challenges regarding their role and relevancy in today’s society. Gerald Reynolds who served as the chair of “The Educational Effectiveness of Historically Black Colleges and Universities” report (2010)
suggested that the success of HBCUs is due largely to the formal or informal commitment to creating a caring atmosphere where students are nurtured and supported as academic scholars and leaders in and outside the classroom. The report further suggested that students flourish in HBCU settings because they are taught the essence of good character, academic excellence, leadership and civic engagement by faculty, staff and alumnae leaders, mentors, and role models committed to the college mission to educate graduates prepared to lead and serve a global society (Reynolds, 2010).

Moreover, students in HBCU settings live out the core of the institutional mission as they come to understand and fully engage in the unique history and traditions of these institutions through a variety of fulfilling campus experiences (Reynolds, 2010). Some examples include opportunities to engage with dedicated Black faculty and staff members who serve as role models and mentors, chances to explore a curriculum that reflects the experiences of the African Diaspora and the world, opportunities to interact with alumni who also serve as role models and mentor, a variety of diverse career and research opportunities and leadership programs designed to mold and shape students as leaders, and engaging campus programs that add to the social climate and support student relationships and connections (Reynolds, 2010).

There are 103 accredited public and private historically Black colleges and universities that continue to educate Black students in the tradition of the arts and sciences and the liberal arts. The aforementioned are examples of how these institutions contribute to the overall character and ethical development of students (Reynolds, 2010).
**Women’s Colleges and Universities**

Women’s colleges and universities offer a unique experience for women students by supporting their academic and leadership development in a safe space. This section describes the role that women’s colleges and universities play in higher education, and the distinctive and unique features of these institutions. Johnella Cross Brazzell (1991) suggested that early women’s educational programs were designed to reinforce social skills and women’s role in the moral development of family. The 19\textsuperscript{th} century evidenced a variety of changes as academies and seminaries developed in the southern United States to educate women on topics of morality, religion, literature and domestic science.

Women’s colleges sprouted up in the northern states, and Oberlin College served as the first institution to admit and provide a comparable education and actual baccalaureate degree to women and Blacks (Brubacher & Rudy, 2007). Colleges such as Vassar, Wellesley, Smith and Bryn Mawr later developed in the 1860’s after the civil war to provide a comparable educational curriculum as access to institutions such as Harvard, Columbia and Johns Hopkins was not possible for women. According to Harwarth, Maline and DeBra (1999), Barnard, Smith, Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Bryn Mawr, Wellesley, and Radcliffe, known as the “Seven Sisters”, offered an education similar to male Ivy League institutions (p. 10).

Today, the Women’s Coalition identifies 46 accredited women’s colleges dedicated to serving and cultivating women as scholars and ethical leaders ([www.womenscolleges.org](http://www.womenscolleges.org)). Pioneering women such as the first woman Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, graduated from Trinity College; the first woman Secretary of State,
Madeline Albright, graduated from Wellesley College; and the first woman to head the Office of Management and Budget and first person ever to head the Congressional Budget Office, Alice Rivlin, graduated from Bryn Mawr College. These are but a few examples of women leaders who began their educational and leadership journey in women’s institutions.

Women’s colleges and universities have also provided a safe space for young women to actively engage with faculty and staff who serve as mentors and role models, and a place where women further develop their identity and find their voice without the distraction of and/or competition with men in an academic environment (Harwarth et al., 1999). Women from low-income families and first-generation college students, in particular, find women’s colleges and universities attractive as reflected by Langdon (1999) in her research on women’s colleges and universities.

The faculty, staff, administrators and alumnae of these colleges and universities are often women who set high standards for academic excellence, and engage young women in rigorous scholarship, leadership, advocacy, activism, and civic engagement (Harwarth et al., 1999). Students at women’s colleges also have numerous opportunities to lead campus and community organizations and initiatives that provide a laboratory for practical application of the concepts and theories learned in class. Whitt (1993) conducted a study on student leadership experiences at three women’s colleges that demonstrated that women develop self-understanding and confidence in their ability to achieve their personal and life goals as a result of engaging in leadership activities in women’s colleges and universities.
Moreover, the significance of women’s colleges and universities is derived from the fact that these institutions are more likely to produce graduates who go on to attend graduate school (Harwarth, 1999, p. 2). In addition to students reporting growth in leadership, public speaking skills, and greater class participation, women’s colleges produce greater numbers of baccalaureate degrees in math, computer science, and physical sciences, all of which are known as traditional male dominated fields (Harwarth, 1999).

**Spelman College**

Spelman College is a world-class institution and America’s oldest historically Black private, independent, liberal arts college for women. The College was originally founded in 1881 as the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary in the basement of Friendship Baptist Church by Sophia B. Packard and Harriet E. Giles. In 1883, the support of John D. Rockefeller was instrumental in moving the school to Atlanta, Georgia, where it became a model school for training teachers. In 1884, the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary became Spelman Seminary in honor of Mrs. Laura Spelman Rockefeller and her parents who were longtime activists in the antislavery movement. In 1924, Spelman Seminary became Spelman College (n.p., 2012, [www.spelman.edu](http://www.spelman.edu)).

Spelman enrolls approximately 2100 undergraduate students representing 41 states and 15 different countries. This includes a growing international student population and first-generation foreign-born/immigrant children from the West Indies, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and Europe. Spelman College ranks in the top 100 liberal arts colleges in the nation and is among the top liberal arts colleges producing Fulbright
Fellows since 2010. For more than a century, Spelman College has maintained its mission as a historically Black college and global leader in the education of women of African descent. The College mission statement expresses a commitment to academic excellence in the liberal arts and sciences, ethical leadership development, and civic engagement of its students.

**Purpose of the Study**

The renewed commitment to character development is widespread in contemporary higher education. In fact, the John Templeton Foundation (1999) documents a variety of institutional programs that demonstrated that colleges and universities have devoted financial and human resources to the development of academic and other programs designed to support character development, community values, and responsible student behaviors. The experiences of students in HBCU settings serve to compliment and/or expand the research on character development and ethical leadership development.

This phenomenological study described Black women’s character development and ethical leadership development experience as actually lived by the students at Spelman College. The following research question guided this study: How do students at Spelman College, a historically Black women’s college, describe their experiences with character development and ethical leadership development? The findings of this study provide knowledge and understanding of the attribution of educational programs to women’s character development and ethical leadership development in a historically Black women’s college environment. Even more, this study contributes to the available
research on college and character development of Black women, in addition to providing insight into the types of academic and other programs and activities that support character development and ethical leadership development of women in college and university settings.

**Theoretical Perspective**

Berger (2004) suggested that theories provide structure and serve to organize researchers study in the field. This study is framed by Gilligan’s work on women’s moral development. Gilligan (1977) was the first developmental psychologist to consider gender differences in moral development. Prior to Gilligan, the most referenced theory on moral development was that of Kohlberg (1958). According to Crain (1985), Kohlberg’s six stages of moral development focused primarily on rules and social expectations. More specifically, Crain (1985) indicated that Kohlberg’s (1958) theory is highly suggestive of a justice orientation, as moral decisions are perceived to be grounded in expectations of reward or punishment.

Gilligan’s (1977) work challenged Kohlberg’s (1958) assertion that moral theory is grounded in a “justice orientation” (p. 483), as her research indicated that women develop learned attitudes about right and wrong and good and bad from various institutions, customs, social practices, traditions, and individual behavior used to evaluate life situations over time. Gilligan’s (1977) work provided a three level theory on the developmental sequence of women’s moral judgment. Gilligan (1977) suggested that women progress from the initial level of “individual survival” (p. 492, level one) to “goodness as self-sacrifice” (p. 496, level two), or caring primarily for others (second
level), and finally to “morality of non-violence” (p. 504, level three), an integration of concern for the needs of both self and others (third level). This is contrary to Kohlberg’s (1958) morality of justice that emphasizes autonomy, rules, and legalism, and considers the role of the individual as the primary focus in the process.

Thus, care, in accordance with Gilligan’s (1977) theory on moral development, is defined as demonstrating feelings of “empathy and compassion” (p. 490) for self and others. This research further explored Gilligan’s (1977) concept of care and justice orientations as related to Black women’s character development and ethical leadership development at Spelman College. More importantly, the research gave voice and documented participants lived experiences with character development and ethical leadership development at Spelman College.

In addition to defining character, it is important to define other terms relevant to this research. The next section identifies terminology used throughout this study.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following terms have been identified:

1. Black Racial Identity Development: the process of discovering Black racial, ethnic and cultural identity development and a sense of belonging to a community with a shared heritage and experience (Cross, 1995).

2. Character Development: Doing what is right, good, and fair to do based on life practices that define who we are and what we value (Whiteley et al, 1982; John Templeton Foundation Report, 1999).

4. Ethics: refers to a moral philosophy or standards of what is right, fair, and good (Rowe & Guerrero, 2012).

5. Ethical Decision Making: exploring personal and social values as related to what is right, fair and good, and weighing the impact of decisions, choices and actions on self and others (Rowe and Guerro, 506-507).

6. Ethical Leadership: leadership grounded in the ethical values of what is right, fair, and good. Furthermore, it is “exercising moral judgment, imagination, and courage in the practice of leadership” (Lyndon B. Johnson Center for Ethical Leadership, 2014, http://www.utexas.edu/lbj/research/leadership/mission/)

7. Gender Moral Orientation: Sex differences and/or distinctions in how men and women think, reason, and make meaning of their experiences (Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988).

8. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU): An institution whose principal mission is to provide quality education and training of Black Americans (Higher Education Act, 1965).

9. Leadership: “A process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a commonly shared goal” (Northouse, 2011, p. 6).

11. Racialized Space: A physical space where race supports and strengthens relationships, ideologies, dialogues, processes and practices between an institution and its students, faculty and staff (Barakas & Ronnkvist, 2007).

12. SpelBound: A two-day program for admitted students that provides a special introduction to the College’s legacy, history, traditions, students, faculty, staff and alumnae (http://www.spelman.edu/admissions/admissions-events/attend-spel-bound).

13. Women’s College: An academic environment, usually a liberal arts college, whose student populations are composed of women and girls (Harwarth, 1999).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

According to Babbie (2008), social research maps out a variety of topics and identifies areas of interest for future study. Exploring relevant literature is necessary to develop in depth knowledge and understanding of theoretical concepts, new ideas, perspectives, and processes in character development. The literature review provided the researcher with exposure to the various methods of research used to explore social constructs critical to establishing a strong foundation for social science research (Babbie, 2008). The following is a review of the literature on moral development, character education, and ethical leadership development. This literature review helped to narrow the purpose of the study, identified an appropriate theoretical framework, and defined the research questions that guided the data collection.

Defining Character Development and Character Education

Exploring questions about what is good and right and understanding the logic or the nature of an individual’s arguments and reasoning were learning outcomes usually left to the disciplines of “religion and philosophy” (Wartell, 2013, p. 168). The literature review on character and college student development demonstrates that character development and moral development are used interchangeably to describe efforts to influence moral reasoning as related to student values and civic engagement. Thus, defining character, character development, and character education requires a short journey through the developmental timeline of moral education.

Throughout history, we know that teaching and learning have always been central to the mission of colleges and universities. Wartell (2013) suggested the “Post-Korean
War society featuring civil disobedience, human rights issues, and diversity questions brought about a level of critical thinking and questioning in college campuses not previously experienced” (p. 168). Thus, faculty and students’ desired to discuss and become more intricately involved in the issues of the day brought about higher education’s responsibility to enhance the way in which students thought about and responded to critical life concepts, questions, and issues (Wartell, 2013).

In the late 1960s, we saw value clarification programs that assisted students with clarifying moral issues and moral reasoning being more widely practiced in higher education (Wartell, 2013, p. 168). Even then, delineating what was right and good, and advancing it as a form of moral education was in direct conflict with the US standard of remaining “value neutral,” (Smith, 2012, p. 5) inclusive, and welcoming to diverse communities. Thus, the birth of cognitive moral development theorists, such as Perry and Kohlberg, provided research to enhance our understanding of intellectual development and moral reasoning. While the research was useful in helping us to understand the various phases of intellectual and moral development of students, these theories lacked real application to the issues of languishing academic achievement and student behaviors impacting the campus and community ethos.

Thus, the term ‘character’ was first used to define those traits most desirable in primary and secondary educational settings (Kronkosky Charitable Foundation, 2011, p. 1). Character has both Latin and Greek roots. The Latin origin of character refers to leaving a “mark” or “distinctive quality,” while the Greek origins of charaktēr means “to scratch,” “stamp”, or “engrave” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2014). Aristotle, the
foremost referenced Greek philosopher, described character as balancing reasoning and
desires and seeking the highest good in all human activity (Nicomachean Ethics, n.d.).

John Whiteley and associates conducted a study of first-year students known as
the Sierra Project at the University of California, Irvine campus to determine the effect of
the first year experience on character development in college students. The program
included a residential component with a course on Moral Development and Just
Communities, and two laboratory credits that required working in a paraprofessional peer
counseling role or engaging in community service at least five hours per week in the
winter and spring quarters of the 1979 through 1982 first-year cohorts. Whiteley (1982)
suggested that character, character development, and character education are all used
interchangeably and added to the confusion and challenge of a consistent definition of
character. Whiteley (1999) defined character as what is right, fair, and good using
principled thinking, moral maturity, and ego development. Character development
emphasizes the understanding of the intellectual progression and capacity for what is
right, fair, and good to do. Character education, then, refers to the formal and informal
experiences and interactions that promote understanding of what is the right, fair and
good thing to do (Whiteley, 1982).

The Sierra curriculum engaged students in academic success strategies, time
management, study skills development, development of empathy, listening and
communication skills, community building, exploration of lifestyle and relationship
choices, sex roles expectations and choices, personal rights and standards, career-decision
making, community service, general life planning, conflict resolution, and race, role
stereotyping and interpersonal relationships (Whiteley et. al, 1982). The research suggested that a supportive psychological environment and educational programs that blend moral and psychological interventions influence character development in the first year of college.

The John Templeton Foundation (1999) represents another significant body of research on character education that looked at 400 colleges and universities character education programs. The authors highlighted 100 “Honor Roll” colleges and 50 college presidents for exemplary character education programs that emphasize academic honesty, honor and integrity, service, leadership, spiritual growth, and substance abuse education and prevention programs. The researchers defined character as the constellation of good and bad qualities, dispositions, thoughts, and actions that are practiced consistently (The John Templeton Foundation, 1999). These good and bad qualities, dispositions, thoughts, and actions form our strengths and weaknesses and reveal who we are as individuals (The John Templeton Foundation, 1999). Character development, then, is ever evolving in that we can teach the principles of truthfulness and fairness that support making good choices and further development of character in college students.

The Sierra Project and the John Templeton Foundation (1999) provided us with a common definition that states simply that character is doing what is right, good, and fair to do based on life practices that define who we are and what we value. The authors of the Sierra Project (1982) and the John Templeton Foundation (1999) report demonstrated further that the core character principles of truthfulness and fairness could be taught or
developed in students. Further, these principles support good choices and decisions that further develop character in students.

Dalton (2011) suggested that there are five types of character education programs that help students to explore meaning and purpose while fostering “…connections between students’ academic experiences and their beliefs, values and commitments” (p. 2). Programs promote ethical standards and student behaviors, personal and social responsibility, academic excellence and the ethics of scholarship, holistic student development, and community service and civic responsibility (Hersh & Schneider, 2005). These programs are designed to produce the qualities and virtues of activism, appreciation of diversity, civility, commitment, consistency, creativity, critical thinking, ethical leadership, excellence, forgiveness, generosity, global awareness, good stewardship, health and wellness, honor, honesty, humility, integrity, interfaith cooperation, introspection, joy, love, moral reasoning, planning, purpose, respect, reflection, service and volunteerism, social justice, and sustainability (Astin & Antonio, 2004; Barch, Harris, & Bonsall, 2012; Dalton, 2011; Dalton & Crosby, 2010; Dalton & Crosby 2012; Meacham & Gaff, 2006; O’Neill, 2011; Roper, 2013; Sternberg, 2013; and Wartell, 2013).

**Kohlberg’s Moral Development Theory**

Cognitive structural theorists, such as Lawrence Kohlberg (1973), sought to explain the process of intellectual development. According to Evans, Forney, and Guido-Dibrito (1998), “these theories focus on how people think, reason, and make meaning of their experiences” (p. 124). Cognitive structures are believed to “change, expand and
become more complex as a person grows and develops” through exposure to educational experiences, events, or activities (Evans et al., 1998, p. 124).

Kohlberg’s (1973) Moral Development Theory explored how people advance in moral reasoning, the foundation for ethical behavior. Kohlberg (1973) believed justice is central to the development of moral judgment. According to Evans et al. (1998), “justice, the primary regard for the value and equality of all human beings, and for reciprocity in human relations, is a basic and human standard” (p. 173). Kohlberg (1973) identified six stages of moral reasoning grouped into the three levels: Level 1: pre-conventional; Level II: conventional; and Level III: post-conventional or principled.

Individuals in Stages 1 and 2 are considered to be Level I: Pre-conventional, and behave in accordance with established rules, policies and socially constructed norms identified by an authority figure. Individuals in the pre-conventional phase obey rules and policies because of fear of punishment. These individuals grow in moral reasoning and engage in ethical behavior perceived as right, fair, and in their best interest of decreasing the possibility of any punishment and/or negative consequence (Kohlberg, 1973).

Individuals in Stages 3 and 4 are considered to be Level 2: Conventional, and these individuals try to maintain a good image to gain the acceptance and approval of peers and authority figures (Kohlberg, 1973). In other words, rules are perceived as socially constructed and applicable to everyone in society. Thus, individuals at Stage 4 obey established rules, policies and procedures out of duty or obligation to fulfill their role in the social system (Kohlberg, 1973).
Individuals in Stages 5 and 6 are grouped into Level 3: Post-conventional recognize differing values and perspectives, but abide by a social contract, where people agree on a set of rules and laws needed to maintain the basic rights and values of society (Kohlberg, 1973). Individuals who reach Stage 6 believe in universal ethical principles based on what is just and engage in moral decisions and actions based on what is just even if it conflicts with rules, policies, practices, laws, and established procedures (Kohlberg, 1973). In sum, Moral Development Theory suggests that everyone must progress through each stage. Unfortunately, Kohlberg (1973) was not successful in identifying any subjects in his studies that had actually reached Stage 6 (as cited in Evans et al., 1998).

Kohlberg (1973) measured moral reasoning using an instrument known as the Moral Judgment Interview, which has a structured interview format that requires individuals to respond to competing moral issues identified in “… three hypothetical dilemmas followed by nine to twelve standard probe questions designed to elicit a clear picture (through justification, clarification, and elaboration) of the interviewee’s moral reasoning” (as cited in Evans et al., 1998, p. 178). Kohlberg’s (1973) research demonstrated that higher stage thinking is identified in individuals from urban and middle-class experiences, while rural and working class individuals demonstrated conventional level thinking. Finally, Kohlberg’s (1973) research supported the notion that “college indirectly fosters moral behavior by encouraging the development of moral judgment” (as cited in Evans et al., 1998, p. 183).
Critics of Kohlberg’s (1973) Moral Development Theory call for additional research on other factors beyond justice, such as care, responsibility, and self-respect, which may play a central role in the development of moral judgment. Further, it is suggested that additional research be conducted using real-life situations rather than hypothetical dilemmas, especially with women and individuals of color within the US who are not currently well represented in the review of literature (Evans et al., 1998).

The common themes in Kohlberg’s moral development theory included the identification of stages of intellectual and ethical development designed to explain how individuals think and solve critical problems, and a focus on the development of perspectives and/or construction of knowledge based on an integration and evaluation of personal, educational and other experiences (Kohlberg, 1973). Kohlberg also sought to delineate clear and separate discussions on intellectual development and ethical development. Finally, Kohlberg created assessment tools to enhance the quantitative research on moral reasoning to understand stages of moral development better.

**Gender and Moral Reasoning Orientations**

This section is designed to explore Carol Gilligan’s work on women’s thinking, moral reasoning and moral development. Gilligan (1977) took a critical look at the moral development of girls. Gilligan (1977) criticized earlier male theorists, in particular Kohlberg, as being biased in their assumption that the qualities of autonomous thinking, clear decision making, and responsible action are closely associated with masculinity, and thus, considered to be “undesirable of the feminine self” (Gilligan, 1977, p. 482). Gilligan (1977) further argued that Kohlberg’s (1973) theory on moral development does
not depict adequately the moral orientation of care, which is more tolerant, sensitive to
the needs of others, and focused on helping others. According to Gilligan (1977), “the
infusion of feeling into their judgments keeps women from developing a more
independent and abstract ethical conception in which concern for others derives from
principles of justice rather than from compassion and care” (p. 484).

Gilligan (1977) sought to “define in formal terms developmental criteria that
encompass the categories of women’s thinking” (p. 490). Gilligan (1977) interviewed 29
women participants who were referred by a pregnancy and counseling services agency.
Women of different age, race, and social economic status participated in the study, which
used the real life moral dilemma of abortion, as it is perceived that women have power
and freedom of choice to decide whether to abort a pregnancy or not (Gilligan, 1977).
While there are very different reasons for why the pregnancies occurred at varying ages
and stages of personal development, the more common themes include unanticipated
sexual encounters, disbelief in the ability to conceive, and failure to use birth control.
Four women in the study decided to move forward with the pregnancy, while 21 women
decided to move forward with the abortion. Three women were still in conflict about the
decision, and one participant experienced a miscarriage (Gilligan, 1977).

Gilligan’s (1977) research findings indicated that women use a different set of
constructs to solve moral dilemmas that are often the result of conflict and choice.
Gilligan (1977) identified three levels of judgment, the first of which is an Orientation to
Individual Survival, or the focus on self and survival. The first level also documents a
transition From Selfishness to Responsibility, where the revelation of the adult feminine
role, attachment and connection to others, and continual struggle over dependence and independence are common themes.

The second level of moral judgment is Goodness as Self-Sacrifice, which is motivated by concern for others and what is in the best interest of everyone (Gilligan, 1977). During the evaluation of the moral dilemma, women experience a second transition, From Goodness to Truth, where the morality of care is used to evaluate the relationship between self and others. Thus, the evaluation of women’s needs in relationship to others and the constant struggle between selfishness and responsibility and moral and immoral are considered as women evaluate if they can still be good and make a decision that may be perceived as selfish and in conflict with what others desire as an outcome. At this level, there is consideration of hurt and harm to others.

The third and final level of moral judgment, The Morality of Non-Violence represents challenge between a woman’s own needs and the desire to balance the responsibility to self and others in a manner that does not cause hurt or harm. Gilligan (1977) has since conducted multiple studies on care and justice ethics, all identifying the challenge of defining what constitutes a moral problem for women and men, and the divergent ways in which women and men manage issues of conflict, choice, and responsibility in real life dilemmas.

One such study with Attanucci (1988) researched real sex differences, distinctions between justice and care perspectives, and moral development in real life ethical dilemmas with 46 men and 34 women ranging in age from adolescents to young adults.
Gilligan and Attanucci (1988) used three separate studies with men and women matched for levels of education and/or professional education.

In Gilligan and Attanucci’s (1988) first study, 11 women and 10 men, including 2 persons of color, with high levels of education and professional occupation explored the variables of age, gender, and type of dilemma. The participants in the second study were 26 male and 13 female first-year students selected from two prestigious northeastern medical schools interviewed as part of a longitudinal study on physician’s stress and adaptation. Nineteen White and 20 Black, Hispanic and Asian-Americans were included in the study to balance the racial composition, and they ranged in age from 21–27 years. The participants in the third study were 10 female and 10 male students randomly selected from a co-ed private school in a Midwestern city. Nineteen White and one student of color participated in the study, and they ranged in age from 14–18 years (Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988).

Participants were interviewed using a series of questions regarding identity and personal experience with moral conflict and choice. Real-life moral dilemmas were analyzed using Lyons Manual for Coding Real-Life Dilemmas (Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988). The study concluded that both justice and care orientations were represented in participant’s thinking about real life moral dilemmas. In addition, the study results suggested that participant’s focus on one orientation while minimizing the other when addressing real life moral dilemmas. Gilligan and Attanucci (1988) also demonstrated that there was an association between gender and moral orientation. While men and women use both orientations, women were more likely represent care orientations, and
men were more likely to represent justice orientations (Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988). Gilligan and Attanucci’s (1988) study concluded that men and women adopted both a care and justice orientation when engaged in ethical considerations. The researchers suggested developing a similar study that addresses issues of race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, traditions, and informal and formal social norms that might impact participant’s sense of identity and ethical reasoning (Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988).

In sum, Carol Gilligan was one of the first theorists to explore the question of how women and men define a moral problem, the identification of issues of gender differences in moral reasoning, and perceived gender bias in theory and assessment tools. The consistent theme in Gilligan’s (1997) research is that women and men demonstrate different ways in which they approach moral reasoning as related to issues of conflict, choice, and responsibility in real life ethical dilemmas. More specifically, Gilligan’s research demonstrates that women rather than men are more concerned with care, relationships, and connections with other people as they address issues of conflict, choice and responsibility in real life ethical dilemmas.

**Moral Development and Co-Curricular Experiences**

This section explores research on the impact of co-curricular programs and experiences on moral reasoning and moral development. Pratt (2002) assessed gender differences and moral reasoning as related to care and justice, and the effects of participating in service learning using service and non-service learning groups. The study examined students’ moral orientations to see if students who participate in service learning would change. The study also sought to determine if the changes are gender
related. Pratt (2002) used the Defining Issues Test to assess justice-related moral reasoning and the Stiller and Forrest Interview to assess care-related moral reasoning and moral orientation. Pratt (2002) measured empathy using the Interpersonal Reactivity Index to understand cognitive and effective empathy. Pratt’s (2002) study discovered that men and women may differ in moral orientation, but revealed no significant difference in moral reasoning between service and non-service learning groups.

Mayhew, Seifert, and Pascarella (2010) investigated co-curricular experience, course-taking behaviors, and educational practices that influence moral development of first-year students at 19 colleges and universities. This longitudinal study included 1,469 first-year students representing a diversity of demographics, including gender, race, academic ability, and political orientation. Data were collected in the Fall of 2006 and 2007 using the Defining Issues Test 2, the National Survey of Student Engagement, and the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education Student Experience Survey.

The survey results indicated that women were more likely than men to report higher moral reasoning scores (Mayhew et al., 2010). In addition, students with higher ACT or SAT scores were more likely to report higher moral reasoning scores than their counterparts with lower ACT or SAT scores. Finally, students who participate in meaningful co-curricular opportunities, meaningful interactions, and positive diverse experiences demonstrated higher moral reasoning scores. Mayhew et al. (2010) also indicated that regardless of gender, race, verbal ability, motivation, political orientation, entering levels of moral reasoning or course-taking behaviors, at the heart of
reported developmental gains in moral reasoning lie good teaching, prompt feedback, quality faculty interactions with students, and challenging pedagogies that force students to integrate ideas, information and experiences outside the classroom. (p. 25)

Mayhew et al. (2010) called for those responsible for co-curricular programs to position student involvement as another critical learning experience for students. More specifically, the researchers demonstrated a need to create programs and spaces for students to learn from their peers while also exploring issues of justice and fairness.

Overall, the research indicated that curricular, co-curricular, and other educational experiences (Mayhew, et al., 2010), such as community service and service learning (Pratt 2002), leadership opportunities and peer conflict mediation and restorative justice programs (Meagher, 2009) influence students’ ethical reasoning and leadership development. In addition, gender is likely to influence the moral orientation, moral reasoning, and perceived educational value of student experiences (King, 2012; Mayhew et al., 2010; Pratt, 2002). Mayhew et al. (2010) called for additional research on race given the “…role of increasing the structural diversity of students on campus, their quality of interaction, and their influence on learning and democratic outcomes” (p. 8). The literature review demonstrated a need for understanding the impact of co-curricular experiences on ethical reasoning and leadership development and the ways in which to connect these experiences to theory and educational interventions in thoughtful and meaningful ways (Mayhew et al., 2010).
**Ethical Leadership Development**

In this section I explored research on ethics and ethical leadership development of colleges students. Rowe and Guerrero (2012) defined ethics as a leader’s moral compass that helps them make decisions about what is right, wrong, good or bad to do in a given situations (p. 490). Trevino, Hartman and Brown (2005) posited that ethical leaders maintain a visible standard of being an ethical and moral person who demonstrates the traits of good character, honesty, integrity, and trust (p. 5). Rowe and Guerrero submitted that ethics is central to leadership, as it involves character, what leaders do, and how they demonstrate morals and values in their actions and decisions (p. 490). Trevino, Hartman and Brown further advocated that behaviors of ethical leaders are reflected in personal morals and values and a general interest and concern for people (p. 5). Thus, ethical decision-making involved fair and unbiased decisions based on the values and morals evidenced by those in leadership roles (Trevino, Hartman and Brown, p. 5).

Ethical leadership, then, encompassed a relationship among followers (Rowe and Guerrero 2012, p. 492). Rowe and Guerro suggested that the value and importance of relationships with people aligns with Carol Gilligan’s ethic of care (p. 492). Care, in accordance with Gilligan’s theory on moral development, is demonstrating feelings of “empathy and compassion” for self and others, and being concerned more with ethical processes and resolutions (Carol Gilligan, 1977, p. 490). Finally, Rowe and Guerro further defined the principles of ethical leadership as good character and actions that demonstrate honesty, dignity, respect, justice and fairness, community building, and service to others (p. 492-493). Ethical leadership, then, is reflected in relationships with
people, communication of core principles and values, and the ability to make good and fair choices and decisions (Rowe & Guerro, 506-507).

Lynn Paine (2011) suggested that ethical leaders have a moral center that guides their processes and decision-making. The moral compass, according to Paine, is used to address ethical issues, and requires leaders to engage in “four frames of analysis” that included identifying the purpose or outcome, questioning the alignment of the potential outcome with principles and values, considering the impact of decision on others, and examining overall authority to implement the action (p. 105-106). Paine considered the implementation of the four frame moral compass analysis to be a process that provides full ethical consideration to all the issues and concepts necessary to effective decision-making.

Ethical leadership, then, encompassed a relationship with a group of people (Rowe & Guerrero 2012), and an ethic of care or demonstrated feelings of empathy and compassion for self and others when engaged in ethical decision-making (Rowe & Guerrero, 2012; Gilligan, 1977). It is the moral center that ethical leaders referenced when engaged in the analysis of ethical issues, questions and concerns (Paine, 2011). In sum, ethical leaders demonstrated good character and actions that reflected a sense of honesty, dignity, respect, justice and fairness, community building, and service to others (Rowe & Guerrero, 2012; Trevino, Hartman & Brown, 2005).

**Leadership and Social Change**

This section is devoted to exploring student involvement, leadership and social change as related to personal development and values clarification. Leadership
experiences provide a laboratory for learning through intentional activities that “...support(s) the moral mission of the institution” (Dalton & Crosby, 2012, p. 7). In an era of accountability in higher education, what students are learning in colleges and universities is receiving greater public attention (Dugan & Komives, 2006). In addition to teaching, learning, and character development, promoting and teaching leadership and preparing students to be good citizens who bring about social change is a central theme in higher education (Clark, 2001).

The literature revealed that there are numerous definitions of leadership as various scholars have sought to provide a theoretical framework for leadership. For example, Gary Yukl (2006) defined leadership as “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (p. 8). Peter Northouse (2007) defined leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (p. 3). Northouse suggested that leadership is a group experience that involves a process, influencing others, and a team of leaders and followers who work together to achieve a shared goal.

Research by Dugan and Komives (2006) demonstrated that student involvement is positively related to student’s personal development in college (p. 15). James Kouzes and Barry Posner (2006) posited that leadership is self-development or personal development. Moreover, understanding of self leads to confidence in one’s ability to lead (p. 4). Campus leadership, then, provided students with numerous opportunities to
develop an understanding of self as related to personal and shared values and beliefs (p.5).

Dugan and Komives (2006) conducted a study of college seniors from 50 institutions to explore higher education’s influence on student leadership using the social change model of leadership development (p. 525). The research from this study supported faculty interaction and mentoring, involvement in community service, and socio-cultural conversations and interactions with peers as having contributed to the development of listening skills, clarification of personal values and perspectives, and development of personal perspectives on social and political ideologies (Dugan & Komives, pp. 538-539). According to Dugan and Komives (2006), “The seven critical values of the social change model included consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, and citizenship” (p. 10).

Soria, Fink, Lepkowski, and Lynn Snyder (2013) conducted a study with 81,135 students using the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) Survey based at the Center for Studies of Higher Education at The University of California at Berkeley. The study examined college student’s participation in a leadership position as a vehicle to engagement in greater social change (p. 241). The research by Soria et al demonstrated that students engaged in “…five types of student organizations—advocacy groups, Greek fraternities and sororities, political organizations, religious organizations, and community service organizations—was positively associated with engagement in social change…” (p. 246).
Kouzes and Posner (2006) theorize that students learn to lead by experience, example and education (p. 9). Kouzes and Posner’s (2006) research demonstrated the importance of students engaging in socially responsible leadership that provides a laboratory for experiential learning. The literature demonstrates that students learn to be ethical and principled leaders, further develop admirable characteristics such as honesty, truth, and trustworthiness, in addition to enhancing ethical decision-making and behaviors as translated from their leadership experiences. George, Sims, McLean and Mayer (2007) refer to this process as discovering authentic leadership, or “learning from your life story” (p. 3). In sum, George et al. suggested that “leadership principles are values translated into action” that every leader will use when leading (p. 4). Thus, leadership principles and values contribute to a moral collegiate atmosphere and institutional culture.

The research on leadership and social change demonstrates a shared experiential learning process whereby a group of individuals come together to achieve a common goal (Clark, 2001; Dalton & Crosby, 2012; Dugan & Komives, 2006; Northhouse, 2007; and Yukl, 2006). Higher education institutions prepare students to be socially responsible leaders in a diverse and global society using the social change model of leadership (Dugan & Komives, 2006; Soria et. al., 2013). Leadership, then, is self-development or personal development as students engage in experiential learning of leadership principles and values that are translated into the action of leading and serving the college and community (Dugan & Komives, 2006; George et al., 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 2006).
Community, Core Values, and Moral Action

According to Chickering (2010), cultivating the intellect involves more than critical thinking. Chickering (2010) stated that human development is a function of the higher education community that involves “affective outcomes”, such as “self understanding, tolerance, honesty, citizenship, and social responsibility” (p. 57).

It is important to ask who really owns community given that higher education institutions dedicate significant resources to develop community and campus relationships that are “nourishing, fulfilling and energizing” (Roper, 2013, p. 277). More specifically, who is responsible for ensuring that “feelings of community are demonstrated in how groups perform and how individuals act towards each other, policies, and the physical environment, as well as the ways in which individuals embody the expressed values of the community” (Roper, 2013, p. 278).

The optimal environment is one where the institution has taken care to articulate its values, moral visions, and goals clearly to help students understand the “value of learning, of telling the truth, being willing to be shown wrong, of changing one’s mind” (Smith, 2012, p. 6) as part of the overall learning experience. Smith (2012) asserted that institutions are in need of “mature and concerned adults” (p. 8) who care genuinely about students and what they do in their co-curricular lives. Smith (2012) called for an integration of the “academic-intellectual-artistic” and “student affairs mission to create optimal college experiences and communities that have a positive impact on the moral ethos and personal character development of students” (p. 9).
Dalton and Crosby (2010) examined college and university character and ethical development program efforts, in addition to exploring ways in which these efforts impact the campus moral ethos and character of students. College campuses are environments where a multitude of moral issues intersect that cause institutions to provide “guidance and support” as related to creating a sense of community, student conduct, respecting human differences, encouraging civic responsibility, fostering leadership, addressing substance abuse, and promoting health and wellness.

Colleges have established “diversity policies, courses, offices, programs, awards and celebratory weeks and programs” to promote respect, tolerance, and appreciation of human differences (Dalton & Crosby, 2010, p. 3). Community service, volunteer programs, and civic education programs have also developed on college campuses to “deepen students’ awareness of community problems as well as to promote their capacity for caring and compassion about the needs and welfare of others” (Dalton & Crosby, 2010, p. 4). Likewise, student leadership programs have been created to address core leadership skills, while also promoting “social responsibility” and “ethical obligations of leadership roles” (Dalton & Crosby, 2010, p. 5) in the campus community, nation, and world.

Dalton and Crosby (2010) also discussed the importance of developing powerful educational partnerships to “encourage the moral and civic development of students by creating holistic environments in which students can better integrate their in-class and out-of-class experiences” (p. 7). Examples of successful learning partnerships between faculty and student affairs that teach character, moral, and civic values include service
learning, ethical leadership development, and diversity education. Specific “common
core content of character” addressed through these character education initiatives include
“respect for others, appreciation for human differences, truth telling, moderation, service,
citizenship and industry” (Dalton & Crosby, 2010, p. 8). Dalton and Crosby concluded
that character and ethical issues of students have continued to evolve and become more
complex, which has required a unique approach to engaging students in learning
character, moral, and civic values in collegiate environments.

Dalton, Crosby, and Mauk (2010) and Shushok (2011) discussed the importance
of friendships and strong interpersonal relationships in college. The researchers
concluded that the development of friends is an important element to students
“adjustment and satisfaction with college life” (Dalton et al., p. 2). Shushok (2011) also
concluded that friendships and relationships in college are one of the most important
influences on the human spirit. Thus, establishing and sustaining friendships is a moral
development issue as friendships require and exploration of the self and of personal
values.

Dalton et al. (2010), Roper (2013), and Shushok (2011) discussed higher
education’s responsibility for developing a community that encourages, engages, and
supports the character and ethical development of students as evidenced in self-
understanding, tolerance, honesty, citizenship, and social responsibility. Smith (2012),
and Dalton and Crosby (2010) expanded further upon the character and ethical leadership
dialogue by discussing the importance of clearly articulated institutional values, moral
visions, and goals to help students understand the value of learning and the importance of
socialization to the overall learning experience. The literature on community, core values, and moral action is significant in that it sheds light on the importance of collaborative approaches to developing a community and engaging students in learning character, moral, and civic values and ethical decision making in collegiate environments.

**Summary**

Character development is a central theme in higher education (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). Character development emphasizes the understanding of the intellectual progression and capacity for what is right, fair, and good to do (Whiteley et al, 1982). Character education, then, refers to the formal and informal experiences and interactions that promote understanding of what is the right, fair and good thing to do (Whiteley, 1982).

Lawrence Kohlberg was one of the first cognitive structural theorists who focused on “how people think, reason, and make meaning of their experiences” (Evans et al, p. 124). Kohlberg identified stages of intellectual and ethical development that explained how individuals think and solve critical problems. His research concluded that justice, care, responsibility, and self-respect play a central role in the development of moral judgment. Carol Gilligan was one of the first theorists to challenge Kholberg’s theory on moral development as she sought to explore the question of how women and men define a moral problem, the identification of issues of gender differences in moral reasoning, and perceived gender bias in theory and assessment tools. Gilligan’s research demonstrated that women are more concerned with care, relationships, and connections
with other people as they address issues of conflict, choice and responsibility in real life ethical dilemmas.

The literature review also explored colleges and universities role in character development and moral development as higher education institutions have a responsibility to prepare students to be socially responsible leaders in a diverse and global society (Dugan & Komives, 2006; Soria et. al., 2013). Dalton et al. (2010), Roper (2013), and Shushok (2011) discussed higher education’s responsibility for developing a community that encourages, engages, and supports the character and ethical development of students as evidenced in self-understanding, tolerance, honesty, citizenship, and social responsibility.

Mayhew, et al. (2010) concluded that curricular, co-curricular and other college experiences shape student’s character, moral orientation and moral reason. Thus, researchers recommend increasing the quality of educational experiences designed to influence character development and ethical leadership development, paying close attention to the influence of gender on character development, moral orientation and moral reasoning (King, 2012; Mayhew et al., 2010; and Pratt, 2002).
Chapter 3: Research Design

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the limited research on Black women’s lived experience with character development and ethical leadership development at Spelman College. Interviews were conducted with 10 graduating seniors and 8 alumnae participants. In addition, the Director of the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement was interviewed to provide an administrator’s perspective on character development and ethical leadership development. A phenomenological study approach was used for collecting, describing, and analyzing the data.

Qualitative Research Design

Yin (1994) defined a phenomenological study as a qualitative study that seeks to understand the everyday experiences of people. A phenomenological approach was appropriate in this study, as I was interested in describing Black women’s character development and ethical leadership development as actually lived by the students in a historically Black women’s college setting.

According to Babbie (2007), qualitative research design is a form of field research used to explore the experience and “underlying meanings and patterns of relationships” (p. 25) of a specific phenomenon. Patton (2002) suggested that “each unit of analysis implies a different kind of data collection, a different focus for analysis of data, and a different level at which statements about findings and conclusions would be made” (p. 228). Since time and access to fieldwork are limited, it was important to select participants that are easy to access, in addition to providing information rich data that
meet the purpose of the study. This involved a relatively small sample of 18 participants who were purposefully selected to increase the likelihood of information rich data.

The limited literature available on this topic indicated that an in-depth study was needed to provide insight into women’s character development in a historically Black college setting. In addition, the research may influence professional practice and future research on character development.

**Researcher Perspective**

Malterud (2001) stated that “a researcher’s background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of the investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions” (p. 483–484). Patton (2002) recommended reporting any personal and/or professional information that could impact the findings of the study.

My work has centered on strategic initiatives that impact student learning and scholarship, character development, leadership, and civic engagement in higher education. In June 2010, I accepted a position as Dean of Students at Spelman College, where I am responsible for supporting the Strategic Plan for 2017. This plan is designed to strengthen the academic core of the institution. The Spelman MILE or My Integrated Learning Experience calls for enhanced academic excellence and the creation of a more empowering student experience. As part of that process, Spelman College developed the Standards of Excellence: Civility, Commitment, and Consistency, which support the institutional mission of academic excellence, ethical leadership and global engagement.
My role as Dean of Students contributes to the mission of the College via the development of co-curricular programs that support the personal, intellectual, moral, and ethical leadership development of students. I believe my overall personal and professional experiences enabled me to be a better researcher engaged as an observer, interviewer, facilitator, interpreter, and reporter of themes and perspectives on the topic of character and ethical development at HBCU.

Meaning making and emotion are central to the phenomenon being studied. Patton (2002) talked about the importance of going into the field to observe a phenomenon in its natural environment, using empathetic neutrality as a means of establishing closeness to the subject matter to discern how the participants think, act, and feel. Credible research requires that the investigator adapt a stance of neutrality, or a “commitment to understanding the world as it unfolds, be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and be balanced in reporting both confirmatory and disconfirming evidence with regard to any conclusions offered” (Patton, 2002, p. 51).

Patton (2002) stated that “reflexivity” (p. 64) emphasizes the importance of self-awareness. Reflecting on the experiences of women and the use of care and justice orientations in character and ethical leadership is related closely to my own professional work. Therefore, it was important to be true to the ideas and the perspectives of those studied, as I possess an insider’s perspective as a member of the community and one who has been involved in character development activities throughout my career (Patton, 2002). Reflexivity was maintained through recognition of how my own subjectivity may impact the development and analysis of research. The design of the research and the
collection, analysis, and interpretation of data contribute to the reliability and validity of the case study.

**Interview Guide**

Since interviews are the primary method of data collection, an interview guide was used to ensure consistency of questions asked of each person being interviewed (Patton, 2002). The interview guide was designed to provide a rich representation of the participant’s character, ethical decision-making, and leadership development experiences.

**Selection of Participants**

Selecting quality “information rich” participants who will provide insight into women’s moral orientation is critical to the success of my research (Patton, 2002, p. 40). Purposeful sampling was used to identify study participants. Patton (2002) said,

> Cases for study (e.g., people, organizations, communities, cultures, events, critical incidences) are selected because they are “information rich” and illuminative, that is they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest, not empirical generalization from a sample to a population. (p. 40)

The study included 10 graduating seniors and 8 alumnae who were participants of the Women of Excellence in Leadership (WEL) series. The Women of Excellence Leadership (WEL) series, under the umbrella of the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement (LEADS), is a strategic initiative that supports the academic, character and leadership development of students as outlined in the mission of the College. Applicants were required to be a junior or senior, demonstrate academic and community leadership, and have a minimum 3.0 grade point average in their majors. The program included a
Spring retreat, eight required educational sessions, and a WEL graduation. The program requires attendance at all sessions and business attire as appropriate for leaders in work environments. Pictures of the WEL graduates are displayed prominently in the main concourse of the college center (student union) with each student’s personal leadership vision to engage the community actively in a celebration of WEL series graduates.

Participants were provided a letter requesting their participation in the study, asked to review and sign a human informed consent form, and given instructions on how to participate in the study.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Qualitative interviews were the primary sources of data collection. In addition, personal observation of program activities and document analysis was used to further enhance the findings of this research.

**Interviews.** Merriam (1998) and Patton (2002) both agreed that one of the most common forms of qualitative interviews is person-to-person interviews. According to Patton (2002), “we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe” (p. 340). Moreover, Merriam (1998) said that the researcher can elicit information from a participant using questions prepared in advance, and can be “highly structured,” “semi-structured,” or take on an “informal conversational structure” (p. 74). Highly structured interviews involve predetermined questions in an ordered sequence and may be in the form of a survey (Merriam, 1998). Semi-structured interviews are less formal and have less structured questions and/or questions that emerge from the immediate context of the conversation. Informal conversational interviews are less
structured as there are no pre-determined questions. The interviewer may disclose the topics and issues to be covered in the interview in advance, but the interview is designed to be more like a conversation, which helps the interviewer to develop questions throughout the process (Merriam, 1998).

I utilized a semi-structured interview, with an interview guide that outlined predetermined questions and topics to provide a systematic approach to data collection and to increase the comprehensiveness of the data. According to Merriam (1998), the interview guide is a research tool that provides the researcher with freedom to determine how to utilize the time and allows for comparison of data upon conclusion of the interview. The researcher was also open to questions that emerged within the natural course of the interview and conversation. Interviews allowed the researcher to acquire direct knowledge, experience, and understanding of student values, attitudes, feelings, thoughts, opinions, intentions, and interactions, resulting in a more accurate record and interpretation of student perspectives and experiences (Patton, 2002).

All interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the participants to allow for accuracy of data collection and analysis. In addition, observational notes, theoretical notes, methodological notes, and analytical memos were used as part of the qualitative research and data collection process.
**Observation.** According to Merriam (1998), using observation as a research tool requires a “formulated research purpose” (pp. 94–95) and a deliberate plan to observe and record the phenomena systematically as they actually appeared. I attended the WEL series retreat in order to observe leaders in a natural environment. In addition, I observed students leaders in selected campus leadership roles to understand the leadership conversations and interactions as related to character development and ethical leadership development.

**Document analysis.** Document analysis involves obtaining pertinent, primary, authentic institutional documents to review as a means of gathering valuable data on the phenomena being studied (Merriam, 1998). The documents analyzed in this study include the Undergraduate Bulletin, Student Handbook, Student Life & Engagement Handbook, and 2014 Women of Excellence Leadership Series Manual to assist with documenting the institutions mission and commitment to academic and co-curricular experiences that shape the character development and ethical leadership development of its students. A written document analysis template was adapted from the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, DC (National Archives and Records Administration, 2014, [http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/document.html](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/document.html)) The written document analysis template assisted with analyzing the historical and current purpose, message and significant points of context as related to character development and ethical leadership development in college documents.

**Data analysis.** Quantitative research provides a clear distinction between data collection and data analysis. Patton (2002) referred to the “fluid” and “emergent” nature
of qualitative research as being “far less absolute” (p. 436). Patton (2002) also stated that
during the course of conducting fieldwork, ideas form, patterns, and themes take shape,
and data are being analyzed constantly. Thus, there is no real clear distinction between
the data collection process and the data analysis process in qualitative research.
According to Patton (2002), the researcher must be prepared to record emerging ideas on
how to analyze data as part of the field and interview notes. The primary sources for
final analysis included interviews that were used “for analytic insights and interpretations
that emerged during data collection” (Patton, 2002, p. 437).

I employed a process described by Groenewald (2004), in transforming the data
through the process:

1. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction;
2. Delineating units of meaning;
3. Clustering of units of meaning to form themes;
4. Summarizing each interview, validating it and where necessary, modifying it; and
5. Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a
   composite summary.

Groenewald (2004) stated that “bracketing and phenomenological reduction” (p. xx)
involve identifying and/or setting aside the researcher’s familiarity, preconceived
ideas, and/or any bias that may impact the research. This process is also known as
“epoche”, a Greek word used to describe the process of separating the subjectivity of the
researcher to ensure the presentation of each research participant’s unique experience
I followed this process by considering my relationship to the phenomenon of study throughout the analytic process.

According to Groenewald (2004), “Delineating units of meaning,” means identifying the shared common experiences of each interview participant based on the “literal content, the number (the significance) of times a meaning was mentioned, and also how (non-verbal or para-linguistic cues) it was stated” (p. 19). The experiences may be common to all or common to a subset of those being interviewed. It also calls for the researcher to bracket her own “presuppositions in order to avoid inappropriate subjective judgments (Groenewald, 2002, p. 19).

Cross case analysis was used to determine shared and divergent themes. Groenewald (2004) defined “clustering of units of meaning to form themes” (p. 19) as identifying the common units and groups with similar topics, meanings, and/or concepts. Patton (2002) also refers to this as “qualitative comparative analysis,” or comparing a number of cases to identify cross-case patterns, themes, similarities, and differences (p. 492). As recommended by Groenewald, I summarized each interview using the themes derived from the data, validating the data with the participant, and modifying the data as appropriate. Finally, “general and unique themes” for all interviews were summarized identifying those themes common to all, in addition to identifying variations of data using a form of constant comparative method of data analysis. A summary was provided connecting the data to the theoretical concepts to support the overall purpose.

Trustworthiness and credibility. The trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative research relies on researcher neutrality and validity of the study. Patton
(2002) stated that the investigator of a qualitative study must engage in ethical research, which includes demonstrating that the research is designed in a manner that is unbiased and without a goal to prove a specific outcome (p. 51). Qualitative research must also demonstrate validity in that the research findings must accurately describe the person’s experience with the phenomena being studied (Merriam, 2002, p. 201).

Triangulation is one of many strategies used to enhance validity. Triangulation involves the use of different research methods such as interviews, document analysis, and participant observation, to assist with comparing areas of agreement and divergence (Patton, 2002, p. 204). As explained, interviews were the primary data collection method in this study. Interviewing was complemented by observation and document analysis, thus providing data source triangulation.

Member checking is another strategy used to enhance reliability and validity. Member checking involves a select group of study participants reviewing the findings of the research. More specifically, member checking requires sharing the data with participants to provide an opportunity to correct any information provided, address any misinterpretations of the data and provide any additional information that might be useful to the study (Merriam, 2002, p. 204). I used member checking to enhance the reliability and validity of this study, by sharing my initial case analysis with each of the participants. There were no significant changes to the findings resulting from this process.

Finally, peer reviews are also a good strategy used to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. Colleagues in the role of Director of Student Life and
Engagement, Associate Dean of Students, and Dean of Students reviewed and commented on the research findings. All similarities and differences of opinion were noted and shared in the discussion of results in Chapter 5 (Merriam, 2002, p. 204).
Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe participants lived experiences with character development and ethical leadership development at Spelman College. Interviews were conducted with 10 graduating seniors who were members of the Class of 2014 Women of Excellence Leadership (WEL) program and 8 alumnae in the 2001-2006 WEL program series. Dr. Jane Smith, Class of 1968, the administrator responsible for the WEL program, was also interviewed to provide an administrative perspective on the phenomena being studied. In addition, I reviewed the Undergraduate Bulletin and Student Handbook to further ascertain the College’s commitment to character development and ethical leadership development of its students, and to better understand what is unique about the Spelman experience.

Each participant shared her own unique personal story regarding the collegiate experience and its unique contributions to character development and ethical leadership development. Data from these interviews were collected, analyzed, and coded using the constant comparative method. The passages included in this chapter represent the unique experiences of the women involved in the WEL series with a commitment to fully represent the individual voice of each participant. Selected participants were given an opportunity to review the information for accuracy and authenticity of their experience. Following the presentation of data is an exploration of themes and categories that emerged from the interpretative analysis of the participant’s transcripts and digital recordings from each interview.
The chapter is organized around two major sections. In the first section, I provide summaries of each of the participants, with a focus on the individual’s college experiences as they relate to her leadership development. The second section represents a cross-case analysis, which is described in detail in Chapter 3.

Table I identifies the Class of 2014 WEL series participants by their major and leadership role. Table 2 identifies the alumnae WEL participants by their class year and occupation. The names were changed to protect the identity and confidentiality of each participant.

Table 1

*Class of 2014 Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Leadership Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Magazine/Newspaper Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>International Studies</td>
<td>Orchestra Cellist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Student Organization Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena</td>
<td>Comparative Women’s Studies</td>
<td>Student Organization Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Student Organization Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>Economics/Mathematics</td>
<td>Student Trustee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Student Organization Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Army ROTC Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simone</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Campus Ministries Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sasha</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Student Government Association</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Alumnae Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Class Year</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashton</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Attorney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandi</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Investment Firm/Drama/Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandra</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Environmental Health Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Doctoral Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keisha</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Social Media Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatiana</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Attorney</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant Demographics**

It is important to review the demographic data of the women participating in this study to provide context in support of the critical themes and topics discussed in the pages that follow. It was found that 14 of the 18 participants came from two parent homes, lived in suburban areas and attended predominantly white schools. Participants identify the primary values espoused while growing up as academic excellence, persistence/perseverance, service to others, honesty/integrity, having a strong work ethic, hard work, humility, self-sufficiency and independence.

When asked if they knew about Spelman College when making their final decision about the college they would attend, only 9 of the 18 participants knew about
Spelman College, and 5 of the 9 participants were aware of the mission of Spelman College. Thus, 13 participants did not know the college’s mission that expresses a commitment to academic excellence in the liberal arts and sciences, ethical leadership development and civic engagement of its students. Approximately 6 of the participants learned about Spelman or were influenced to attend Spelman College by alumnae, a teacher or guidance counselor and/or family members who attended or had a desire to attend a historically Black college or university (HBCU). Only 10 of the participants actually visited Spelman College, either by invitation to SpelBound, a major recruitment/yield initiative for admitted students, or via an HBCU tour sponsored by a local church or college bound program before making the final decision to attend.

While Spelman is a college with a good academic reputation, and is a part of a consortium with the largest concentration of Black scholars in the world, which makes for a very engaging social environment, none of these were clearly identified as the reason students came to Spelman College. Instead, the participants discussed the desire to be in an environment with women of high academic achievement who “look just like me.” Moreover, experiencing the social, political, economic, geographic and cultural diversity among women who are joined together in a place created just for Black women and girls was identified as inspiring and motivational. Finally, the influence of the Spelman legacy, connection with alumnae, the friendly and welcoming environment and supportive faculty and staff were also factors considered to make Spelman unique, and, thus, influencing student’s decision to enroll.
Ana. Ana came to Spelman as a first-year student from a predominantly Black community in Colorado. She attended predominantly Black schools in Colorado during her pre-kindergarten through high school experiences. Ana always knew she would attend Spelman College as she has been intimately engaged with the institution since she was ten years old. Ana’s sister is a graduate of Spelman, so she had many opportunities to experience the college as she visited her sister periodically. Ana fell in love with the Black women who represented Black academic excellence. She recalls the day that she made her decision to attend Spelman as being a life changing experience. “The students were friendly and very vibrant as they met me with a welcoming smile. As I walked out of the student center I ran into a group of young ladies who were having a very intense intelligent conversation. It was at that moment that I knew I wanted to be a Spelmanite.”

In all the time that Ana engaged with the campus, she admits being unaware of Spelman’s mission to educate and empower the intellectual, creative, ethical and leadership and service to the many cultures of the world. “I had an emotional connection to Spelman as I witnessed the commitment to social responsibility and contributions to the positive progression of American society at Spelman.” Once she enrolled and attended New Student Orientation, she remembers her experiences with coming to know and understand the tagline, *A Choice to Change the World*. “I felt an immediate commitment to take steps to be a change agent responsible for having a huge positive impact in the world.” Ana says she was awakened to global awareness and a
responsibility to discover her role as a Black woman leader over the course of her undergraduate studies.

*Family values, cultural pride and giving back.* Ana describes her family as being a very tight knot clan. Her mother and father raised her and her four siblings with a respect and esteem for their elders and a strong focus on cultural pride. “My parents always told me I am as good as or better than any other person of a different ethnicity. I never had a sense of self-rejection because of my Blackness. I never questioned whether I was good enough because I am Black.”

Ana speaks of having to develop a sense of independence and individuality, and always being encouraged by her family to take advantage of the numerous opportunities to discover her passion. In her family, integrity and honor, or “being a person of your word” is expected. “We were taught to be leaders who were selfless, responsible, courageous, versatile, humble and empathetic to the experiences of others.”

By the time Ana finished high school she believes that she had a surface level understanding of herself, and a commitment to being an authentic leader who demonstrates honor and trust, and one who is responsible for creating supportive and reciprocal relationships and experiences. As she embarked on her Spelman journey, she experienced students and alumnae who were social change agents who demonstrated pride in the history and traditions of the College. Ana began to seek her own personal experience to further develop a sense of social responsibility and social consciousness. She joined a community service initiative designed to mentor students in the Atlanta
public high schools who were challenged with passing the Georgia High School Graduation Test.

Through this community service initiative, Ana was able to put her values to work as she learned through generosity of service to others. Ana considered herself to be from a very ethnic and culturally diverse experience. However, mentoring allowed her to further understand different perspectives, issues and experiences in the surrounding Atlanta metropolitan community. Ana learned that she was a privileged Black woman as many of the students she mentored were from single parent families with limited education and experiences. While she was being taught about racial oppression in class, she actually experienced the oppression of others through engaging in community service.

Ana was able to take a stand for the equality and progression of students less fortunate than her and the other college students involved in this community service experience. Ana was engaged in a movement that would bring about change in the inner city educational system, in addition to giving voice to youth who often felt silenced, defeated and without hope. “It’s a revolution. It is time to encourage brotherhood, sisterhood, change our livelihood, and take it to the neighborhood.” It’s experiences like this that strengthen character and leadership which, according to Ana, are inseparable.

**Black women of excellence in leadership.** My foundation is one of cultural empowerment as a Black person, not as a young Black woman. Dr. Tatum always says that “ignorance can only be tolerated as a temporary state of mind.” Spelman has given
me a greater sense of responsibility to my Black womanness. I have made a conscious
decision to empower myself and uplift my Spelman sisters as Black woman.

Every year in October students are excited as they hear their sisters (peers) talk
about the Women of Excellence in Leadership Series (WEL). It is understood that WEL
experience is one in which every good leader should seek to be involved. Ana was
further inspired by her friends who were junior and senior graduates of this program and
highly regarded as leaders on campus. The information and application of leadership, the
pictures of the WEL graduates with the personal leadership vision on the wall of the main
concourse in the student center, and the fact that Dr. Jane Smith, a Spelman alumna,
heads the program is what inspired Ana to say, “I’m gonna have my picture on that wall”.
As Ana and I continued her interview, she seem to be saying that she wanted to be a part
of a unique group of change agents exploring leadership as related to a civil and just
community of leaders.

Ana reflects on the WEL experience as being “a beautiful and amazing
experience.” The Women in Excellence Leadership Series helps you to think about and
be able to articulate your values and character- “to understand what you stand for.” She
further indicated, “In WEL, and at Spelman, we are constantly reminded that we are
global leaders and change agents. Dr. Smith always says, ‘Spelman women are smart,
quick and we have voices.

While there were many lessons learned throughout the various sessions, what Ana
remembers is the importance of not confusing what you do with who you are as an
individual.
I started the TBA magazine in my junior year. As I reflect on what it has meant to own my own magazine, I know now that it has helped me to grow and learn about others. I have learned that leadership is not about me…I have become even more selfless and my views are more flexible.

Ana also talks about having a theoretical framework for understanding leadership. WEL introduces you to the social change model of leadership, and gives you an opportunity to understand the various styles of leadership with exposure to corporate and non-profit leaders. As a graduating senior Ana was able to reflect on her collegiate experience and explore her strengths as an authentic feminist leader.

As a WEL participant, you learn to be a person of substance and to not sit when it is time to take a stand on critical issues. You learn that failure is not an option. Just because a plan fails does not mean you failed. It just means you change the direction you take to get there.

Ana identifies her overall learning outcomes as understanding her own personal image and leadership brand. “I will become the CEO of a media conglomerate that will produce positive TV Shows and editorial content that will empower, educate, entertainment and challenge its audience for their social and intellectual betterment.” During our conversation Ana reflects on having learned about business etiquette and the importance of looking successful and dressing for every environment. She also speaks of becoming more skilled at setting clear, realistic and precise goals, which she thought she mastered having run the business operations of a magazine while being a full-time student.
One of the greatest lessons Ana reflects on is the importance of staying current with world events and exploring the leadership and ethical question(s) in every issue. It was also evident that she learned about Black women and relationships as she discussed the challenging perceptions of Black women, expectations to be great as a Spelman woman and alumna, and how the structures of relationships are evolving in the Black community, sometimes at the expense of what we know as the traditional family. This appeared to be very challenging to her as family is central to her overall life experience.

In closing, discussions about money and financial literacy are limited to programs through the Student Government Association or through programs like WEL. Dr. Jane Smith and Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum both discuss the importance of money and financial management as part of the WELs curriculum.

Success is not just about you. Dr. Tatum shared that 50% of Black and Latino families make less than $40,000 a year. Less than 1% of the African-American community earn over $200,000 annually. Spelman women must be “undaunted by the fight.” Spelman women must be prepared to walk through the doors of opportunity, and set new standards for leadership in an era of reverse migration. Paying it forward, then, requires the achievement of success and the giving of your time, talents and financial commitments is an expectation of WEL graduates and of all Spelman women. Moreover, Spelman women are being prepared to understand the responsibility to be a “woman of impact” and a “beacon of hope and justice” for those who will one day follow in their footsteps.

Ana concludes by saying, “Spelman is truly a transformational experience.”
**Black feminist leadership.** Over the course of her undergraduate experience Ana learned to be a feminist scholar, ethical leader, activist and advocate for social justice. Much of what she has learned has come through academic and/or co-curricular programs such as the First-Year Convocation, African Diaspora and the World (ADW), Comparative Women’s Studies, and the Women of Excellence Leadership Series (WEL). Spelman women are taught to be feminists and that “I am my sister’s keeper.”

Looking back now, I love First-Year Experience and Convocation. Faculty and staff have provided enriching experiences, although it is perceived as “motherly,” it has reinforced things that I have doubted in myself and had a direct impact on my character and my ability to lead. You have made “*A Choice to Change the World*”, you are a “feminist”, and “I am my sisters keeper” are things you continuously hear in First-year Convocation, and courses like Images of Women in the Media and Introduction to Women’s Studies. I have learned more about being a Black woman leader, versus being a culturally informed Black leader.

Exposure to business leaders and alumnae leaders who offer a definition of global leadership and reinforce or validate a responsibility to change the world obligates you to work towards being a global change agent. In addition, being exposed to the Audre Lorde Archival Research Lecture Series and the Langston Hughes series through the English department at Spelman provides a firm foundation in Black culture experiences and an understanding of the multiple identities and intersection of identities of being Black, a woman and a feminist.
I have been able to take what I have learned at Spelman and apply it in an internship with Black Entertainment Television (BET), worked as a Campus representative for the Grammy U program housed in The Recording Academy, started my own magazine, engaged in conversations with celebrities and elected officials, including President Barack Obama. I have experienced opportunities and developed a network of who’s who because I am a Spelman student. Spelman has shaped who I am as a Black woman leader. Access to these experiences may not have been the same had I made a decision to go to College somewhere other than Spelman.

One challenge Ana spoke about is having experienced white privilege and various forms of oppression that supports sexism and racism in environments where she has been in the minority. “Spelman provides a strong theoretical framework for recognizing and understanding that these experiences exist. While sheltered from institutional and individual sexism and racism, you are prepared to confront it when you see it.”

Of the overall learning experience, Ana posits that all students are exposed to the same learning concepts in and out of class. But she wrestles with the notion that all students learn to “internalize and apply what they learn” with regard to being scholars and ethical leaders with a feminist lens on life. “I watch some of my Spelman sisters talk about morality and being ethical in various student organizations and leadership roles, but they sometimes fall short in demonstrating what it means to be ethical and of good character.” Transforming your thought processes to conceptualizing, internalizing and actualizing scholarship, leadership, ethics, character and feminism may be a lesson
learned by most during the four years of undergraduate study at Spelman, but for many others it may continue to be an elusive lesson that will come much later in life.

**China.** China is classically trained cellist and international studies major from Michigan who has the distinct honor of being one of the top ten graduates in the Class of 2014 who achieved the designation of Summa Cum Laude. She attended Cass Technical High School, which is a magnet school known as one of the more outstanding college preparatory programs in Detroit, Michigan. She was one of the sixteen students to be honored for graduating with a perfect 4.0 cumulative grade point average from the Detroit Public Schools district. Thus, China has always been in an environment where academic excellence was the standard. For China, Spelman was just a continuation of her desire to be around other high achieving students. “Spelman was always on my radar as it is known as one of the best colleges for Black women in the nation and world.”

China was inspired to attend Spelman by an alumna in her church who made it clear that Spelman College was the best institution for talented and gifted African-American women. She was further inspired by the tagline, *A Choice to Change the World,* as she really wanted to be an International Studies major and knew that Spelman had a Japanese studies program. In addition, she wanted to continue her artistic endeavors as a cellist through involvement with the Atlanta University Center Orchestra and Atlanta University Center Quartet. Her decision was truly related to academics as she didn’t really know anything about the social atmosphere and other offerings outside of the classroom experience.
On character and values. China is a product of a household with a mother and father who strongly believe that the composure of a leader is reflected in their character. China’s mom and dad taught her the core values of being honest, having a strong work ethic, determination and persistence, and always remaining calm and well balanced. Your character guides your decision making. Your decisions make you a great leader. The decisions you make as a leader all impact your leadership and personal growth as an ethical leader. My work ethic has been strengthened as I have learned the value of trust, finding common ground and valuing diverse perspectives.

China reflects on an experience during her sophomore year that reinforced the values and influenced her view of leadership. Through an assignment supported by the Bonner Scholars and Leadership Development program, China volunteered with the Atlanta Beltline Project to assist with a sustainable redevelopment project in an urban area designed to provide a network of public parks, multipurpose trails and transit along a historic 22 mile railroad that connects 45 downtown neighborhoods. Working with students and the community to clean areas to support the revitalization of areas faced with economic decline influenced my view of myself and my leadership as it showed me the process of starting with a grassroots idea, a group of committed activists and enthusiastic volunteers to bring the vision to life. Involvement in the Atlanta Beltline Project provided China with a lesson on leadership. “Being a leader means working through the sometimes long and difficult process of
seeing the creation of an idea from the beginning to the end.” The experience further inspired China’s commitment to starting organizations in developing countries to promote economic and community development and educational equity.

**Going global.** Throughout my college career I have lived by a Japanese quote that, when translated, means “When I change, the whole world changes.” China applied to Women of Excellence Leadership Series because she wanted a capstone experience that would bring greater understanding of what it means to be a Black woman who is a global leader. The literature on the WEL program, coupled with her connection to alumnae who successfully completed the program inspired her desire to apply. China wanted to further enhance her understanding of leadership and what it means to be a Black woman and a change agent in a global society. “WEL provided the tools necessary for me to continue on my leadership journey long into the future, as well as eventually helping someone else begin their journey.”

While China has always been confident, entering a world where dreams and goals are sometimes forgotten and pushed aside requires a focus on preparing for life after Spelman. “I became a leader because I saw some greater vision I wanted to achieve. It’s always the goal to improve and make things better.” For China, WEL provided a place for top women leaders to understand what it means to be supported, while also receiving inspiration from other women leaders who take risks and move outside of their comfort zones. “Coming to Spelman, in general, is taking a risk. Spelman makes you feel like you can do anything, or that it never hurts to try.”
WEL is about reflecting on what you want and how it will impact others and the greater community.

Being a leader at Spelman has let me experiment with leadership and also find who I am as a Black woman. My one year study abroad in Tokyo, Japan, taking Japanese and English classes, engaging in the campus orchestra and the international student culture exchange group allowed me to gain independence and develop friendships with people from around the world. I was able to reflect on my life from the lens of being a Black woman engaged in an international community. I practiced different styles of leadership and learned the importance of flexibility while living in a country very different from my own.

Upon returning to Spelman after study abroad, China talks about having experienced reverse culture shock.

I felt alone at Spelman. I connected with other students who had the same experience of reverse culture shock. I wanted to go back to Japan. But, I found comfort in the fact that it was not my last travel experience. The study abroad experience helped me to integrate the knowledge learned at Spelman and abroad, but no one experience prepared me for this reverse culture shock.

Before coming to Spelman, China thought of herself as “just a leader.” After graduating from Spelman, she sees herself as a self-determined, Black female leader with a strong international experience and understanding of what it means to be a feminist.

Being in an environment like Spelman where everyone wants to lead and is passionate about something forces you to move into that next level of greatness.
My Spelman sisters have always inspired, challenged and supported me in my leadership roles. My Spelman sisters inspire me to leap and know I can fly. The WEL experience has a large impact on young women leaders as it helps to understand the importance of good character and leadership from the lens of alumnae and other Black women who are global leaders with successful academic and career experiences. The WEL program, coupled with my study abroad experience, has broadened my horizons and helped me to integrate the knowledge learned at Spelman and abroad.

*A vision inspired.* China talks about how the Spelman environment celebrates gender, race and ethnicity and empowers students to learn and discover their passion and calling. She speaks of having engaged in numerous leadership opportunities where she has learned how to make decisions with a bigger goal in mind. Serving as a student ambassador, executive board member in the Honors Program, executive board member of the Atlanta University Center Orchestra and Quartet, volunteering for the Atlanta City Refuge, experiences as a Google BOLD Immersion Intern, study abroad experience, volunteering with the Tsunami/Earthquake disaster relief through the Japan Emergency NGO (JEN) program and serving as an intern with Lumina Learning which is focused on personal development training and coaching has helped China to clearly identify her passion and calling. “I will become an integral part of bridging the world’s economic development gap. I will direct the skills and potential of people across the world into projects that promote educational and economic equity.”
Thus, having the opportunity to lead and learn in an environment like Spelman has provided China with the inspiration to think and dream big. Leadership requires leading by example, and recognition that every decision requires very strategic goals and risk-taking which are the foundation for being a great leader. China will attend American University in the fall as a student in the International Peace and Conflict Resolution graduate program, and will also serve as a Fulbright Fellow in Malaysia.

**Erica.** Erica is a political science major from Pennsylvania. She learned about Spelman from a close friend whose sister is an alumna. Erica grew up in a two parent household with both her mother and father having attended a historically Black college or university. Her family placed great emphasis on academic excellence, Black women in leadership and being ethical. Erica says it was a natural fit to attend Spelman College given its mission to educate women of African descent and its dedication to academic excellence and the intellectual, creative, ethical and leadership development of students. Like so many other young women, Erica grew up attending predominantly white primary and secondary schools which also influenced her decision to attend Spelman. “I wanted to be around more women who looked like me.”

Erica is from a “God fearing home” where she developed a strong spiritual grounding that now serves as the foundation for her decision making, choices and actions. Her family instilled in her the values of being kind and remaining true to oneself and her beliefs and values. Erica practices the golden rule which requires that you treat others the way you want to be treated. She believes there is a huge connection between character, leadership and decision making. “My entire time at Spelman I have made
good decisions in and outside the Spelman gates. You learn your values at home, but you become independent and actually get to decide if you will uphold your personal values while in college.” Erica believes that Spelman provides an environment of support for the development and enhancement of ethical principles.

*A woman of excellence.* Erica applied to the Women of Excellence Leadership Series because she wanted to learn about leadership theories, ethical leadership and further develop her leadership skills. She also had a mentor who applied and participated, and witnessed first-hand the transformation of her mentor. Thus, she also believed the WEL program would help her reflect and further transform as a global leader. Erica’s face lit up when she talked about WEL women and leadership at Spelman.

In WEL there is a diversity of leaders—there is no one type of leader. The WEL program also exposes you to the social change model of leadership. As leaders we learned to tell our story, to be able to talk about leadership principles, to develop a personal leadership mantra, and fully develop our personal image and brand.

Involvement in an organization provides a chance for students to find their leadership style and to think about the impact of decisions as a leader. WEL helps students to understand the social issues from a global leadership context, and, thus prepares you to think as a global leader.

Erica learned what it means to be a selfless leader who is sensitive to the needs of others and the community. For Erica, character determines leadership, involvement and
how you make decisions. “I am surrounded by examples of women who lead as a unit, not as people who try to achieve their own selfish goals.” Erica believes she represents the student body, and therefore, must be ethical as she is making decisions for the community.

It’s not just about me anymore. Relationships matter in a community like Spelman. Students care about one another and they care about the success of student organizations, so they want to do the right thing. It’s because of the passion we have for each other, and for Spelman that we are inspired to do the right thing even when no one is looking.

**Being a Black feminist and activist.** “Activism comes in many forms… it’s not just about the protest. Leaders can engage in civil disobedience, rather than protest, and still be just as powerful.” Erica says she has always been somewhat of a feminist-activist, even before entering the gates of Spelman.

I have always advocated for equal social, political and economic rights of women in my own way. I identify more with being a womanist—more of a progressive woman who is concerned about the African-American community. I want to work hard for African-American women’s interests. I have learned a form of activism at Spelman that I would not have experienced anywhere else.

Erica found her voice at Spelman as there are so many opportunities to engage in self-reflection and self-searching to discover who you are and to find your passion and purpose. “I am comfortable with me now.” Erica states that “I will become a Supreme Court Justice. I will be the voice of revolution this country needs to break down cultural
barriers and create social, gender and racial equality in the United States justice system.”

In the Fall 2014, Erica will enter George Washington Law School.

**Helena.** Helena is a transfer student who attended a southeastern university internationally recognized for its outstanding liberal arts colleges and graduate and professional schools prior to coming to Spelman College.

I came in a semester late and I am leaving a year early, but even in this shortened time period I have learned and gained a lifetime's worth of experiences, feelings, knowledge, education, and discovery I wouldn't have experienced anywhere else. Originally from Texas, Helena grew up in a divorced family, spending ages 5-18 years living with her dad, only occasionally seeing her mom. She attended Montessori schools in her early childhood, and recalls that much of her primary and secondary educational experiences were in predominantly white school systems in small towns which later influenced her desire to attend Spelman College. Helena, like so many other young women at Spelman had a strong desire to be in a nurturing and supportive environment with strong Black women leaders that looked like her and exhibited the desire to excel academically and as a global leader.

Helena’s dad, uncles and cousins all attended Morehouse College and Spelman College. Thus, she has always had a positive frame of reference for Spelman College growing up hearing various stories about her relative’s experiences at these historic institutions. While she decided to initially enroll at another university directly out of high school, she later left that same institution because of the “racial tension, splintered ethnic community and less than challenging curriculum”.
Helena decided to enroll at Spelman College because of her first-hand experience with the nurturing and empowering community as she would often escape the tensions of her previous institution by visiting Spelman and the other colleges and universities in the Atlanta University Center Consortium. She was impressed with Spelman’s legacy of academic excellence and history of producing some of the smartest and most influential women graduates in the nation.

**On discovering personal values.** As Helena reflects on her values she remembers being conflicted. She grew up with a focus on family, academics and a strong desire to secure a scholarship to college. Helena talks about how her mom and dad imparted very different values, including self-sufficiency, doing well academically, engaging in community service or giving back to others and making a lot of money.

It seems like my parents spoke a lot from their own flaws, failures and negative things that happened in their life. I know that my values have changed. My dad says I sound like a terrorist/nationalist, when I really have grown into a feminist/womanist who is at peace with herself.

Helena describes herself as having developed as an ethical leader whose personal values dictate her decisions and actions. She has learned how to lead through collaboration in achieving common goals. While her relationship did not always thrive and flourish in leadership situations, Helena says she learned to achieve goals for the greater good through leadership collaboration and partnerships.

At first you get into leadership for personal reasons like getting notoriety or a significant leadership role. You soon find that it is a natural feeling to want to
serve and learn from others. What looked and felt like selfishness was really me learning when and how to work effectively with people. So, I had a lot of self-discovery. I have learned my strengths and weaknesses and how I can be a better leader and help others to be better leaders while serving others.

Helena’s developmental experience reflects Elizabeth Whitt’s (1993) study on student leadership experiences at three women’s colleges. Whitt’s research demonstrates that women develop self-understanding and confidence in their ability to achieve their personal and life goals as a result of engaging in leadership activities in women’s colleges and universities (p. 21).

**Finding voice.** Helena was inspired to apply for the Women of Excellence Leadership Series because of the previous WEL graduate’s example of leadership. In addition to the WEL written material which describes the commitment to teaching young women a global leadership perspective, she was further inspired to apply to be surrounded by other successful student leaders.

Since I think on a global scale and aspire to travel all over the world and live in other countries, this is extremely important for me. I am a great leader now, but I knew I could be a better leader after being exposed to different leadership styles of students and alumnae leaders.

WEL asks you to explore your values for yourself. Being in this program helped Helena to refine her life purpose, goals and plans. WEL taught her to understand authentic leadership and how to be her authentic self. More importantly, Helena learned what it meant to flourish as a leader. In reflecting on her experiences she shared the following:
At my previous institutions I did not flourish and the environment because it was toxic. It did not promote self-discovery and love of self. Instead it was very academically competitive, and I am not sure I would have been empowered to lead. WEL helped me to think how Spelman makes you feel you can do anything you want. I wasn’t pigeonholed as I was at my previous institution. I would not have the fire and courage to do what I have done. Being around like-minded, successful Black women, I had to learn how to be just as amazing as all the other women at Spelman.

In addition, Helena talks about how the program helped her to strengthen her understanding of leading as a Black woman. “Being here in this space has taught me what it means to be a Black woman leader. I am not narrowly defined by western hegemonic traditions.” Helena believes that Spelman grooms you to be a global leader. Like so many other students, she believes that Spelman instills a confidence that “lives in the atmosphere” and “permeates the spirit and soul” of every Spelman woman.

More specifically, Helena learned how her campus and community leadership experiences provided a laboratory to test her ethics and determine if what she values is right for herself and her future, rather than those imparted by her family as a youth and adolescent. “My evolution of thinking and broadened values and outlook has provided me with a diverse framework for analysis.” The WEL program has been an integral component of her learning ethical leadership development. In sum, she has learned about authentic leadership, servant leadership and the value of serving others while also
growing as a person, “becoming free, healthier, wiser and a more autonomous person” (Robert K. Greenleaf, 2005).

**Paying it forward.** According to Helena, what is unique about the Spelman collegiate environment is that it helps students to recognize, appreciate and develop a different lens from which to view the world and themselves. The Comparative Women’s Studies program emphasizes Black feminist theory, advocacy and activism. In addition, Religious Studies provides an understanding of the history and variety of religious traditions in the African Diaspora. Helena talks about learning the roles and status of women within various religious traditions.

People base their ethics off of religious views. In class, we talk more about what’s right and wrong from the lens of feminism, advocacy and activism. The courses where I learned the most are my Intro to Women’s Studies, Intro to Study of Islam, Intro to Feminist Thought, and Mothering While Black. These courses really helped me to reevaluate my entire life.

Another lesson Helena learned is that of paying it forward. Students learn to focus on giving back to their communities and to the youth of this world. Helena made a personal commitment to touch many lives and to build a true legacy of love and inspiration as she is a very proud Spelmanite who believes she would not be the woman she is without Spelman College. ”I have gained the confidence to go for my wildest dream and pursue my truest, most organic passion. My aspirations are astronomical, and will take me above the clouds. I will become a fashion icon in a global context. I will be a major recognized source of knowledge, influence, and authority in the fashion industry.”
Joy. Joy is a political science major who is a quiet and demure young woman from North Carolina. She grew up in divorced family living in between two households. Her dad owned multiple small businesses and work to ensure that Joy always went to good schools because he wanted her to be prepared to attend the college or university of her choice. Joy attended public schools that were very diverse in nature. It was not until she started high school that she had an opportunity to attend an all African-American high school for the first two years. She was later moved to an all white high school where there were very few students who looked like her.

Joy learned about Spelman as her grandmother and aunt always spoke highly of the school and all the great women graduates. So, it was expected that she would attend Spelman College.

At first I was not sure, but after applying, being accepted, and going to SpelBound, I knew it was the place for me as it felt like a place that encourages and supports Black women. I didn’t know the mission of Spelman before I came. I learned the mission, the rich history and college traditions during New Student Orientation. Everything perfectly aligned with the goals and mission of the college to create a standard among Black women destined to change the world.

While the mission did not influence my choice to attend, it certainly influenced my choice to stay.

For Joy, Spelman represented a comfortable environment where there are lots of women who look like her with the same expectations for academic excellence and global leadership.
On becoming a leader. Joy’s father taught her to work hard to achieve her goals. Her father always encouraged her with one consistent statement, “good better, best, never let it rest until your good is better and your better is best.” Joy also learned the value of tenacity or persistence and never giving up even when someone told her no or that she wasn’t qualified. She just became more disciplined, humble and focused on achieving her goals. The most important values she learned while growing up is honesty and humility.

Joy’s family instilled in her a lot of the leadership and ethical decision making values. Coming into Spelman she knew that she would be faced with challenges to always make the right decisions to do well and still be proud of herself. Joy’s leadership experience began as a Bonner Scholar which is a service based scholarship that requires active involvement in community service during the undergraduate experience. Joy served as a volunteer coordinator for the Atlanta University Center Neighborhood Association. In addition to community service, Joy served as the Vice-President of her first-year class council and worked as a student assistant in the Financial Aid office. During her sophomore year she was inspired to create the Social L.I.T.E. (Leading, Issues, Topics and Experiences) organization to increase social-political awareness of students at Spelman and in the greater Atlanta metropolitan area.

Community Service has played a significant role in Joy’s understanding what it means to be a servant leader.

Often people believe that by simply engaging in an act of service is an indication of affecting change as a leader. However, my work with the Atlanta University
Center Neighborhood Association helped me to understand that connecting with the people I serve helps to develop a sense of hope and a shared vision for clean and safe neighborhoods in the African-American community. Learning how to inspire people to have a shared vision is an essential concept that is needed to be a global leader.

Joy believes that a lot of students come to Spelman as leaders. Spelman simply enhances your leadership as you see other Black women leading and serving in fairly significant roles.

*A transformative experience.* Joy believes leadership is a catalyst for change. She applied to the Women of Excellence Leadership Series because many of her upperclass mentors and Spelman sisters whom she admired participated in the program. Joy also wanted to be in a setting filled with other experienced leaders as she felt there was something to be gained by hearing and sharing leadership experiences. Finally, she applied to the WEL program because she wanted to connect more intimately with Dr. Jane Smith, Executive Director of LEADS. Dr. Smith is responsible for promoting leadership, economic empowerment, advocacy in the arts, dialogues across differences and service learning. It was an excellent opportunity to be mentored by alumnae and other corporate and community leaders.

The WEL experience placed Joy among a group of women who were experienced leaders. Together the women learned what it means to be a Spelman woman and the value of teamwork. “WEL helped me to realize that I am part of a unique lineage of women, and that we all struggle to become our own distinctive woman. It also taught me
that it is my responsibility to be my sisters keeper-- to help my sisters succeed.” WEL provided Joy with many life lessons. One of the greatest lessons was learning the Social Change Model of Leadership. In addition, Joy learned to actively engage in understanding the leadership decision behind an issue or concept. Joy knew first hand that being a leader tests your character. She was able to better understand how her civic engagement helped her to find her passion for social justice and activism. Joy has always had a passion for taking action to bring about political or social change. The WELS program helped her to understand what it means to be a feminist-activist.

“I am a leader. I have really matured through the WELS program. I understand who I am as a person and I know what I stand for.” Joy identified the Sophomore Year Experience, Sister-to-Sister Alumnae Networking Program, the Bonner Scholars program and being a member of the Student Government Association as having significantly shaped her character, leadership and ethical development. More specifically, the Sophomore Year Experience further engages students with faculty to enhance students academic and professional experiences, understanding of health and wellness concepts, and knowledge of authentic leadership and expectations for civic engagement.

Joy specifically credits the Sophomore Year Experience with helping her to understand authentic leadership, to understand the Social Change Model as a framework for leadership, and to develop as a public speaker which was an area of challenge for her prior to entering the course. She indicates that she learned that public speaking is simply representing your own perspective. Joy was given the confidence to understand that her experiences were key to effective public speaking. Moreover, she began to understand
that people expected her to succeed, and, therefore, had very little room for anxiety and self-defeating thoughts.

The Sister to Sister Alumnae Mentoring program paired Joy with an alumna in the field of business. The program engages students with alumnae with the goal of helping students to further discuss and explore academic choices and career paths. The value of the time spent with the alumna helped Joy to further understand that being a good businesswoman with a high degree of career satisfaction requires being self-aware or knowing yourself and understanding and maintaining your personal values. Joy also learned the importance of having a good and supportive network and choosing a work environment that values the experiences of Black women. In particular, the experience was key to her understanding the politics of career choices, the importance of finding an environment that fits with her values and one that supports her passions.

The Bonner Scholars program engages students in over 280 hours of service each academic year, for a total of 1120 hours of community engagement prior to graduation. “Through service, I learned how fortunate I am.” While Joy has always engaged in community service, she learned a greater sense of responsibility to others and to community. Her own value and self-worth was enhanced as she learned that she has the power and agency to change the life experiences of others.

Joy was encouraged to start a student organization to inspire others to take action to change communities for the better. Being a leader of an organization and a member of the Student Government Association helped Joy to think about leadership and to further develop her character and ethical decision making. As a leader, you are faced with
ethical dilemmas which test your ethics and personal resolve. In every case Joy says she has always reflected on her experiences and desire to engage as a responsible leader. She talks about working to do the right and ethical thing in every situation. Joy learned the lesson of aligning herself with likeminded change agents focused on the future of enhancing the social, political and environmental realities of the communities in which they live.

In sum, “everything I am is because of Spelman. I’m more social, confident, and ready to actively engage with diversity of people and experiences. I’ve developed as a leader tremendously.” Joy is attending Yale Business School in the summer and will be enrolled in the fall at North Carolina Central Law School. She endeavors to become a small business legal consultant committed to “promoting economic activity and longevity of minority businesses in America.”

**Kara.** Kara is a first-generation college student from Alabama who attended a predominantly white high school. She first heard about Spelman College from a Black teacher who indicated that it was an excellent school with a national reputation for producing Black women leaders. The teacher spoke of her desire to attend Spelman, but did not have the resources to support her enrollment. So, when the time came to look at colleges and universities, Kara applied because she felt compelled by the one teacher who wanted to attend but did not have the opportunity to make her dreams a reality. Receiving the Dean’s scholarship and getting into the Honors Program further solidified Kara’s decision to attend Spelman.
So, I actually kept my scholarships on hold for a year at Auburn University in case I didn’t like it. After the first semester I had friends and found that Spelman was more diverse than I expected it. In high school, I didn’t have experiences with Black students and, thus, had no Black friends, so it was a great experience. I had great professors who became my mentors, and those same professors eventually would support my decision to become a pre-law major. So, I liked it and I stayed. Being in this environment made me feel like I should be here. Everyone around me was doing good things, and it made me feel like I had to do good things too. It’s not competitive, just uplifting.

**On personal values.** Kara grew up in a single parent household where she was taught that doing good in the world is much more important than doing well. Moreover, doing what is right sometimes means that you may not be able to engage in things in which others choose to involve themselves, and it may even mean being excluded from some inner circles. Her relationships with faculty and staff have been critical to strengthening her personal values, learning who she is as an individual and feeling confident enough to seek opportunities to lead.

The faculty and students in the English department and Cooperative Education program have been like a second family. “Spelman has given me the ability to achieve beyond what I ever believed to be possible. I feel connected and like I have a second family. My values have changed and been strengthened and changed. I have learned to value different things, such as education. “
On leadership. Kara has always considered herself somewhat of a leader, “…but here I get to actually lead. Spelman is an environment with so many women engaged as leaders that you really don’t want to fail. Being a leader teaches you to sink or swim. ” Kara joined the FRESH, First-Years Reaching Excellence with Spelman’s Help, program which helps first-year students to develop a four-year career plan that incorporates internships and summer undergraduate research, opportunities to engage in mock interviews with employers and attend career and graduate school fairs.

She has also served as a Student Ambassador in the Admission Office, a New Student Orientation leader, joined the Miss Spelman Advisory Board, and coordinated the Interfaith Prayer Breakfast. These experiences have all presented Kara with an opportunity to explore social justice and social advocacy that permeates the college environment through the various classroom and co-curricular programs and activities.

Kara learned early on that “…leadership is expected. In the Atlanta community, people expect Spelman women to have an answer to the problems and issues that exist. Sometimes you fall into leadership and you end up ok.” Kara identifies her most rewarding experience as serving as the Co-Executive Chair for the Interfaith Prayer Brunch which commemorates the anniversary of 9-11. She was recommended to serve as the Co-Chair by a mentor. Kara remembers being so nervous because it would be the first time that she would lead an initiative to engage students, faculty, staff, alumnae and community. More importantly, she wanted to ensure that the role she played would truly honor the sacrifices of first-responders who sacrificed their lives to help others on September 11, 2001, in addition to continuing the spirit of unity that organically
developed out the 9-11 experience.

Kara speaks of feeling overwhelmed by the gravity of the experience. The experience touched a very special place in her heart and provided a good life lesson for Kara as the entire Atlanta University Center Consortium supported the event. The experience taught her that the “soft skills of being a leader are even more valuable that the hard analytical skills.” Lessons of empathy, compassion, being approachable, considerate, resourceful and learning to balance the demands of leadership with the numerous responsibilities of being in the Honors Program and a rigorous academic major are life lessons Kara says are best learned by doing.

Performing acts of service is one of the most powerful learning experiences that shapes leadership and ethical decisions making skills.

Volunteering for events and activities on campus and in the community helps you to meet new people and test out your leadership and ethical decision making skills in the process. You continue to get asked to take on various leadership roles if people think well of your leadership and you have demonstrated the ability to make good choices and great connections with other leaders in the campus and greater Atlanta metropolitan community.

Volunteering for Mayor Kaseem Reed’s Centers of Hope also influenced Kara’s view of ethical leadership. The Centers of Hope Program are recreation centers in low-income communities that provide safe and structured learning experiences that focus on academic enrichment, character and leadership development, health and fitness, and engaging youth in modern technology. Kara began to understand that she was privileged,
and that many of the student’s perceived her to be a role model as the students in the program sought her out for guidance and reassurance that they could make good decisions and be successful too. “This was incredibly important to me as a child. I attended one of those types of programs, and my program director is the first, and for a long time, the only person that encouraged me to be successful and to attend Spelman, an institution that has changed my life.” Kara’s view of leadership changed as the experience reminded her of “…the importance of leadership to both the leader and those being led.”

**Being a dynamic Black leader.** Kara applied to the Women of Excellence Leadership series (WEL) as she believed the program would be beneficial to her leadership journey.

It’s difficult to be an African-American woman leader without being stereotyped or marginalized. I know that I belong to a unique group of people and I know that I need to be nurtured. This program is important as it just doesn’t teach you how to lead, it teaches you how to lead as a woman. WEL helped me to conceptualize what leadership is and helped me to rethink being passive. Dr. Jane Smith reminds you that Spelman women are smart, quick and that we have voices. You recognize you have to do something about the issues that are wrong in the world. The collegiate nature of the WEL program helps you recognize your passion while being in a supportive group of leaders who encourage you to achieve it.

Kara not only believes in her dream to become a partner in an international law firm, she now believes she can shatter glass ceilings in global industries everywhere. Kara has
further developed the confidence to know that she can have a significant impact on women as leaders in law firms. She also believes that she has a responsibility to increase minority-owned business and mergers once she achieves her law degree.

**Alumnae networking.** When students here the name Spelman College, they think of a place built just for Black women, and a place with a legacy, strong history and traditions that have been passed on to generations of Spelman women.

Alumnae also pass down history, traditions and expectations for leadership. I had the opportunity to intern with Kathy Hampton who is Spelman and Harvard Law School alumna, and an attorney for the City of Atlanta. Her best friend is on the admission team at Harvard. Kathy taught me the value of networking. The thing that Spelman alumnae give to students is a very real and very raw perspective of what you need to be doing to achieve your dreams, in addition to helping you to understand what to expect on your journey. We talked about academic, career and personal living environments, which gave me a better understanding of what to expect. To talk to someone who has the same academic and career journey gives you a very real perspective life and added confidence to succeed.

Kara made it a goal to attend one of the top ten law schools in the nation. She focused on attending Harvard Law School for several reasons, one of which included her internship experiences with Kathy Hampton, a City of Atlanta attorney and Spelman alumna. Another reason she determined she was destined to Harvard involved a personal connection with a current student attending Harvard Law who shared her journey and
process of admission into Harvard. Kara was encouraged to connect with Arun Alagappan, a Harvard Graduate, and president and chief executive officer of Advantage Testing who encouraged her to apply for the Training and Recruitment Initiative for Admission to Leading Law Schools (TRIALS) summer residential program for underrepresented students sponsored by Harvard Law School, New York University School of Law and the Advantage Testing Foundation.

The TRIALS program helps prospective applicants become more competitive. Kara applied and was accepted into the program. She learned early that the various schools not only knew about Spelman, but had a strong appreciation for the historically Black women’s liberal arts college.

When the program participants first arrived, he asked us what schools we wanted to attend. We all were shooting for the top 25. He said no… why not the top 5 schools. Sometimes we are made to feel somewhat inferior about the HBCU experience. Because Mr. Alagappan valued the Spelman student experience, he pushed the three of us to apply for the best law schools in the nation.

Kara talks about learning her own personal value, leadership and the value of the Spelman experience through her encounters with Mr. Alagappan and the TRIALS program.

The program is really competitive as they choose 18-20 students each year out of 3000 applicants. Advantage testing is a highly regarded tutoring service. The founder hung out with us for 6 weeks over the summer. He was very encouraging, supportive, and helped us to look beyond the ceiling we set for
ourselves. He created study groups and really helped to prepare us to test well on the LSAT program. The program also provided a $3000 stipend to supplement the final year of college expenses, including tuition, housing, books, and other supplies. The TRIALS program gave me confidence and the tools to navigate a space that was perceived as not being open to me. Our cohort got into Harvard, Yale, and Stanford law schools. My goal was Georgetown, and now I am going to Harvard.

Kara says the name Spelman College carries a lot of weight in various communities. Even more, she understands the value of her alumnae connections and other networking experiences.

In addition to the alumnae connections, Kara suggests that there are certain professors who are well respected in the academic fields, such as Dr. Anne Warner and Dr. Donna Akiba Harper in English, Dr. Marilyn Davis in Political Science, and Dr. Jack Stone in Economics. Because of their widely respected work in their academic fields and with Spelman students, a letter of recommendation from these individuals speaks volumes about student scholarship, leadership, ethics and service.

As a student at Spelman, you are building your brand and your reputation as an academic scholar and ethical leader in order to get to the next phase of your life journey.

I am very much aware of myself as the only woman and only Black woman in the room. But it has always been that way. However, I now have more of a voice. I recognize that I have to be a leader. I know when I make decisions that I make decisions because I am Black and a woman. I am paving the way for future Black
women leaders using my own since of self and knowing who I am and what is required to achieve success. Spelman has no cookie cutter approach to developing Black women as leaders. Being at Spelman has further enriched my understanding of factors such as race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic diversity as related to my overall experience of being a Black woman. Spelman has given me an appreciation for the diversity of Black women.

According to Kara, cultural sensitivity is a requirement at Spelman. Kara’s suggests that when young women arrive at Spelman, they may see themselves as a monolithic group of Black women.

Students soon learn to understand that they are a part of a unique legacy of a very special and diverse group of women who are required to be great, and who have a responsibility to join the alumnae who return to share of their time, talents and life experience to ensure the success of the next generation of great Spelman women.

**Kimberly.** Kimberly is an economics and mathematics major from California, and one of the top ten graduates of the Class of 2014. She attended the California Academy of Mathematics and Science which is a highly competitive public magnet high school in California. The gender and ethnic makeup is very diverse with an equal number of males and females enrolled and a total minority enrollment is 88 percent.

Kimberly applied to the top 16 colleges and universities in the nation, and was admitted to all, some with very lucrative scholarships. Spelman College was not even a consideration for Kimberly until her dad encouraged her to apply and to visit before making her final decisions about college.
I visited before applying, and I didn’t really enjoy my experience. I came again after receiving the Presidential Scholarship. I was impressed with the level of sisterhood, the cooperative environment, helpfulness of students, faculty, and staff. Even as I walked around campus, I found it to be a very friendly and welcoming environment. I don’t recall looking at the mission statement, but I do think that the mission of educating Black women was evident and definitely impacted my decision to attend.

Kimberly comes from a family where both parents were college educated, and believed in the values of hard work, humility, kindness, resourcefulness and persistence. Kimberly believes all of these values, for the most part, have been strengthened during her time at Spelman.

**Testing ethics and values.** Spelman is a unique community with a diversity of women, the majority of African descent. It is a fairly competitive environment as many of the women represent the top of their class. Many of the students have limited financial resources, and some have very challenging family situations which inspires persistence and resourcefulness.

One thing I have learned is that it is very different in the way you try to connect and motivate people at Spelman. It’s very much focused on building and investing in relationships to support your vision and goals. It’s definitely a good thing, but challenging as it took an investment of time. Sometimes people who are not able to see the vision are not invested or interested in making a
connection. So, I learned the importance of building relationships to be successful in college and beyond.

As the Student Trustee, Kimberly was placed in the company of high ranking executives which taught her how to interact and appreciate the importance of organization management in a college environment. “Observing the many functions that must work in concert for the College to run smoothly has given me a greater appreciation of the role an ethical leader in a large successful organization.” Kimberly witnessed firsthand the need for an internal compass or barometer that inspires you to do the right thing regardless of who sees it.

As a leader, Kimberly has always had a leadership vision. However, engaging in community service, studying abroad, participating in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Summer Research Program, participating as a member of the Coca Cola Intergenerational Mentoring Program, Circle K, the Mathematics Research and Mentoring Program, and being in various leadership roles in the Student Government Association has helped Kimberly to learned how to bring people together and inspire united leadership through a shared vision and purpose.

As a leader, every decision I made was informed by my character, ethics and personal values and how I believe things will impact myself and others. However, I am not sure that these same principles are reflected or evidenced in the ethical decision making or even addressed in the social change philosophy of students in the day-to-day activities as preached at Spelman. The competitiveness seems to create a challenge to the social advocacy and activism that Spelman
espouses. Students are highly focused on their personal goals rather than having a unified goal or vision.

Kimberly’s engagement with the Breakthrough Atlanta enrichment program for talented students in the Atlanta Public Schools is another experience that provided her with an opportunity to enhance her leadership while gaining an understanding and appreciation for diversity. The disadvantages faced by many children and youth in the community became more real to Kimberly. Her experiences with this program helped her to connect with a variety of talented students who were not being challenged and given opportunities to learn and grow in their schools.

As a tutor, Kimberly learned the importance of demonstrating what it means to be an ethical leader as the students mirrored her every action. This level of responsibility made her think more clearly about her actions and provided a much needed lesson regarding the importance of leading by example. A large part of what Kimberly learned through community service was ethical leadership, tenacity, perseverance and the political finesse to navigate various circles in order to adequately represent the concerns of youth, much like her leadership role model, Marion Wright Edelman, a Spelman alumna, scholar and leader of the Children’s Defense Fund. This experience taught Kimberly how to translate academic and community experiences into social advocacy. In addition, the experience provided inspiration for Kimberly to seek a career where she can engage in social and economic policy development.

**Intentional leadership.** While Kimberly believes she is very comfortable with her knowledge and understanding of herself as an African-American leader, she joined
the Women of Excellence Leadership series to reflect and study the role of an intentional leader. Joining the WEL program provided a community of like-minded global scholars and leaders who explore and discuss the qualities of an empowered woman, what it means to be a Black woman and a global leader, in addition to further expanding upon the idea of what it means to be an authentic leader. While the concepts of authentic leadership and the Social Change Model of Leadership Development are discussed in the Sophomore Year Experience, Kimberly indicates that being in the WEL program provided an enhanced framework and application of the Social Change Model of Leadership which helped her to reflect on and understand leadership as a process.

The involvement of alumnae in the WEL program also had a significant impact on Kimberly’s overall collegiate experience. Alumnae talk about their experiences which helps put into perspective how Spelman benefits you after graduating. Kimberly was able to connect with alumnae with similar career goals who guided, mentored and directed her academic and career experiences, in addition to providing a good example of how to be a mentor. Kimberly defines it as a unique experience that provided a realistic look into the generational styles of leadership of Spelman and other women leaders. It is also an opportunity to explore what it means to be a Black woman and a leader. Alumnae helped to clarify and validate the value and uniqueness of the Spelman experience.

Some of the other unique common conversational themes include academic choice and freedom, networking and developing supportive relationships, exploring environments that are good for Black women, and understanding how to balance relationships and family.
While discussing how and where students learn leadership and ethical decision making, Kimberly stated that leadership and ethical development are promoted in the mission, by President Tatum, via faculty, academic programs like Convocation and Sophomore Year Experience, and in specific organizations like the Student Government Association. However, the competitiveness of the environment sometimes challenges a student leader’s ability to be true to themselves, their values and their personal and institutional ethical code. Kimberly indicates that there is an improvement oriented ethos at Spelman, and, thus, recommends the application of ethical leadership development be explored early in the student’s collegiate experience in order to ensure that what is promoted in the mission is actually lived throughout the undergraduate experiences of Spelman College.

**Being in a place where Black women are leaders.** Overall, being at a place like Spelman where Black women are leaders sets the tone and expectation to get involved in various leadership roles. “Leadership is the norm at Spelman.” Students also gain a strong self-awareness and understanding of what it means to be a woman of African descent through the various educational experiences in and out of class that explore Black feminist theory, leadership, activism, sisterhood, and an appreciation for ethnic and cultural differences. Moreover, there is evidence of real life application of leadership as numerous opportunities exist to observe and work with faculty, staff, alumnae, student leaders and others who are actively engaged in leadership in the Spelman community, the Atlanta community, nation and world. It’s a unique place where Black women feel inspired to lead, serve and facilitate positive social change. The one challenge with the
experience, according to Kimberly, is that Spelman does not prepare you for “how others perceive Black women leaders and how we should engage with others who are not Black women leaders.” Kimberly indicates that students have limited exposure to these topics in their junior and senior year, but it needs to be an earlier conversation as students engage in research at other non-historically Black institutions, participate in internships, and study abroad experiences where they may experience a form of culture shock.

Kimberly attends Massachusetts Institute of Technology where she is pursuing a Ph.D in Economics. Her long term goal is to be an administrator in the US Agency for International Development where she will transform international policy through the integration of cultural context into economic development analysis.

**Sasha.** Sasha grew up in Georgia and attended one of the oldest public high schools in Georgia that is also listed in the National Register of Historic Places in the United States. She is a Political Science major whose goal is to make history as the nation’s first African-American female Speaker of the House. Sasha didn’t know very much about Spelman College, but she grew up hearing lots of stories about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Morehouse College from her uncle who is an alumni. She figured if there is Black school for men, there has to be a similar school for Black women. So, she began her research in middle school and found what she refers to as the “illustrious Spelman College.”

I went on a tour of Spelman with an Upward Bound Trio program. Prior to her trip to Spelman, the University of Georgia was my first choice. But, after the tour, Spelman was my only choice. I didn’t know about the formal mission of
Spelman College. During my tour, my ambassador shared with me how nurturing
and supportive the environment is, and she told me it was a place where you could
find yourself and explore who you want to be, and that was comforting.

It was important for Sasha to be able to explore her values and further develop as a leader
given that she grew up the daughter of a minister and attending schools where her mother
was always around because she was a member of the faculty. Sasha’s parents instilled in
her that she must use education to help herself and others and that she must always keep
herself in the presence of those seeking academic success. She smiled as she said she
was taught, “boys and books don’t mix.” Finally, she talks about the need to have dignity
and integrity in everything she does, which is something she heard regularly from her
mom.

**Developing strength, honor and integrity.** As Sasha’s reflects on the Spelman
experience, she believes that most of what is learned happens outside of class. “That’s
when students are in the most intimate and vulnerable space.” Students depend on their
personal value system to navigate the college experience. “Following your passion and
pursuing your goal is what keeps you focused and helps you to make good ethical
decisions.”

Being in a single gender environment has kept Sasha focused and involved on
campus. “Spelman tests you, and thus strengthens your honor and integrity. The values
of academic excellence, leadership, service, activism, advocacy and civic engagement,
were values taught at home, but College taught me to apply these values and principles. I
was also challenged to look at my values from different perspectives given the diversity of Spelman.”

Sasha got involved the moment she set foot on the campus. She became a member of the Sisters Chapel Arts Ministry, PULSE college program board responsible for major campus events, and was selected as part of the Coca Cola Mentorship Program which pairs business and civic leaders and celebrities with youth to help them explore various career paths. Sasha would later become a Resident Advisor, joined the Residence Hall Council, and volunteered as a member of Amnesty International, and engaged in the Student Government Association (SGA) as Vice-President in her junior year and President of SGA in her senior year.

Despite the prestige that comes with many of leadership positions, working as a Resident Advisor was the most rewarding experience. Being surrounded by young women that essentially reminded me of my purpose helped me get out of bed on some of my toughest days. As an RA, I learned what real love is and I developed some of my closest relationships at Spelman. Being a first-year and having a difficult time, I determined that I would be a leader and provide a safe space and a listening ear while serving as a role model who supported other students growing into their own unique Spelman experience. Becoming a Resident Advisor taught me to stretch out in ethical leadership. I learned to be flexible and adaptable even when I didn’t want to be. As an RA, you are always challenged with an ethical dilemma and you have to do what’s right even when its difficult.
One of Sasha’s greatest lessons throughout her collegiate experience is learning that leadership is evidenced in many ways.

Leadership is not a title or position. It’s seeing what needs to be done and doing it. It’s leading without praise for the work that you do. Ethical leaders follow heart and passion and don’t deviate from their values. Being an ethical leader is the Spelman way. Being civil, committed and consistent in your actions is expected. Spelman teaches you to go beyond leadership to authentic leadership. Knowing who you are and engaging others for the benefit of all is expected.

Sasha’s greatest challenge was balancing the competitiveness and success with sisterhood and unity. Her toughest experiences developed out of competing for various leadership roles on campus. “There were some days when I just didn’t want to be at Spelman. But, I did learn that failure does not always inhibit success. Some leadership experiences just were not for me.” Thus, understanding the type of involvement that is important to your future goals and focusing on those experiences becomes very critical as you move into being an upperclass student.

Leading on campus gives you a sense of reality. When you are in a leadership role, there is a certain level of esteem and pressure to do the right thing because everyone is watching you. It makes you ask yourself if you are really cut out for this. It also forces you to become more vulnerable in your decision-making processes as you must always consider the thoughts and needs of others.

Sasha says she has always been acknowledged as a natural leader since middle school. However, as Sasha reflects she recognizes that her growth and understanding of
leadership has been a journey and that she is still “a work in progress.” Authentic leadership, according to Sasha, is discovering who you are while you are learning how to lead. “It’s an ongoing process.”

Community service shaped Sasha’s view of leadership. Sasha strategically engaged herself in community service initiatives focused in the area of African-American health and wellness. Service has been something that Sasha has always enjoyed because its “hands on” engagement with the community.

Being involved in community service helps me to realize that I am involved in something so much bigger than myself. I am reminded that I better understand my role in leadership once the end goal has been achieved. I was engaged with hundreds and sometimes thousands of people who help to ensure the success of a community service event. When I am able to look around and see people involved in similar passions among total strangers, I have a sense of pride that no personal recognition could ever compare.

Sasha talked about social advocacy as not always being about activism or protesting. She learned that engaging in community service is a form of leadership and is “just as powerful” in bringing about social change.

Leaving a legacy. When I asked Sasha what was unique about the Spelman experience she immediately began to talk about the WEL experience and about the connection to alumnae. “WEL teaches you to leave a legacy, to be a pioneer and a change agent. Further, being a leader sometimes means that you are opening the doors for others.” Sasha also talks about the importance of assessing ”why you do what you
do,” and understanding the call to greatness as promoted by the College’s tagline, *A Choice to Change the World*. “We are taught to be strong, articulate, passionate and professional. The personal is important, but being professional is critical.”

Making connections with alumnae has been equally as critical to Sasha’s development as an ethical leader.

Coming into Spelman, I developed an idea of what it meant to be an alumna. I have met phenomenal alumnae of Spelman who are dedicated, compassionate and very nurturing and supportive of Spelman students. They model of paying it forward to ensure that Spelman sisters succeed. I have learned that giving back to the College via time and money is a form of social advocacy and leadership that makes a difference in the lives of students. It becomes a rite of passage.

Sasha’s says of her overall Spelman experience has helped her understand what it means to be a Black woman leader.

Black women are sometimes bombarded with images and/or taught by some to believe that we are unintelligent, undesirable and not likely to be successful. Spelman equips us with the knowledge that we are Black women leaders who are intelligent, resilient, powerful, beautiful and successful, that we all have a duty to continue our intellectual growth and development, and that we have a duty to dismantle oppressive power structures.

As Sasha reflects on her four years she posits that Spelman women understand the essence of genuine sisterhood. “We are trailblazers and pioneers. We are women who live with purpose, and we are women who will one day define this nation. Spelman
women are smart, quick and we have a voice to continue to advocate for and empower women and girls who experience social inequity.” Sasha’s sentiments seems to express that Spelman is a place where women are empowered to believe in themselves as leaders and challenged to take action to change the face of the world through leadership and service.

**Sierra.** Sierra is a psychology major from New Jersey who desires to become a clinical psychologist. Her high school was predominantly Black and Hispanic and provided her with an opportunity to explore her musical gifts. Sierra chose Spelman because her mentors encouraged her to look into the school as they thought it would be the best place to support her growth and development as a Black woman and as a leader. Sierra admits to not really knowing much about mission of Spelman College.

Instead, she made her decision to attend Spelman after participating in SpelBound, a two-day program for recently admitted students to experience the Spelman culture, academic programs, and to make connections with students, faculty, staff and alumnae. “It was because of my experience at SpelBound…the sisterhood, welcoming environment, diversity of students, activities, and the beauty of all Black women who were academically gifted helped me to make my final decision to attend Spelman College.”

Sierra’s role model and mentor is her older sister who did not attend college. She talks about being inspired to always work hard to be a success and graduate so that she can make her sister proud and be a role model for her brother. “My sister always tells me that she is proud of me and that she would love for me to be better than her, which
encourages me to keep going and to never give up,” Sierra describes the primary character values of perseverance, dedication and responsibility as being instilled early on by her family. “My values are always demonstrated in helping and being of service to others. Every decision I make is informed by my character values and how I believe things impact others. These values are rooted in my upbringing.”

Developing as a leader, growing as a Black woman. Sierra’s involvement as a leader is positively related to her personal development and understanding of herself and her personal values. She began as a member of the FRESH program, like Kara, which helped her develop a four-year career plan. Much of her involvement is focused in the areas of dance and music as she involved herself in one of the first-year stroll teams that perform synchronized dancing and the first-year step teams which perform an artistic form of percussive dance using stepping/stomping, spoken word, hand clapping and group formations. She also engaged as a member of Ashitu African Dance Ministry liturgical dance ministry which performs during worship service at the historic Sisters Chapel. Sierra really blossomed as a leader as she involved herself in the Spelman Jazz Ensemble, and later joined Tau Beta Sigma National Honorary Band Service Sorority.

Serving as the Ways and Means Chair, Parliamentarian and President of the Iota Rho Chapter of Tau Beta Sigma Honorary Band Service Sorority has been my most rewarding leadership experience. The different leadership positions prepared me for other leadership positions in Spelman organizations and clubs. It also allowed me to network and become more social with my Spelman sisters.
Community service also influenced Sierra’s view of leadership as she used her experiences with Tau Beta Sigma to help middle school students personal growth and academic success.

This community service activity showed me that doing the smallest thing, such as performing for the students and allowing them to be involved in music performance helps them to be more excited and engaged in school. Their involvement with band volunteers had a positive impact on their attitude towards school, in addition to the fact that they became more socially engaged with one another. It feels good to inspire someone to be better and to see the joy in their faces. Volunteering with at-risk students helps them to understand they could be leaders too if they follow the right path. Volunteering influenced my leadership as I learned to come up with interactive and fun activities that made them want to learn.

Sierra was motivated to be involved as a social change agent making a difference in the lives of students with similar life circumstances as her own.

**Simone.** Simone is an English major from Virginia who attended predominantly white K-12 schools. She comes from a married family household, with a mom who attended a historically Black university for two years, and a father who is now a retired member of the U.S. Navy and a student at the University of Maryland. While neither parent finished college, Simone grew up knowing education was the only priority.

Her early visits to Spelman in her grade school years left a lasting impression as she had never seen so many engaged Black women walking around in business suits.
Many of my family members spoke highly of Spelman. In addition, Simone had the occasion to meet a number of “phenomenal Spelman alumnae who were leaders in their field.” So there was no desire to go anywhere else but Spelman College as the mission statement spoke to her desire to engage in academic excellence, leadership and global learning experiences. “I attended predominantly white public schools all of my life, so I wanted a different experience. More of my culture and experience was reflected at Spelman. I felt a sense of belonging the day I set foot on the campus.”

As a first generation college student, Simone’s family instilled in her the values of faith, leadership, education and service to her country. While she believes that much of her desire to be an ethical leader was formed during her adolescent years, Simone believes enrolling at Spelman, being a member of the Army ROTC and having served as a Squad Leader, Platoon Leader, and Senior Cadet Leader provided her with the opportunity to explore, test and further enhance her values. The Army ROTC taught Simone the values of loyalty, duty, respect, personal courage, honor, integrity and selfless service.

Serving as Sophomore Class President, Vice-President of the Student Government Association, a Student Ambassador in the Admission Office also taught Simone a strong responsibility to personal truth as balancing your role as a campus leader and responsibility to peers and the administration of a College require you to always make the best decision for the community even as you are being challenged to support a different outcome.
Simone indicates that serving as the Vice-President of the Student Government Association in her junior year provided the most rewarding leadership experience. The Student Government Association provides you with many opportunities to learn leadership, ethical decision making and advocacy as you are responsible for serving as a liaison between the administration and the student body and advocating for the needs of the community.

Leading on campus gives you a sense of reality. You are under a magnifying glass as students are looking at you to make the right decision as aligned with the Spelman brand. As leaders we learn the values of transparency, integrity, trustworthiness and civic engagement in the Spelman and greater Atlanta communities. Spelman teaches you the value of being a free thinking women, and the importance of promoting the Spelman spirit of intellectual curiosity, ethical leadership and social change through civic engagement.

Being civically engaged also influenced Simone’s leadership perspective. Simone co-founded a mentoring program for low-income middle school girls. The curriculum was designed to build positive self-esteem, to encourage the students to stay in school and set positive academic and career goals, and to learn how to take the appropriate steps to realize their goals.

This community service influenced my view of leadership because I learned that being a leader means going beyond the curriculum and doing whatever it takes to ensure the growth and personal development of others. I learned that leadership is the ability to influence others. Leadership is not about a title, it’s about positively
impacting the lives of others. Watching the girls in the program develop a sense of worth, and understanding of their value, and succeeding academically and socially expanded my view of leadership.

Community service is a high priority for Spelman. “We are taught to address and work to change issues of poverty. We also are taught to be activist addressing legal and political issues. We always talk about being students first and leaders second, but at Spelman, scholarship, leadership and social advocacy are an expectation for all students.”

Becoming an ethical leader is a journey, and there is a culture that supports student leadership and ethical decision making.

*The WEL journey.* For Simone, embarking on the Women of Excellence Leadership series journey was an opportunity to explore what it meant to be a Black woman in a male dominated field as a future Army officer. Over the span of her academic career, Simone admired Dr. Jane Smith for being an adaptive leader and teacher who demonstrates the ability to influence and consistently inspire others. Simone was attracted to the program because of the opportunity to engage with and learn from the experiences of top student leaders across campus. All of the programs on authentic leadership, feminist leadership, Black women and relationships, business etiquette, social media and the millennial generation, and leadership from high places have contributed to the way in which Simone thinks about being an empowered Black woman who has been prepared to be an ethical global leader.

Spelman added a new dimension to my values. Dr. Smith added the value of financial literacy or understanding the value of money, budgeting and giving.
You have to be financially sound to be able to give back. Other Spelman alumnæ mentors have also encouraged developing and successfully living and managing your finances.

According to Simone, WEL is a special space where leaders come to explore and better understand their values and how identity shapes their character and leadership. It’s a network where leaders support each other as they grow and better understand themselves and develop confidence in their ideas, goals and dreams.

**Uniquely Spelman.** As Simone entered the week long activities celebrating her graduation, she was very reflective of academic and/or co-curricular programs that contributed to her development as an ethical leader at Spelman College. From engaging as a first-year student in the residence halls holding various leadership positions, being a part of the Sisters Chapel arts ministry and engaging in the Sophomore Year Experience, Simone talks about being able to connect with and network with alumnæ who are global leaders in their respective fields to learn about academic excellence, developing leadership skills, personal etiquette and understanding authentic leadership.

Spelman is more than just an education, Spelman makes you fearless. We are part of a unique community of Black women leaders who are a force to be reckoned with. Every sector of Spelman has some form of leadership weaving through the fabric of curriculum and activities. You can’t escape the institutional expectation for being an ethical leader and making good decisions. Having opportunities to connect with alumnæ who are global leaders gives us examples of phenomenal women who inspire you to look and act as a global leader. One thing I will never
forget is Spelman women are smart, quick and they have voices. Anything you do you have to have urgency and agency for social change.

Spelman also contributed to Simone’s understanding of feminism, intersectionality of race, gender and religion, and her understanding of how knowledge is constructed and contributes to her view of herself and the world.

Feminism has shaped my thoughts and the way in which I lead. I didn’t understand before being at Spelman that I operate from a feminist lens. But, anyone who fights for social justice and equality can be considered a feminist. I own feminism now. I understand the various intersections of being Black, a woman and how class and religion play a critical role in my self-concept and my journey as a leader. I am better prepared as a Black woman and for my role as a global leader. I will be the President of Spelman College! I will promote education equality and increase the diversity of enrollments at HBCUs.

**Learning a framework for leadership.** Being a part of a unique program like the Women of Excellence Leadership series that creates a cohort of extraordinary leaders from the junior and senior class is something every student looks forward to every year at Spelman College. For Sierra, the attraction was being in a group of peer leaders and being able to network and share unique leadership experiences. “In addition to learning leadership characteristics and traits, I learned what a leader looks like, and I learned a framework for leadership.” The key elements of the WEL program for Sierra were focused in the areas of understanding Black women as leaders, understanding our global
impact and responsibility to lead, and having alumnae and other mentors and role models to support you on your leadership journey.

Sierra’s WEL experience helped her reflect and be able to better characterize her overall Spelman College experience.

I developed a feminist lens at Spelman. None of that stuff mattered where I was from. I learned what it meant to be a Black woman, how to lead, how to be an activist and my responsibility to engage in social advocacy. I did a lot of community service, and witnessed a lot of issues. But, now, I understand how to bring about change as an advocate and activist. I have a voice, and I am motivated to be involved in bringing about social change.

During the interview it was clear that Sierra understood how she had matured as a result of being engaged in leadership and community service.

Spelman has molded me into a mature young woman who is civically engaged. If I went to a different institution, I would not have been the person I am today. I was encouraged and motivated to become a powerful leader who is willing to be an activist and advocate for those things that are important to me and my community.

Sierra concludes her interview by saying there is no place like Spelman College, and that students rarely understand the value of the experience until their Senior year in college. For some, the value of Spelman does not come to life until well after graduation.
Alumnae Interview Summaries

**Ashton.** Ashton is a Class of 2006 graduate of Spelman College from a conservative small town in rural Georgia. She attended a predominantly white high school where she was one of a handful of Black students always enrolled in honors and advance placement courses. Ashton learned about Spelman from an alumna mentor who was a very influential member of her community. She applied to Spelman, got accepted, and was the first to go to college on her mom’s side of the family.

Ashton’s family played a key role in the development her values. They always emphasized the importance of obtaining a college education. Ashton talks about her great aunt who lived to be well over 100 years always saying, “Ashton just make sure you get a good education as no one can take that away from you. That really stuck with me, so it became important to get a good education.” Ashton’s parents also espoused the values of humility, “always being grateful and never take anything for granted.” In addition, her parents were huge advocates of community service. “I saw my parents involved in community service, and I was involved in civic organizations with my family. So it really encouraged me to get involved and give back to my community.”

Ashton reflects on her decision to attend Spelman and shares that it was the best decision she made. She also talks about her difficulties transitioning from a very loving, caring and nurturing environment to an environment with people she didn’t know who were from all over the country. Ashton says that “Spelman educates the whole person. I learned academically about myself, especially through the Women of Excellence program and the Bonner Scholars program that provides a service learning scholarship
for students who have a demonstrated high financial need and a commitment to engaging in community service. Ashton says that when she entered Spelman, “I didn’t have self-confidence. African Diaspora and the World (ADW) was one of her first courses where she really begin to question whether or not she really belonged at Spelman.

As I sat in my ADW class, I began to question if I belong at Spelman as there were so many students whose parents were legacy, and I didn’t really have a since of who I was. I learned so much about myself, and I developed lifelong friendships with my sisters who I still stay in contact with and who I call on in difficult times. At the time, I really didn’t fully appreciate ADW. But, now, as a graduate, I understand the value of a course that provides a global lens on the historical issues, movements, and travels of people of African descent. ADW is also such an important course that no one really likes until they leave and can apply what they have learned in real life circumstances. I wish I could go back to Spelman as an adult and take certain courses as you really just learn so very much that is helpful in real life.

Spelman helped Ashton to understand race and gender issues which provided her the “freedom to develop as a woman and as a leader.” Her participation in a leadership position with the Student Government Association (SGA) helped her to engage as a leader. “My lack of self-confidence really limited my involvement as an undergraduate. By the time I reached my senior year, I had the confidence and desire to engage in leadership.” Ashton made it a goal to run for an SGA position and was elected as secretary of Senior Class Council. She felt equipped as a leader given all the leadership
theories and principles learned in class and through co-curricular experiences with students, faculty and alumnae. Ashton talks about the developing the art of managing relationships with a very diverse group of young women, having to coordinate all communications regarding senior year and commencement responsibilities, and learning to balance the academic and leadership responsibilities as being the lessons that enhanced her overall leadership. “Little did I know that these would be the experiences that would prepare me for a lifetime of leadership.”

**Becoming a woman of excellence.** There were a number of academic and co-curricular programs that contributed to Ashton’s development as a Black woman and an ethical leader. Ashton discusses her experiences as a political science major.

Dr. Marilyn Davis, Associate Professor of Political Science taught about Black women in leadership. It was an important course that further provided guidance and preparation for leadership. We read a great deal of literature on leadership, one, in particular that helped us to think about when illness strikes a leader, something you really don’t think about as a student. I really learned what it takes to be Black woman in leadership. I realized after graduating and getting out into the world that I really learned a lot of valuable lessons on leadership. These are lessons that can be applied event today.

Convocation was another program that Ashton mentioned as having contributed to her personal development.

Convocation also seemed futile at the time. I wished I had of taken it more seriously. We had a number of phenomenal speakers such as Nikki Giovani. She
is such a force to be reckoned with. The way she stringed words together so eloquently and with purpose. I was impressed and inspired.

Even as an alumna Ashton returns to Spelman to attend Convocations with notable business and academic leaders. “I have taken advantage of opportunities to return to Spelman to meet great speakers such as Ingrid Sanders Jones and Helen Price Smith, both of whom hold vice-president roles at Coca Cola.” Aston recalls some of the key points from campus convocations. “Helen Price Smith emphasized the importance of selecting the right mate who is supportive. Ingrid Sanders Jones talked about the fact that you may have to develop a plan for your career, but also recognize that it may turn out differently than planned. Being in the right place at the right time may land you in very different roles than you anticipated. She stressed that preparation is key to your success.”

The Women of Excellence in Leadership program is another program Ashton references as having an impact on her personal and leadership development. “I applied because my best friend talked about how phenomenal Dr. Zenobia Hikes, Vice-President for Student Affairs was. Dr. Hikes provided such an executive presence. I didn’t have a lot of confidence in myself. I joined the WEL program because I thought it would help build my confidence.”

Upon entering the WEL program Ashton says she was immediately told that she was a leader and was expected to act as a leader. The program provided business etiquette training as the students attended corporate dinners. The students were also taught to engage in business conversations. Ashton recalls Dr. Hikes saying “you need to be a worldly person who understands and can engage in conversations about sports and
world events to be an effective leader. Dr. Hikes would encourage us to read U. S. News and World Report to expand our knowledge and to develop a more diverse and complex vocabulary. She would tell us to look for the leadership lessons in everything we read.”

Ashton reflects on how the program has evolved over the years under various leaders such as Dr. Kelley, Dean of Students and Dr. Jane Smith, the current Executive Director of the program. “Both brought a unique perspective to the program. As I returned to visit campus, I met Dr. Smith who was just such a force to be reckoned with. I was invited to an event about a year or so after I graduated. Even then, I was learning kernels of leadership knowledge as Dr. Smith taught me to be intentional about every decision.”

I also served as a WEL intern working with my younger Spelman sisters and ensuring they were developing good leadership skills that they could apply at Spelman, and later in life. I learned a lot of event planning, how to support a Dean of Students, how to develop curriculum, and really how a major program comes together. Everything you do requires some degree of working with people and motivating /inspiring them to do the work that’s necessary for the program to be successful. I was also able to compare the various leadership styles of Dean Kelley and Dr. Smith. I learned how to carry myself as a woman. Dr. Smith presented herself as an authority without being demanding. When Dr. Smith spoke, it gave you such an urgency to act. Spelman teaches you to fully appreciate the history and traditions of the College and the alumnae who impact and add value to your overall personal development and leadership experience.
Ashton believes the WEL program “single handedly launched my career.” She talks about meeting Margo Copeland, one of the vice-presidents of Key Bank who was one of the sponsors of the WEL program. Little did Ashton know that Ms. Copeland would later be responsible for helping her to obtain her first job after graduating. “A position came open at Key Bank, I interviewed for the position and I got it. Margo was such a phenomenal mentor who made sure I had exposure to senior leaders, different events, and just really supported and mentored me.” Ashton says she really learned how to interact with senior executives early in her career.

Ashton summarizes her Spelman experience as one which helped her to resolve internal conflicts she had about race, culture, religion and socioeconomic issues as most of the faculty and staff “looked like me and had similar experiences.” Ashton says that “Spelman removes the race and gender factor. Students are fully able to learn, engage as leaders and value the full range of diversity that is unique to a women’s college.”

Ashton shares the following experience to highlight the value of the Spelman experience. “When I went to law school, I had to focus on race. People automatically assumed I was an affirmative action law student. But, Spelman gave me the confidence to stand and advocate for African-American faculty and students in the program as the president of the Black Law Students’ Association. The Spelman legacy lives on in me and many other students who graduated from this historic institution.”

**The value of networking.** After working at Key bank for a couple of years, Ashton decided to attend law school. “I was a first generation law student and one of five Black students in my entering law class. The academic program was very rigorous, and
the environment was not very nurturing. It made me question whether I belonged as some of the faculty members were very not very supportive. I give back to Spelman regularly, but I have yet to give back to my law school due to the lack of support I received as a student.” Ashton shares that while she was in law school she felt really prepared to succeed. Things that seem to be intuitive to me, other students seem to really lack. The students from predominantly white schools didn’t really understand the value of networking. At Spelman we learned networking and valuing relationships and opportunities to interact with others was the best way to ensure you excelled in your career. My classmates, whether Black or white, didn’t have some of the basic leadership skills necessary for success. I feel like I had an advanced start as I knew how to write out and have my questions prepared, and to always think about the leadership issue as I prepared my questions. This helped me to distinguish myself from my peers while in law school.

When Ashton finished law school she didn’t have a job. She volunteered with the district attorney’s office and was able to attend the Women of Color Conference at Spelman College. Networking at the conference paid off for Ashton as she introduced herself to various Spelman alumnae who helped her obtain her first job after law school. “I met one Spelman alumna who connected me with another Spelman alumna who in essence launched my career. Neither of these women knew me. But they were determined to help me succeed. All they required of me was to help another Spelman sister in need.” Ashton returns to Spelman annually to honor her commitment as a mentor. She says she
mentors future Spelmanites with a great since of pride and an expectation for success, just as her Spelman sisters did for her.

**Brandi.** Brandi graduated from Spelman in 2005 as a math major with a minor in theatre. She grew up in a married family household in Pennsylvania. Brandi attended Quaker affiliated private schools that were predominantly white from the time she was in kindergarten through seventh grade. Her mother received a job promotion which landed them in New Jersey where she attended public middle and high schools in New Jersey. She attended a predominantly white high school where the underrepresented student population was composed of approximately 33% Hispanic and Asian students.

Brandi says she has always had a strong and supportive family network. “As I reflect back on my experiences, I now realize the value of family and understand the impact of choices as related to following your passion.” She says her dad was a stickler for academic excellence and encouraged her to always do her absolute best. Brandi was encouraged by her family to be smart, independent, self-sufficient and disciplined. In addition, having a strong work ethic and working to your full potential was also encouraged in Brandi’s family.

Brandi is not sure how she found out about Spelman. All she knew was Spelman was a historically Black college for women. So, she made sure she was on the HBCU College tour arranged by her counselor.

Everything I learned about Spelman I learned during my tour of the campus. Spelman stood on sacred ground. All of the students were friendly and seemed to exhibit academic excellence. I had a chance to talk with students, faculty and
staff in the math and drama department. Students talked about being able to do research with faculty. I was convinced! That made me want to go to Spelman College. I loved the fact that I was going to attend an women’s school that was an HBCU. I wanted to be around people who looked like me. I felt like they would give me the skills I needed to be a successful Black woman.

**Making hard choices.** When Brandi started Spelman College she was a math major, but had such supportive faculty and staff who mentored her in both the math and drama departments.

One of the advantages of going to a school like Spelman is that you are able to have more one-on-one time with the faculty. Dr. Jeffrey Ehme, now the chair of the math department, Dr. Tasha Ennis and Dr. Shaw were faculty members who taught some of my most difficult courses. Dr. Shaw would sit with me and work a math problem until I understood it completely. She was willing to help even without an appointment. Once we finished with the academic help and support, we would engage in these long conversations that had nothing to do with math. She took a liking to me, so much so that she invited me to her daughter’s birthday party.

Dr. Crystal Dickenson was also one of Brandi’s drama teachers who served as a mentor. “I spent a lot of time in the science and drama departments. Dr. Shah supported Brandi’s decision to add drama as a second major even as it would be fairly demanding.

Dr. Tasha Ennis recommended Brandi for the GAME Theory summer program at The University of Maryland at College Park. “I was the only Spelman student invited to
attend and participate. I took classes in GAME Theory, did tours of organizations and companies who used the GAME theory program, and was responsible for a capstone project. Spelman faculty were always very supportive and advising me about the best courses to achieve my academic and career goals.”

**Developing as a leader.** Brandi was always very engaged in academic organizations. She applied to the Women of Excellence Leadership program because she wanted to connect with other students outside the math and drama departments. “I wanted to be involved in something other than academic leadership opportunities. The WEL program introduced a theoretical framework for leadership and academic excellence.

We participated in LeaderShape where I learned about leadership and integrity. We also went on retreats with Spelman College and Agnes Scott College students. We networked with a diverse group of leaders with different leadership skills and areas of expertise. We learned how integrity is at the core of leadership, how it impacts our actions and how we engage with one another as a diverse group of women. I learned a lot. But I really learned to appreciate and work with people from diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. It was interesting to meet so many other young ladies who were in different majors.

Brandi identified Dr. Zenobia Hikes as a woman who made students feel like an educated Black woman could conquer the world. “Every time she spoke to us she motivated and inspired us to excel, especially in fields where Black women were not well represented.”
No place like Spelman. As Brandi reflected on her undergraduate experiences and career, she thought about the uniqueness of her college experience. The HBCU experience is totally different from an ivy league or predominantly White college or university experience. Spelman is an experience like no other. I never knew that there were so many different types of Black women. My parents went to the University of Pennsylvania. So, they did not understand the experience of being a part of a supportive sisterhood. You become a part of a community of leaders who have the same experience. In graduate school, me and my roommate were the only two Black women in my academic program.

Brandi talked about how she believes the overall Spelman experience prepared her to be able navigate any experience beyond the gates of the college community.

Spelman gives me a sense of pride that I don’t believe I would have experienced anywhere else. I feel very confident and competent in my academic ability. I feel like I can go anywhere and learn and/or tackle any subject. Spelman taught me that I can do anything. What I do know is that what you learn outside of class, you don’t really grasp it until you leave and actually have to apply the leadership lessons you learn as an undergraduate.

The other unique thing about Spelman is the brother-sister network between Spelman College and Morehouse College.”

There is a good amount of Spelman and Morehouse people all around, in particular in New York where I currently live. Spelman has a presence everywhere. When we say we went to Spelman, they say “oh that makes sense.”
They say it because of how we carry ourselves, how we engage, and because of the legacy and history of both schools. We know our history. We know what we are obligated to do. The alumnae are very clear from the day you set foot on campus and well after you graduate on what we need to do and to be when we graduate—successful women committed to paying it forward.

**Brooke.** Brooke is a Class of 2006 graduate from North Carolina. She comes from a married family household where she learned the core values of having a strong faith in God and hard work. Her parents have always encouraged her to be better than the competition and “to know your stuff”. Brooke attended private elementary and middle schools that were predominantly white. She begged her parents to allow her to attend a public school so that she could get a different experience. She recalls the students making fun of her because she “talked and acted white.”

Brooke thought that she was always going to attend Duke University because that was the institution friends and family always discussed. She didn’t know anything about Spelman College. In her junior year she received an informational mailing from Spelman that opened her eyes to a different experience. Once Brooke visited Spelman, she felt it was where she was supposed to be. “There were so many people like me, smart, intelligent and successful. I had an opportunity to learn about the history and traditions and immediately began seeing myself all over campus. I didn’t get that feeling when I visited Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I didn’t feel welcome.”
On becoming an ethical leader. Civic engagement and ethical leadership development have always been a part of the Spelman experience. “I was at Spelman during the time of Enron, so ethical leadership was a campus wide-discussion. There was a sense of obligation to improve the world around you. Dr. Hikes, Vice-President for Student Affairs, always said, “to whom much is given, much is required”. Spelman provided Brooke with a framework for understanding feminism and womanism, and being able to intelligently write, talk and explain feminism. Brooke remembers feminism and womanism being a part of many English department readings and discussions.

She also remembers being nurtured and encouraged to engage in activism. Advocacy and activism are focused on bringing about social change as related to social equity, sexism and sexual violence against women. “I remember being a part of the big music video controversy where we took on the rapper Nelly who was scheduled to conduct a bone marrow drive on our campus. We supported the Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance who criticized Nelly for his video, “Tip Drill,” which promoted a misogynistic message and the objectification of women. It’s the collection of moments such as this that made me into an ethical leader.”

Brooke also reflects on her experiences as a leader. She served as a member of the PULSE Program Board, a New Student Orientation Leader, and also served on the Executive Board of her Residence Hall Council. Brooke remembers sitting in training programs where she learned what it meant to be a leader in the respective organization, how to lead, networking and communication. But joining the Women of Excellence
Leadership (WEL) program as a sophomore, and as an intern in her senior year provided greater understanding of a theoretical framework for leadership.

I joined the WEL program because Dr. Zenobya Hikes was such a dynamic woman. I felt like this woman is going to teach me how to be a leader and give me sound advice on how to be an ethical leader. The point of the program is access to outstanding leaders who give advice and guidance.

Brooke talks about meeting impressive women like Carla Harris who was the Managing Director of Morgan Stanley financial services corporation.

She made a strong impression on me as a sophomore in college. She was fierce, being able to be a Black woman in a major Wall Street firm. She was also pursuing her passion in music. She made me think that we can do all these things. Understanding your personal brand and how to position yourself were also topics of discussion. We were having conversations about building your personal brand before it was even a discussion across the nation. We also learned public speaking. I remember learning the importance of having an elevator speech, or a one minute commercial. These are all skills I use today!

Brooke also served as the WEL Intern under Dean Kelly who offered a very different perspective and approach to the WEL program. “Dean Kelly was focused on servant leadership. That year we focused on leadership from a social justice perspective, in addition to learning different theories and approaches to leadership.”

I asked Brooke to reflect on her overall takeaway from the Spelman experience. She circled back to the biblical quote often touted by the Vice-President of Student
Affairs, “to whom much is given, much is required. Spelman teaches you that you have an obligation to be great.” Brooke posits that going to Spelman is a privilege and an honor. The overall message for Brooke is one of advocacy and civic engagement. “I am required to reach back, teach someone or help someone.”

**Cameron.** Cameron is a Class of 2004 graduate of Spelman College from Ohio. She is a product of a two parent household. Her mother is college educated and works for a public school system as a hearing specialists and speech pathologist, while her father was an entrepreneur with an electrical wholesale company who also dabbled in real estate. Cameron’s parents instilled in her the value of hard work as she began helping out in her dad’s business at the age of 10 years. She was taught to be a leader and to persevere as her father encouraged a “no quit mentality.” Cameron’s parents saw her leadership abilities at an early age. Thus, Cameron was taught the importance of making decisions quickly, committing to a decision, and the necessity to have great follow-through.

Her parents moved to an affluent area with a good school system to ensure that she had the best education. Cameron attended a public school that was a predominantly white and Jewish. She attended Montessori schools prior to attending the public high school.

While her high school provided her with the experience of being from diverse community, Cameron chose Spelman because she wanted a different type of college experience as Black students represented only less than 10% of the population. Cameron
was admitted to Ohio University, Xavier University in Ohio, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU), Syracuse University and American University.

I chose Spelman even as I had not visited the campus and did not know much about the mission of Spelman College. The original mission was *Our Whole School for Christ*, and was known for its commitment to community service. There were a few key factors that contributed my decision to attend Spelman.

While in high school I was the manager of a reception area for a hair salon and spa. I was working on a Saturday and a woman I knew who was struggling to make ends meet came into the salon. She was working as security guard during the day, and an usher at a theatre in downtown Cleveland. I told her I was accepted to Spelman College, and she said, “I went to Spelman.” I was not impressed, but she ultimately told me that she came from a very challenging background with little support as her family did not support her. She put together all her money and came to Spelman with one suitcase. She found a house to rent with 13 other women. She eventually got pregnant and went home in shame. I decided I was going to go to Spelman to finish what she started.

Cameron says that she realized when she set foot on the Spelman College campus that she did not know who she was as a Black woman who grew up in a Jewish and Indian community. Spelman gave her the opportunity to explore her own culture and allowed her to discover what made her unique and different.

*The making of a pastoral leader.* Cameron shares that Spelman taught her very early in her first-year a level of academic excellence, what strong leadership looked like,
and helped her develop an understanding of how feminine leadership takes a different. Cameron believes that leadership is perceived as masculine and very patriarchal. Lessons about being a person of integrity, having a vision and making the correct and tough decisions when leading a movement and/or cause, and “caring about the people who follow just as much as the destination you are leading them to.”

During our interview, Cameron discusses being called to a higher purpose and direction in her junior class year.

My junior year at Spelman was when my call to ministry began. I started a really small bible study on campus that grew to 75 students coming weekly on campus. That put me in a leadership place. I was able to develop my model of leadership as we started a national conference, *Pregnant with Purpose*, where we literally started bringing in nationally renowned leader without really any budget. While Spelman continued to nurture the general leader within, I began to develop a framework for my role as a spiritual leader that allowed me to embrace my calling as a Pastor, which I pursued after graduation.

Cameron reflects on the many opportunities to lead while at Spelman, but talks about being recruited to join the Women of Excellence Leadership series that was led by Dr. Zenobia Hikes, Vice-President of Student Affairs. “I signed up for the program because I thought it would help me discern how to determine the best use of my leadership gifts.”

The WEL program incorporated leadership modules that taught the basics of understanding self and others through a common purpose, sustaining relationships and collaborative partnerships, strategic communications, making informed choices and
decisions, problem solving, negotiating and managing conflict understanding cultural
dynamics, and being an innovative change agent, all of which Cameron says she already
knew. The program was heavily focused on business and personal etiquette, as I also
learned to “hold my purse, to have a purpose, and to hold good conversation.”

Cameron’s greatest lesson from the WEL program was learning to clearly identify
the “leadership arena” to which she was being called to lead. More importantly, she
learned to avoid placing herself in an arena where she was not “called to lead.” Cameron
was recommended for a position with Goldman Sachs where she further learned and
applied critical thinking skills and discernment in determining how to lead in her purpose.
“I was offered a position, but through discernment and critical thinking, I walked away
from that job recognizing that it was not my purpose. Dr. Hikes taught me to be clear
about who I am, where I am called, and where I can best use my gifts. Had I taken that
position, I would have traveled a different road that is very different from my call and
purpose.”

*Prepared for ethical leadership.* Cameron further discusses the many programs
that contributed to her development as an ethical leader at Spelman College. She speaks
very highly about the Spelman’s African Diaspora and the World (ADW) which is an
interdisciplinary course designed to teach students about the communities throughout the
world that are descendants from Africa while also promoting the values of sisterhood,
leadership and a love of learning. Cameron says that ADW taught her to think critically
about different cultures from around the world. The faculty member also taught her the
values of “doing things right the first time to the best of her ability, and to follow-through even if things aren’t what you think.”

The Spelman Independent Scholars (SIS) program taught by Dr. Gloria Wade Gayles helped Cameron to learn the art of oral histories and the art of oral presentation. Dr. Gloria Wade Gayles is the founding director and faculty mentor for the SIS Project, and a noted Harvard University W. E. B DuBoise Fellow. “Because I was in ministry, and was paired with a ministry couple, much like me and my husband. I was taught the art of oration which enhanced my communication skills. But I also learned to sit with greatness and not to embarrass myself.”

Cameron also reflects on how narrowly focused she was as a leader, and having an impactful experience with the Director of Housing who served as the advisor for her weekly bible study groups. “She taught me to understand the vision and to welcome the diversity of the package it comes in. I also learned how to manage diversity and political adversity.” Through her patience, I broadened my scope of diversity as a leader. She taught me that I don’t have to always respond in difficult situations. I learned to pick and choose my battles.”

Cameron was also able to interact with alumnae with careers in ministry to learn how to function in what she refers to as “a male dominated profession.” According to Cameron, Spelman alumnae in ministry represented a small number of graduates during the time of her enrollment. Cameron was able to connect with an alumna who would serve as mentor. She reflects on this experience as having inspired her to believe that you could be a minister, be married, have a family and a successful career.
Cameron graduated from Spelman and received a Master’s in Divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary. She says that Spelman provided her with the confidence and competency to pastor a predominantly white church and to lead the paradigm shift to focus on building a multicultural congregation.

The Congregation I currently serve is 159 years old and never had a Black pastor prior to my appointment. The church is 50% Black now. I am the first Black pastor, the only woman pastor, and the youngest Black pastor at a church where they are known as “clergy killers.” My husband is also a pastor, and he pastors another church in Cleveland. When the offer came, I knew that when I took this church that I could not quit. I knew nothing about finances, working with political leaders, construction, and other things. But here we are six years later moving into a brand new church with a congregation that is no longer stubborn. Cameron says that Spelman certainly contributed to her confidence to be able to lead and to be a change agent. She ended our interview by saying that “It was my work at Spelman that has helped me to know how to lead.”

Chandra. Chandra is a Class of 2006 graduate from Louisiana. She is a product of a two parent household that taught her to be a woman of integrity. “My mom would always say that I have to do what is right regardless of who was looking.” Chandra’s family also taught her about persistence and hard work. She was taught to believe that “as Black women you have to work twice as hard and twice as long to get the same recognition as a white counterpart, especially in the sciences. Chandra’s parents also taught her about the importance of giving back to the community. “I was always
involved in service in the community and in my church. Spelman inspires you to go beyond the service requirement by reaching out to the community and bringing others on the campus. We were able to get outside the gates of Spelman to inspire others to look beyond their circumstances to something much richer and stronger.”

Chandra attended private Catholic schools from kindergarten through twelfth grade. “Because I went to all white schools, I wanted to go to an HBCU institution. I applied to all HBCU’s and also applied to Tulane University and Louisiana State University because they were in my hometown. I visited Spelman and fell in love with the sisterhood. Spelman’s mission was also very important to me as it focused on service and preparing women to be global leaders.” Chandra was also admitted into the Honor Program, received a full tuition scholarship and several small scholarships to support her involvement in science and engineering. “Spelman was a good fit.”

Chandra also had the unique experience of being in the Women In Science and Engineering summer program. The program provided mentors and access to faculty who helped us to understand science and engineering options at Spelman.

I participated the summer before I began my first-year at Spelman. I met faculty, developed friendships, and had a strong understanding of the history, mission and purpose of Spelman. I also had a strong footing in my coursework which helped ease my transition into Spelman. I knew that prior to coming to Spelman that I felt differently than my high school peers because I had an opportunity to develop a sense of what it meant to be a feminist and a Black woman at Spelman College which gave me a better understanding of my own personal identity.
In addition to the support received from students, faculty and staff, the program also provided research opportunities in math and science and connections to alumnae and other leaders working in various careers in math and science. Chandra felt better prepared to understand the issues facing women and other underrepresented populations in the sciences through a series of discussions and interactions with students, faculty, staff, alumnae and leaders who looked like her and had successful careers in the science and engineering fields.

_A duty to invest in the future of others_. In addition to being involved with the Chemistry Club executive board that shaped Chandra’s leadership as a scientist through various programs and activities, academic and/or co-curricular programs and the faculty, staff and alumnae also contributed to her development as an ethical leader.

Spelman helped me to explore and strengthen my identity as a Black woman. I had some sense of feminism having attended a high school for girls. But, the African Diaspora and the World (ADW) course that everyone takes in their first year at Spelman introduced Black women’s role in the feminist movement. Readings by Audre Lorde, a Caribbean-American writer, feminist, womanist and civil rights activist, help to shape my identity particularly because I was chemistry major. I really liked the ADW class because it helped me to shape my perspective as a woman and a Black Scientist. I also remember in my sophomore year, we had the Nelly protest. I remember asking myself critical questions of why the exploitation of women was acceptable in an all women’s space like Spelman. It was my first bout with activism and feminism where I was a part of a group
demanding that a rapper answer to Black women why this form of exploitation was acceptable. These types of experiences prepare you for the real world.

Chandra also considers her involvement in church and campus ministries as a strong part of her overall ethical leadership development. She served as a Ministry Assistant in her junior year, and President of the Lyke House, Newman Club/Atlanta University Center (AUC) Catholic Student Coalition which represented African-American, African and Caribbean Catholics in the AUC college community.

The AUC Catholic Student Coalition was focused on building a Christian community, celebrating heritage and building consciousness of the Black Catholic tradition, and sharing faith development through service and learning in support of being good and responsible citizens (www.lykehouse.org). “The opportunities to grow and serve as a member of the catholic leadership responsible for leading bible studies, mass, and book reading sessions are examples of activities that contributed to my overall development as an ethical leader.”

The Women of Excellence Leadership program was also identified by Chandra as a program that helped to enhance her knowledge, experience and overall confidence as a leader.

Dr. Zenobyiah Hikes, Class of 1977, Vice-President for Student Affairs led the WEL program during my time as a student. Every time we started class, she would tell us that we were chosen for this time as leaders and that we were destined to be great. The WEL program taught me different frameworks for leadership based on the different leaders who participated in the class and basic
leadership principles such as understanding who I am, what I value and my strengths and limitations, the responsibility to lead by example, the essence of motivating and inspiring others, and the importance of having a vision and communicating that vision. In addition, I learned the principles of dining and other business etiquette and the importance of having a good elevator speech to share who I am as a leader. The WEL program gave me confidence to lead and the skills to be a good leader.

Alumnae involvement was critical to Chandra’s development as a leader. She recalls being mentored by an alumna who was a business entrepreneur. “She was a Black woman in science and engineering and her willingness to give back and mentor another Spelman student was inspiring. She also taught me that I have an obligation and an honor to serve. Her achievements and mentoring inspired me to volunteer for the Sister to Sister program which mentors current Spelman students. It is because of alumnae who volunteered their time at Spelman that I am inspired to continue to give of my time and talents to other Spelmanites.”

**Confidence to achieve despite life challenges.** As Chandra reflects on the overall educational outcomes of her undergraduate experience, she credits her collegiate experience as having made her into an ethical leader who exhibits the poise and grace to understand her strengths and weaknesses, the wisdom to lean on others where she lacks strength, and the willingness to be vulnerable enough to recognize her weaknesses and to seek help. In addition to family values instilled in her while growing into a mature young adult, Spelman gave Chandra the confidence to pursue her goals despite many challenges.
After graduating in 2006, Chandra enrolled at Georgia Institute of Technology. While it wasn’t the best fit, Spelman empowered me to take risks and do different things despite the odds. Chandra finished her graduate program and became an Environmental Epidemiologist/ Environmental Health Officer with the Center for Disease Control. After working a few years, she was inspired to go back to graduate school to complete a doctorate.

This decision was met with negativity by family, friends and cow-workers. But, looking back on her Spelman experience and talking with Spelman alumnæ gave Chandra the confidence to apply to Emory University and to eventually graduate with a Ph.D. in environmental sciences. Chandra summarizes the Spelman experience as providing “students with the confidence and integrity to do things well and with excellence.” In addition, Chandra learned the value of giving back and investing in others through mentorship while at Spelman College.

**Kaitlin.** Kaitlin is a 2006 graduate from California who went directly into graduate school to complete a Master and Ph.D. program at Michigan State University. While she is the product of a two parent household, she shares that her mom remarried when she was 10 years old. Kaitlin went to a combination of very diverse public and private schools while growing up, but graduated from a predominantly white suburban high school. She recalls learning early on the values of education as her mother would always say that “you can’t succeed without an education.” Kaitlin also says her mother encouraged a strong work ethic as there is “no excuse for failure.” Kaitlin says she was always encouraged to work hard and to learn.
Kaitlin did not purposely seek to attend a historically Black college. “I chose schools based on the type of academic majors offered and wanting to be far away from home to explore the world. I also wanted to live in a big city.” Kaitlin says that Spelman College was an ideal school. “My best friend and I went to school together from grade school through high school. We traded notes regularly. We separated by the time we got to high school. We compared notes as we were applying to different colleges, and at some point she said, “I’m going to Howard,” and I said, “I am going to Spelman.”

Kaitlin’s decision to attend Spelman was influenced by the fact that she was awarded the Women In Science and Engineering (WISE) Scholarship. “I didn’t really know the mission of Spelman, but I felt like the reputation of the faculty and the students played a huge part in my decision to attend Spelman. Being able to participate in the summer science and engineering program provided me the first introduction to the campus.

Prior to Spelman, Kaitlin was actively involved in leadership roles. “I have always been around a community of leaders. Being in a predominantly white high school, students of color were forced to be the representative responsible for addressing racial and socioeconomic issues. Spelman gave me additional opportunities to define who I wanted to be as a leader and to develop the skills that helped shape my leadership. I was more that not just a representative of my race to others.”

An environment of support. Kaitlin reflects on her undergraduate and graduate experiences and shares that the focus is definitely on the student at a place like Spelman College.
Small classes let me discover who I am and develop my own personal style of learning. There was access to faculty who wanted me to learn and who mentored me to be a leader and a scholar. The supportive environment provided access to instructors who supported me as I learned and addressed my own identity development and personal prejudices. I did not feel the threat of someone thinking that I am not capable of achieving all that was expected of me academically.

Kaitlin shared her feelings about not feeling threatened at Spelman. She talks about having opportunities to explore her identity.

I didn’t have to constantly think of my race and gender as a deficit. I got to address the race and gender issues I really wanted and needed to address. At institutions that are predominantly white, all the layers and complexities of race and gender get in the way of addressing the real issues and problems or what you are struggling with trying to accomplish as a Black woman. For example, in a predominantly white environment if the only three Black students in the class are failing, they are failing because they are Black, not because of the course, material, instruction or lack of support in the struggling to learn.

Keisha says she felt pretty confident as a Black woman having attended an historically Black women’s college. “Spelman forces you to confront your own issues of prejudice against people who look like you. You learn about the diversity of Black women at Spelman College. I learned about diversity and human dignity. I grew and learned in a safe and comfortable environment without any degree of hostility. It provided a good
foundation for being able to go to Michigan State. I found that there were a lot of challenges of being a Black woman in the computer science field where people do not look like me and/or they simply do not expect me to be there. I was confident that I could learn, even as I faced many challenges. I have to address unwritten expectations of my performance, but I was confident that I could succeed given the foundation established at Spelman.”

Kaitlin had a “really pretty amazing experience at Spelman.” She talks about her appreciation for the faculty in the computer science department as they were very supportive, and continue to extend that support to her as a graduate student. “I grew confidently in my academic major at Spelman as it was a field in which Black women were not well represented.”

There were also a lot of experiences Kaitlin says she did not understand or appreciate at the time, like the White Dress Tradition. “You do it because you have to. I started off thinking that it’s just something I have to do and eventually moved to thinking it’s kind of cool.” Kaitlin also discussed the focus on developing students moral values and ethical leadership. “One faculty member wrote on the board, “integrity is what you do when no one else is watching you, and that stuck with me.”

Learning what it takes to be a leader. Participating in the Spanish Club, serving as President of the Honors Program, being a part of the computer science organization, volunteering off campus, and creating an organization called the Hip Hop Collective with a group of friends provided Kaitlin with positive leadership experiences. “It provided a sense of service to community that has stuck with me even today as a graduate student.”
Kaitlin was “excited to be a part of the WEL program as a sophomore.” She indicates that “the program fit well with Spelman’s mission and goals.” Kaitlin also talks about the selectivity of the WEL program. “It was disheartening that it was such a selective process as the program provides the training and experiences that you expect of a Spelman woman. I wish it was more accessible to all students.”

Kaitlin says that the WEL program reinforced a lot of leadership skills that were learned throughout her educational program.

I learned leadership skills in high school, but the WEL program helped me to learn and experience an actual framework for leadership. Business etiquette and expectations for being in a professional environment were core values of the program. The program also provided life skills, tips and tricks to survive as a Black woman. For example, I remember Dr. Hikes, Vice-President for Student Affairs, suggesting that we have a notebook write significant thoughts, quotes and books shared throughout the experience. She would say how important it is to have a place to gather information and reflect on who you are as a leader and how to incorporate the information, skills and thoughts shared throughout the experience.

When asked what was unique about the WEL program, Kaitlin shares that students are told that they are intelligent. In addition, she discusses how the WEL program exposed her to “…very career-focused and prominent alumnae throughout the various seminars. The access and connection to alumnae provided opportunities for learning and understanding what to expect in the real world after graduation.”
The value of the Spelman experience. Kaitlin recently finished the requirements for a Ph.D. program and participated in commencement activities. She shares an experience about trying to find something to wear for the ceremony as she didn’t want to buy anything new. “So, I found my white dress from Spelman and put it on.” She shared with me her Facebook post shortly after her graduate school commencement ceremony.

This is the dress I wore to my undergraduate graduation from Spelman College seven years ago. Spelman has a tradition that students wear white dresses for official celebrations and ceremonies. I wore my white dress during New Student Orientation and didn't really understand or appreciate the tradition. The next 4 years, I wore my white dress for Founder's Day convocations as required. Over time the tradition grew on me.

Kaitlin talks about how she came to appreciate the White Dress Tradition upon graduation.

This year as I graduate from Michigan State, my white dress is a tradition that has taken on a greater meaning. This year, when it came time to find my (last!?!?) graduation outfit, I went shopping. I searched for weeks and didn't find anything that suited my tastes or my grad student budget. As I was cleaning out my closet one weekend I came across this dress that I wore for graduation in 2006.

After taking a few minutes to celebrate actually fitting into the dress, Kaitlin reflects on the significance of the White Dress Tradition and how it represented the value of the Spelman experience.
I realized, that as a Black woman getting a PhD in Computer Science, my experiences at Spelman are what allowed me to make it to this point in my academic career. I doubt I will ever experience another time or place that a professor will be so concerned about creating an inclusive and supportive environment for women in a computer science class that he would ask the women their opinion on having more men than women in the course before starting the class. At the time it seemed funny. Today I truly appreciate that small act and wish that level of awareness was more commonplace. I doubt there will ever be another time that I will be stuck in a computer lab with half a dozen other Black women working through tough programming questions.

As we continued our interview, Kaitlin recognizes the challenges of being Black and a woman in male dominated academic program and profession.

In my 9 years of interning experience at five different companies the first time I worked with a Black programmer was last year. Grad school can be tough. There are times when you truly feel isolated. Knowing that there are professors who care if I feel included in a class, knowing that there are women who look like me who write code even if I don't see them everyday, those things kept me going. So as I walked across the stage in 2013, my white dress represented tradition but so much more. My white dress represented the preparation, love and support that I received as a Black female computer science student at Spelman College. It took a lot of people to get me here.
As Kaitlin prepared to graduate, she again reflects on the history, traditions and legacy of Spelman College.

Thank you Spelman College and my Spelman CIS professors for helping me become the woman that I am today! I truly understand what 8 years later what that tradition was…it represents a supportive environment that I had. It means I have a support system beyond my current experience, however positive or negative.

Kaitlin says she grew to understand and value the strength of the Spelman experience. “You get a firm reminder of who you are. I was given me the confidence to be fearless in whatever I do. I was taught to be a leader who is an active participant in my community. I was given opportunities and experiences to confidently develop my leadership skills.”

Kaitlin suggested that, “It would be beneficial or enhance the Spelman experience if there were a course similar to the WEL program for all students to choose to enroll in, instead of being available to a select few.” She also suggested that it is important to continue to prepare women to be civically engaged in their community, especially as related to understanding what it means to vote. Kaitlin also stressed the importance of teaching young women financial literacy. “Knowing how to successfully manage the money we make, i.e., making good decisions on how we spend our money is something that every Spelman woman needs to know.” Finally, Spelman encourages graduates to come back and share their experiences on how to be successful and to be an example of the path chosen. Kaitlin stresses the need for more one-on-one connections with alumnae to ensure students know what to takes to be successful.
Keisha. Keisha is a native of Georgia and member of the Class of 2004. Keisha’s comes from a two parent household where getting a good education, civic engagement and/or service to the community was expected as her mom is a teacher and her dad is a physician. “I had a sense of activism as my mother also served as Mayor of our city and has always been involved in the Democratic party.”

Keisha remembers attending seven different public and private schools while growing up, all of which were predominantly white. “In all of my classes it was just me or only a few other Black kids. By the time I was in middle school, I was around other Black students, but none were in my advanced placement classes.” Keisha always knew she would attend a historically Black college as most of her family attended an HBCU. She chose to apply to Spelman College because she wanted to be surrounded by Black women who were leaders. “When I applied to Spelman, I didn’t think I would get in. At the time I applied, I was pregnant. I went to Spelman for SpelBound and knew that this was the place for me as I had a chance to experience the sisterhood, leadership and academic excellence. There was also a commitment to serving others, and that’s always been important to me. My dad is a big giver, and he has always taught us that it’s not about you, but what you can do to help others.”

In high school Keisha was president of the Student Government Association which focused on leadership and community service. As Keisha reflects on her Spelman experiences, she admits that she really didn’t know what it meant to be an ethical leader or a servant leader until she enrolled at Spelman College. “I grew up in a Christian household where much of what I learned about being ethical came from attending church
and learning from bible stories. But Spelman is where I actually saw leaders who applied the principles of ethical leadership.” Keisha was admitted to Spelman. Her parents were very supportive as they took full responsibility for helping to raising her son while she attended college.

Finding voice and shifting perspectives on leadership. When Keisha arrived at Spelman she felt intimidated. “I went from being the top Black person in my class, to being among many bright Black women at Spelman. I had to find my space.” As she reflects on her years at Spelman, she remembers being a “disengaged student. I remember more lessons from convocation now that I work at Spelman.” One of the many educational moments that caused Keisha to reflect on her values and life experiences was taking a course on Images of Women in the Media taught by Dr. Tarshia L. Stanley in the English department.

I didn’t really learn about feminism and womanism until I came to Spelman College. I rejected feminism because it was so radical and so man hating, and I liked boys. The whole notion of being appalled at the “Male Gaze,” I just wasn’t so sure about as I knew that I liked boys. Claiming feminism was a struggle for years. I always went back to people I knew or observed who claimed to be feminist. They always seem angry and not happy. I went through the same thing with Christianity.

Keisha discussed finding her own space in her personal circle of friends and family as related to being Christian and being a feminist.
Spelman taught me to be able to have a voice and that my opinions were worth stating. The first time I really went against the status quo I was in Dr. Stanley’s class talking about images of women in the media and really learning the concepts of sexism, objectification and misogyny. I remember watching a woman in a hip hop video, and everyone was blaming the woman in the video saying that she was, in some way, at fault, and that women in videos are to blame for structural oppression. I took the other side of the argument questioning whether or not there are economic disadvantages or structural oppressions, or if we, as a community, perpetuate and/or support misogyny. I argued whether a woman has the right to choose to express who she is.

Keisha talked about how she began to see misogyny more clearly in different conversations with men based on this classroom experience.

As a parent I hear fathers talk about sex to their sons one way and their daughters another way, I really began to develop my feminist perspective. Even later in my career when I was teaching and seeing how children interacted with each other. It was disappointing to see girls work so hard for male attention. It was disheartening to see males dismissing females and controlling so much of their thoughts and ways of being. It was realizing that children learned these behaviors from adults and are growing up perpetuating misogyny, inequity and disrespect of women…that is when I recognized and appreciated feminism for what it was.

Keisha attempted to get involved as she served as president of the Atlanta University Center Council of Students. “I wasn’t a really good leader then. When I am stressed, I
can get very aggressive and loud. As I observed other faculty and student leaders on campus, I learned that I really didn’t know how to communicate and/or lead. I knew that something needed to change.”

Keisha applied to the Women of Excellence Leadership program because it was focused on developing students as leaders. “I found my voice at Spelman when I went into the WEL program. It validated that you were supposed to be here at Spelman. I still have my WEL program binder. The WEL program taught me to step back and discover me as a servant who helps others lead. I remember being so touched by the whole experience that I have to do this for other people. It taught me to build future leaders.”

Keisha also entered the SWEPT program for juniors and seniors. SWEPT stands for Spelman Women Empowered Through Professional Training. The program prepares students to successfully transition into the workplace through a series of workshops designed to connect students with corporate leaders who share their leadership journey and perspectives on the importance of having and demonstrating integrity and good judgment, understanding cultural diversity, the importance of working with and communicating with people from diverse backgrounds, and demonstrating a desire to learn, develop and grow in the workplace.

Keisha shared that SWEPT was very professional and focused on careers in the corporate world. “The program was sponsored by JP Morgan Chase and was focused on leadership and change management. One of our readings included the book, “Who Moved My Cheese” taught me to reflect on change, how it affects my life, and the importance of being flexible and adaptable, all of which were important qualities that I
learned.” I learned the soft skills, like what to do in an interview, how to lead a group, the interpersonal skills to deal with different types of people, all of which goes to character.” Keisha also states that both the WEL and SWEPT program inspired confidence and a freedom to “provide voice to other sides of an issue, even if it goes against the thoughts and opinions of everyone in the room.”

**Being other centered.** I asked Keisha to reflect on her undergraduate experiences and career over the last decade and how she thought Spelman affected her character and ethical leadership development. Keisha indicates that the biggest difference in being a student, graduating and moving into the real world and now returning to work at Spelman is how the reputation and brand of Spelman has continually grown. “Because we are Spelman, students benefit from high profile speakers in class, Convocation, and other areas. Students have far more opportunities for internships, and we didn’t have the big study abroad push.

The focus was on leadership, not on becoming a global leader like today.” Keisha also talks about the continued focus on “preparing and empowering students to be servant leaders who have the drive and determination to change the world.” Finally, Keisha says that her experience taught her that “Spelman students are not all the same. We can’t be free thinking women if we all think alike. Spelman students are taught to understand and be more respectful of diversity.”

**Tatiana.** Tatiana is a 2001 graduate of Spelman College from Georgia. “My parents divorced and remarried, and this was relatively uncommon in the 1970’s. I was the only divorced kid. When my parents got divorced, my grandmother moved in with
us. I come from a family of educators as my grandmother was a 4th grade teacher and my mother was a 4th grade teacher who later became a principal. My birth father was a professor at Morehouse College and Clark Atlanta College which is not Clark Atlanta University.”

Her mother would eventually remarry and she gained two siblings who were much older, but she was raised as an only child. Tatiana talks about not really knowing how unique her family was until she enrolled as a student at Spelman. “I didn’t really know I had issues until I came to Spelman.” Mom taught me early to whom much is given, much is required. Education, service, diligence, persistence, and excellence or doing the very best you can with whatever you have were things Tatiana learned while growing up.

Family was a big reason why Tatiana chose Spelman College. Her grandmother attended Wilberforce University because she couldn’t afford Spelman, while her Mom went to Howard University and was the first in the family to leave the state. Tatiana recalls that Mignon Lewis, who was a Spelman Alumna and her piano teacher, really made her feel as though there was no other choice but to attend Spelman College.

I thought I wanted to leave and go out of state for college. Ms. Mignon trapped me by saying just go on a visit to Spelman. I did know the specific mission, but I knew what it represented. Ms. Mignon’s daughter’s all went to Spelman. These women made it ok to be a woman of excellence—smart and intelligent. Seeing women I wanted to be like made me want to go to Spelman. I went to visit multiple campuses, New York University (NYU), Brown University and Spelman
College, to name a few. Spelman was the best fit. I had horrible visits to NYU and Brown. My friends were at Massachusetts Institution of Technology and Howard University, so I thought I needed to go out of state. I thought I needed to go up North.

Tatiana talks about being fortunate in that she received a scholarship at Spelman that gave her a chance to actually reflect on the value of the experience.

I came to Spelman and fell in love my first semester. My friends all hated their experiences. My SpelBound sister really kept up with me and checked on me. They made me feel like they cared about me. I was part of the Honors program which was a living and learning community. So all the Honors students living in LLC1 had pride in being a cohort and being a group struggling through courses like Honors Philosophy together. It made me think and feel intellectually smart, but it also supported you on your journey to becoming the person you wanted to be. Dr. Cynthia Spence, an alumna and professor of Sociology, who was also Dean at the time mentored and advised me. Dr. Anne Warner, Dr. Steven Nadler, Dr. Akiba Harper were all faculty who made the experience worthwhile.

Tatiana says that she knew that when she went home for break that she had found a College that was a great fit. “I drank the Blue Kool Aid. I fell in love with all that was Spelman.”

**Supporting the ethical leader within.** When I asked Tatiana to reflect on her character and ethical leadership development, she commented that at the time she did not really know the definition of ethical leadership, but she knew it when she saw it.
“Spelman helped to teach me the language that helped me to be able to explain what I knew and practiced as a leader.” Tatiana remembers Tuesday and Thursday Convocations that provided prominent speakers who shared practical, professional and spiritual presentations to help students learn their passion and to be well prepared for life beyond Spelman.

When Tatiana arrived as a first-year student she was ready to become an active leader. “I came in and lobbied to be on SGA. I met with the SGA president who appointed me to be a first-year class representative. This position did not exist prior to me.” Tatiana also served as an RA in the residence halls, an intern in the Office of Communications, and later became the President of the Student Government Association in her senior year. “Having to hold others accountable in a positive manner helped me to test and further define myself as an ethical leader.”

Prior to the development of the WEL program in 2001 there was no formal leadership experience preparation.

Everything at Spelman was leadership preparation that taught me to be an ethical leader. It was reinforced by campus advisors, peer leaders and big sisters who encouraged you to do the right thing. WEL was developed by Dr. Zenobia Hikes, Vice-President for Student Affairs. Dr. Hikes helped to formalize a program so that students would be prepared for internships. She told me to apply for the program, so I did. We had to do these mantras—a collective phrase that everyone agrees to and recites that helps you to focus and work to achieve leadership excellence. It’s an affirmation that united us and taught as to work as a team.
The experience taught me how to work with a diverse group of women. The reason everyone applied might have been different, but we all knew that there was value in having different types of leaders in the room and learning how to work with them.

Tatiana’s senior year provided lots of opportunities where her ethical leadership was tested and refined. She shared several examples to further expand upon her experiences.

I remember disagreeing with Dr. Zenobia Hikes, Vice-President for Student Affairs, about a decision she made regarding an SGA matter. She refused to meet with me over a specific issue. I consulted with the Director of Student Life and Dean of Students, both of whom provided those valuable conversations that always helped me to ask the right questions when trying to figure out a difficult ethical dilemma. At the end of the day, she changed her decision, but she never talked to me. Her behavior didn’t match up to the values she espoused. She talked about the importance of communication and leadership. But the experience taught me that personal values are always tested and being watched by others who look to you for leadership. It also taught me that process matters.

Tatiana also talks about learning the value of partnership and collaboration.

As SGA President I met with my cabinet and we decided we needed more money to do the types of programs and activities we all envisioned. We developed three proposals to increase student activities fees. We consulted with the Vice-President for Business and Finance, who thought we should share a particular proposal. We decided to still put all three on the SGA election ballot that year.
The vote came back with an identified option that we, as students, supported. I consulted with the Vice-President for Business and Finance who talked to me about why it was important to select another option. We passed the initiative. No one ever told me I don’t know everything, but they taught me how to partner with others.

Finally, it is the policy of Student Activities that all leadership positions require a 3.0 cumulative grade point average. “Tatiana also talks about being SGA President and having to evaluate two candidates for an appointed position, one with 3.0 and another who did not meet the eligibility requirement. “The difficulty came in that the student with the 3.0 was also a member of my sorority. Because the student was my sorority sister, it was suggested that I was selecting her for that reason. It was also further suggested that my sorority was trying to create a uniform block of sorority sisters who ran the campus.”

Tatiana shared with me that about forty or so students came together to protest the selection of this student. “I saw unethical behavior and confronted it. This experience taught me that it is important to do everything the right way. Faculty and administrators taught me that if you are going to be in the role, you have to be ethical and exhibit transparency in everything you do.”

Feminism: A way of being and doing. The call to leadership, advocacy and civic engagement was discussed as part of our interview.

There is a sign at the front of the campus that talks about women who serve.

Before we talked about civic engagement and community service, it was fully
expected that you were a part of some entity that dealt with voting rights and human rights initiatives. Prominent speakers often came to campus and taught about being a leader in a church, doing campaigns with local groups and engaging in voter registration in national elections. Service and activism is core to who we are as Spelman women.

There were also elements of the Spelman experience that represented a bit of a challenge for Tatiana.

I struggled with feminism and womanism as they were new concepts. The Women’s Research and Resource Center didn’t exist during the time I was a student, and we certainly didn’t have a women’s comparative studies major. So, learning the terminology, history and what it represented was challenging to me. Telling me to be a feminist and a womanist seem to render me powerless as I could be just these things. It wasn’t until I graduated that it was not every day common experience where women were at the forefront of leadership, activism and civic engagement. Graduating and going out into the world, I did a fellowship where I was the only Black person in the program. I really valued my Spelman experience and it taught me to speak with competence and a feeling of confidence. I was able to compete in arenas where perhaps other women of color didn’t feel confident in competing. Friends who went to predominantly white institutions didn’t have the same experience and seem to lack confidence.

Tatiana talks about have great role models and mentors who helped her to understand what it meant to be a Black woman. She had close connections with Dr. Johnetta Betsch
Cole, the first Black woman President of Spelman College who served from 1987 to 1997. In addition, she was privileged to be able to interact with the first alumna president, Dr. Audrey Forbes Manley, and Dr. Cynthia Neal Spence, Dean of Undergraduate Studies, who was also an alumna and instrumental in Tatiana’s understanding of Black women and ethical leadership.

**The power of the alumnae and Atlanta University Center Network.** Tatiana refers to Spelman as a very nurturing place that provides the certain experiences that are the same regardless of generational differences. One such experience is the power of alumnae connections that occur as a student and continue well after graduation.

My degree from Spelman opened doors for me. The Vice-President for College Relations at Spelman continued to mentor me and give me feedback about different careers. Networking got me my first role in higher education. The AUC network resulted in me getting hired. I have been able to navigate going from a practicing attorney to entering into institutional advancement in higher education. Tatiana says she has always networked with other alumnae and never had to submit an application for the any position.

Spelman carries a reputation that allowed me to be hired immediately. Every job I had I could call any of women in my Spelman to get a resource connection. I got the call to come back to Spelman, never thought about it, but I jumped at the opportunity. Almost 15 years later, I still look at all these milestones and know that they are one step away from Spelman. I know that’s why people come to Spelman. They want to be one step away from achieving their dreams. There’s
always a Spelman woman somewhere. Our Board of Trustees talk about the fact that people listen when a Spelman woman talks.

Tatiana closes our conversation by saying that “Spelman shaped me into the professional woman I am today. Spelman makes it ok to be free to be yourself.”

**Cross Case Analysis**

I began analyzing the descriptions of the students and alumnae experiences by transcribing the data from the interviews and digital recordings. I engaged in an open coding process to assist with developing common ideas, concepts, terms, phrases and key words that emerged from the analysis of each interview using the constant comparative method (Kleiman, 2004). Axial coding was also engaged as a process to connect associated themes and categories that emerged out of sequential comparisons (Kleiman, 2004). Finally, I engaged in selective coding to develop the main categorical themes and topics to make sense of the data and to better understand how the phenomena of character and ethical leadership are experienced in a historically Black women’s college setting (Kleiman, 2004).

According to VanManen (1990), bracketing involves recognizing and managing my own preconceived ideas about the phenomena of character and ethical leadership development to ensure the data is reported in an authentic manner. My goal was to be totally engaged with the data to make certain I fully compared the emerging ideas and topics to achieve research saturating. In addition, I remained open to emerging phenomena as related to the process of character and ethical leadership development in a historically Black women’s college setting. This process of engaging in total immersion
with the data to develop a shared understanding of the phenomena being studied is known as intuition (VanManen, 1990).

The cross-case analysis resulted in descriptive answers to the central research question: How do students at a historically Black women’s college describe their experiences with character development and ethical leadership development? The remainder of the chapter is organized to reflect the main categorical themes and sub-topics that further examine student’s thoughts about the academic and co-curricular programs that best prepared them to be ethical student leaders.

All of the women in this study discuss character development as largely being formed and influenced by family while growing up and further enhanced in college while engaging in educational experiences, events and activities. Participants also discussed the value of being in a historically Black women’s college environment like Spelman that provides a unique opportunity to test personal values and to develop their own personal identity which adds to the complexity of character development and ethical leadership development.

The following were consistently identified by participants as contributing to women’s character development and ethical leadership development: (1) a supportive environment with expectations for student success; (2) conscious Black feminist and activist development in a collaborative learning environment; (3) opportunities to lead; and (4) faculty and alumnae interaction, mentoring and support. The following provides an explanation of the critical influences and importance of the various aspects of their collegiate experiences.
A supportive environment and expectations for success. Participants indicated that a distinctive feature of the Spelman environment is that they see and experience a large and diverse concentration of Black women scholars and leaders who look like them, have similar educational goals and aspirations and expectations for success. Participants saw this as an important feature of the environment given that 14 of the 18 participants came from suburban areas where they attended predominantly White or Caucasian schools. Participants further indicated that the environment inspired a desire to learn more about the history of the Black experience in the United States, in particular, the South.

As participants communicated their experiences with me, it became clear that there was a shared perspective regarding the responsibility to freely engage in self-discovery, learning more specifically about their identity as a Black woman and who they were becoming as a feminist, scholar and leader. All participants discussed the environment as being one that evokes a feeling of being safe as the impediments of race, gender, oppression and mental state that comes from being marginalization are removed from the student experience. In addition, contributors to this study indicated a responsibility to govern one’s self in an ethical manner, to believe in one’s potential and the ability to be successful and to be in a position to pay it forward to others who are victims of inhumanity and unjust experiences.

Race, gender and issues of oppression and social justice were also explored as philosophical and societal constructs in the curriculum and co-curricular experience. Participants talked about being exposed to Black culture, history, institutional traditions
and the legacy of global leaders who are faculty and alumnae of the College from the

time of first arrival for a campus visit, attending SpelBound, a two-day admission

visitation program for admitted students, and through participation in New Student

Orientation.

Participants also shared that there is an immediate connection with peers who
serve as orientation leaders and alumnae who commit to teaching Spelman history and
traditions and the Spelman hymn, which students sing on numerous occasions during the
ten day New Student Orientation program. All participants remembered the early
“Wake-up” candlelight ceremony with alumnae where their names are added to the “roll

call” among scores of alumnae who have come through the gates of Spelman College. In
addition, contributors to this study recall their participation in the White Dress Tradition
and induction into the Spelman sisterhood where they are provided a ceremonial pin, hug
and welcome by a Spelman alumna just prior to the start of class. The accessibility to
alumnae, faculty, staff and administrators of the College provided a connection and
feeling of community and pride that comes with being in a unique environment built just
for Black women.

There were also shared experiences of being held accountable for learning the
Spelman College history, philanthropy and responsibility for civic engagement during
New Student Orientation and throughout the academic year. Specifically, participants
say that they learned the history of the founders of Spelman College, the history of the
College presidents and the activism that resulted in the first Black woman president in
1987. What participants most treasured is the opportunity to learn the history from
successful Spelman alumnae as it is evidence of the institution’s overall dedication to preparing women of African descent to be scholars and global leaders who are civically engaged and committed to empowering women and enhancing gender and social equity. Even more, they shared a commitment to being fully invested in the life of the campus well after they graduated.

**Black feminist and activist development.** The 2014 graduates and alumnae who participated in this study identified several courses and programs where they learned to question, analyze and communicate identity development, gender and gender equity, feminist theory and social justice ideas logically and coherently. Participants specifically identified African Diaspora and the World, Comparative Women’s Studies, English, Religious Studies, First-Year and Sophomore Year Experience, and the Honors Program as the courses, departments and programs where they learned to become feminist scholars, ethical leaders, advocates with a lens for social justice and scholar activists who engage in student movements, peaceful assemblies and protests to raise consciousness and to create opportunities for discussion and debating the issues of injustice and other social concerns.

Participants further described the Spelman experience as transforming and expanding their knowledge and understanding of identity development, personal values, ethical leadership and intersections of gender, race, class and sexuality as related to history, community and politics. Additionally, social justice and activism concepts are also a distinct theme mentioned by participants in this study. According to Ana,
Spelman provides a strong theoretical framework for recognizing and understanding white privilege and various forms of oppression that supports sexism and racism in environments where Blacks are the minority. While sheltered from institutional and individual sexism and racism, you are prepared to confront it when you see it as Spelman provides a strong theoretical framework for recognizing and understanding that these experiences exist.

Courtney talked about the African Diaspora and the World (ADW) course as helping her to think critically about different cultures from around the world. Ashton shares her experience with the ADW course as follows:

As I sat in my ADW class, I began to question if I belong at Spelman as there were so many students whose parents were legacy, and I didn’t really have a sense of who I was. I learned so much about myself, and I developed lifelong friendships with my sisters who I still stay in contact with and who I will call on in difficult times. At the time, I really didn’t fully appreciate ADW. But, now, as a graduate, I understand the value of a course that provides a global lens to the historical issues, movements, and travels of people of African descent.

Further, Ashton suggested that students do not really appreciate the value of a course like ADW until they graduate and experience real life circumstances.

Participants also discussed the Comparative Women’s Studies program as providing students with an understanding of the experiences and struggles of women from various cultural and global contexts, while also emphasizing Black feminist and womanist theory, social advocacy and activism. Helena specifically talks about her own
identity, self-development, and transformation as she shared her development of a feminist lens in the exploration of race, class and gender. Houston suggested that having a feminist and womanist lens for analysis helped her to develop as a Black woman and as an ethical leader.

Helena further identified Religious Studies as helping her to expand her ethical lens, while also developing an understanding of the roles and status of women within various religious traditions. According to Helena,

People base their ethics off of religious views. In classes, we talk more about what’s right and wrong from the lens of feminism, advocacy and activism. The courses where I learned the most are my Intro to Women’s Studies, Intro to Study of Islam, Intro to Feminist Thought, and Mothering While Black. These courses really helped me to reevaluate my entire life.

Ana considered that the exposure to high caliber academic lecture series and programs as providing “a firm foundation in Black culture and experiences and an understanding of the multiple identities and intersections of being Black, a woman and a feminist.”

Participants discussed the First-Year Experience as being an interdisciplinary learning experience where character, ethics, culture, gender and sexuality is explored and the critical skills of reading, thinking and learning to write critically in college are taught. Ana describes the following experience:

Looking back now, I love First-Year Convocation. Faculty and staff provided enriching experiences, although it is perceived as “motherly,” it has reinforced things that I have doubted in myself and had a direct impact on my character and
my ability to lead. You have made “A Choice to Change the World”, you are a “feminist”, and “I am my sisters keeper” are things you continuously hear in First-year Convocation and courses like Images of Women in the Media and Introduction to Women’s Studies.

Graduating seniors and alumnae shared their experiences of having learned more about being an ethical Black woman leader who is culturally informed through engagement with the First-Year Convocation program and courses like Images of Women in the Media and Introduction to Women’s Studies that exposed them to reading, guest lectures and a speaker series that challenged students to think and engage in the exploration of ethical leadership questions and questions associated with understanding the intersections of race, class and gender.

Participants also identified the Sophomore Year Experience as a course where they were exposed to authentic leadership, servant leadership and the Social Change Model of Leadership. Specific skills participants say they learned and practiced included public speaking, interpersonal communication, problem solving, conflict resolution and teamwork. In addition, participants discussed the Sophomore Year Convocation as an opportunity to engage with and learn from business and civic leaders.

Joy credited the Sophomore Year Experience with giving her “a framework for leadership, while also developing her skills as a public speaker.” Public speaking was an area of challenge for Joy prior to entering the course. After concluding the course, Joy developed confidence and an understanding of using her experiences to engage in effective public speaking. Moreover, it was through the Sophomore Year Experience
course that Joy began to understand that people expected her to succeed, and, therefore, she began to believe that she had very little room for self-defeating thoughts.

The contributors of this study also express the importance of challenging curricular and co-curricular experiences that contributed to their personal and ethical leadership development. The Ethel Waddell Githii Honors program was another feature of the curriculum where participants say they learned to question, analyze and communicate ideas logically and coherently on their journey to becoming ethical leaders and social advocates with a lens for social justice. The Honors Program also provided a living and learning component where first-year students are housed in the same residential building and floor and take similar courses throughout the first-year. Tatiana described her experience with the Honors program as follows:

I was part of the Honors program which was a living and learning community. So all the Honors students living in LLC1 had pride in being a cohort and being a group struggling through courses like Honors Philosophy together. It made me think and feel intellectually smart, but it also supported you on your journey to becoming the person you wanted to be.

The participants describe the academic and co-curricular programs as bringing to life a set of values and expectations that every student experiences. The stories shared by the participants identify a commitment to educating women to be ethical leaders and change agents. Moreover, participants spoke about having developed their voice, agency and awareness of what it means to be a Black woman prepared to be a global leader. Kara provided a good description of her experience below:
I now have more of a voice. I recognize that I have to be a leader. I know when I make decisions that I make decisions because I am Black and a woman, but I am paving the way for future Black women leaders using my own sense of self and knowing who I am and what is required to achieve success. Spelman has no cookie cutter approach to developing Black women as leaders. Being at Spelman has further enriched my understanding of factors such as race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic diversity as related to my overall experience of being a Black woman. Spelman has given me an appreciation for the diversity of Black women.

In my analysis of the shared experiences of participants, there were common themes that implied that when young women arrive at Spelman, they may see themselves as part of a monolithic group of Black women, and may not fully understand the complexities and intersections of being Black and a woman. Further, they may even feel challenged by cultural constructs that are sometimes in conflict, requiring them to make choices that impact their future and the lives of countless other women. An example of this conflict is being forced to choose between advocating for women and children’s issues when faced with historical and current injustices being committed against Black men.

The shared experiences of participants seem to indicate that Spelman is a place that helped them engage in feminist and racial identity development. The participants explored and expanded their understanding of identity and self, expanded their community and world view, and resolved internal conflicts associated with race, gender, culture, religion and socioeconomic questions and concerns. Participants further communicated an understanding that they were a part of a unique legacy of a very special
and diverse group of women who are required to be great and to use their education and experiences to address a diversity of social justice platforms, especially those related to poverty and the oppression of women and children in low-income communities.

**Opportunities to lead.** Participants in this study shared an overall belief that Spelman is a place that affords a supportive and enriching educational and social environment that makes students feel empowered to do and/or achieve anything. As such, students felt empowered to lead and engage in community service, clubs and organizations. The following pages describe the opportunities to engage as leaders and participant experiences with leadership development.

**Clubs and organizations.** In addition to a rich and diverse curriculum that addresses race, culture, gender and power structures, participants suggested that Spelman offers any number of co-curricular learning experiences designed to get students involved from the time they arrive as first-year students. Student clubs and organizations were perceived by participants as providing a way to take the theory and concepts learned in class and apply them in the laboratory of collegiate life. Participants in this study share stories of involvement in the Student Government Association, Atlanta University Center (AUC) Council, serving as a Student Ambassador, as a Resident Advisor, Bonner Scholar focused on community service and service learning, as a Class Council President, New Student Orientation leader, member of the PULSE College Program Board, Residence Hall Council, Amnesty International, ROTC, and in academic clubs such as the Computer Science, Chemistry Club and Honors Program.
Participants shared that they involved themselves in clubs and organizations perceived to be important to enhancing the overall undergraduate experience and achieving future personal and career goals. Erica reflects on her role in representing the student body as one where she learned to be a selfless leader who is sensitive to the needs of those she leads and the community she serves.

It’s not just about me anymore. Relationships matter in a community like Spelman. Students care about on another and they care about the success of student organizations, so they want to do the right thing. It’s because of the passion we have for each other, and for Spelman, that we are inspired to do the right thing even when no one is looking, said Erica.

My analysis of the participants shared experiences suggests that leading in a women’s institution is about developing relationships and connections, being authentic or being genuinely human and exhibiting great integrity. Even more, participants suggest that being authentic means leading with purpose and clarity and awareness of your strengths and limitations. Finally, participants share that being a leader in a women’s institution is about being one who is willing to serve and empower others to lead, addressing oppression and other barriers to women in leadership and working to ensure a just and humane world and society for women and girls.

**Community service.** Participants shared that Spelman College integrates service and service learning through the Bonner Office of Community Service and Student Development. Students often referred to the office tagline, “Where Women Enter to Learn and Exit to Serve” and the sign in front of the campus that clearly displays
Spelman’s commitment to service upon entering the gates of the College. Tatiana shared her understanding of the commitment to and expectations to engage in service:

There is a sign at the front of the campus that talks about women who serve. Before we talked about civic engagement and community service, it was fully expected that you were a part of some entity who dealt with voting rights and human rights initiatives. Campus speakers often came to campus and taught about being a leader in a church, doing campaigns with local groups and engaging in voter registration in national elections. Service and activism is core to who we are as Spelman women.

Many of the participants in the Class of 2004 to 2014 were able to talk about the Bonner Office of Community Service and Student Development as managing the Project Impact initiative that engages students in community service within a 1.7 mile radius of the College. “Civic consciousness” and “civic engagement” is perceived to be the impetus for change in society. Participants also discuss courses offered through the Social Justice Program and the Sophomore Year experiences that incorporate service learning and require students to complete 16 community service hours for course credit as having impacted their overall experiences.

Participants who graduated in 2004-2014 suggest that they developed a greater understanding of diversity in the Black community, while also learning different life perspectives and understanding of what it means to be a citizen leader engaged in the generosity of service. Participants were able to recognize their privilege as college students and as Black women who experienced the oppression of others through
community service. Moreover, participants learned to use the power of their own life experiences to advocate for social equity and community development in low income communities that surround Spelman College and the Atlanta University Center community.

In addition to developing as ethical leaders, participants discussed finding their voice, and giving voice to the experiences of youth and members of the surrounding communities who are often silent, feeling defeated and expressing limited hope and excitement about their future. Joy shares her experience with community service:

My work with the Atlanta University Center Neighborhood Association helped me to understand that connecting with the people I serve helps to develop a sense of hope and a shared vision for clean and safe neighborhoods in the African-American community. Learning how to inspire people to have a shared vision is an essential concept that is needed to be a global leader.

Engaging in community service taught participants how to be civically engaged and contributed to their character development and ethical leadership development through hands on exploration of what is the good and right thing to in surrounding communities. Community service, then, helped participants to develop the tools and skills to change inhumane and unjust circumstances in the Project Impact communities.

**Leadership and leadership development.** Participants clearly identified themselves as global leaders engaged in positive social change. The WEL program was consistently shared as an example of the type of leadership development opportunities available at Spelman. According to Dr. Smith, the WEL series is a seven week program
designed to strengthen character, ethical leadership development, understanding of leadership theory and exploration of the core tenants of leadership. Dr. Smith is a Spelman graduate who is very passionate, deliberate and intentional with the WEL program curriculum. Dr. Smith shares the following regarding the WEL program:

The WEL Series provides a leadership curriculum within the concept of a historically Black women’s college. We are descendants of ex-slaves, so it is important to teach young women to be authentic. Authenticity comes from knowing who you are, understanding your history, and understanding the intersections of gender, race, religion, citizenship, etc. I really work to ensure that the program reflects the historical construct of what it means to be Black and a woman. It’s important to maximize the diversity factor for our students so that they understand that when a Black woman walks into a room, she should exhibit the strength and understanding of who she is…a woman who is part of a rich legacy of Black women pioneers and trailblazers. Every student must understand her responsibility to maintain the Spelman legacy of leadership.

The Class of 2014 WEL participants indicated that women apply to the WEL program to engage in a capstone experience that cultivates greater understanding of what it means to be a Black woman, an ethical leader and a social change agent in a global society. In addition, participants consistently discussed being able to see and talk to current students who successfully completed the program, coupled with the opportunity to connect and engage with alumnae as being inspiring to who want to be a part of the WEL program.
Being among a group of students recognized as the crème de la crème of campus leaders is another reason why this program is so very attractive to students.

WEL helped me to realize that I am part of a unique lineage of women, and that we all struggle to become our own distinctive woman. Jaynell further shares that WEL also taught her that it is her responsibility to be her sisters keeper-- to help my sisters succeed.

WEL encouraged participant’s exploration and discussion of what it means to be a feminist and how to recognize and address issues of injustice from a feminist lens, which participants indicated was not important in their home communities prior to arriving at Spelman.

I learned what it meant to be a Black woman, how to lead, how to be an activist and my responsibility to engage in social advocacy. I did a lot of community service, and witnessed a lot of issues. But, now, I understand how to bring about change as an advocate and activist. I have a voice, and I am motivated to be involved in bringing about social change, says Sierra.

The Class of 2014 WEL participants seem to identify a greater understanding of themselves, their personal identity as a Black women who are ethical leaders, in addition to knowing what they stand for, and being responsible and accountable for paying it forward in government, corporate, non-profit, for-profit, public and private sector career and leadership roles.

The Class of 2001-2006 WEL alumnae participants shared a different experience as the program focused more on identity development, ethical leadership development
empowerment, understanding diversity, etiquette and preparation for corporate leadership roles. Consistent with the Class of 2014 WEL participants, being in a program with a diverse group of leaders and being acknowledged as a leader is one of the greatest benefits of being in the program.

According to Tatiana, the experience taught me to work with a diverse group of women. The reason everyone applied might have been different, but we all knew that there was a value in having different types of leaders in the room and learning how to work with them.

Also consistent with the Class of 2014 WEL participants is the idea that the WEL program introduced a theoretical framework for leadership and academic excellence. However, the approach to teaching a leadership framework was completely different.

We participated in LeaderShape where I learned about leadership and integrity. We also went on retreats with Spelman College and Agnes Scott College students. We network with a diverse group of leaders with different leadership skills and areas of expertise. We learned how integrity is at the core of leadership and how it impacts are actions and how we engage with one another. I learned a lot. But I really learned to appreciate and work with people from diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. It was interesting to meet so many other young ladies who were in different majors, says Brandi.

Participants also discussed being exposed to prominent alumnae leaders who teach them what to expect and how to survive in the “real world” prior to graduating from Spelman. They also shared stories about being held participants accountable for being social
change agents with familiar biblical quips that focused on a responsibility to give back to the community. For example, “to whom much is given, much is required,” which is found in Luke 12:48. Thus, more seasoned alumnae talk about a responsibility to be engaged with improving the community and world around you.

Another theme consistent with the Class of 2014 WEL participants is the notion of finding one’s voice, or being able to fearlessly speak up and be heard as a Black woman regarding the direction and focus of your life and engagement in leading social change.

I found my voice at Spelman when I went into the WEL program. It validated that you were supposed to be here at Spelman. I still have my WEL program binder. The WEL program taught me to step back and discover me as a servant who helps others lead. I remember being so touched by the whole experience that I have to do this for other people. Keisha further states, it taught me how to build future leaders.

Finally, the participants in the 2001-2006 WEL programs shared a focus on business etiquette, learning expectations for being in a professional environment, and understanding specific life skills, tips and tricks to survive as a Black woman in corporate America.

In summarizing the major difference between the 2014 WEL participant and 2001-2006 WEL participant experience, one can surmise less of a focus on preparing participants for corporate leadership, and more of a broader focus on preparing women of strong character and ethical citizens who will lead social change beyond the gates of
Spelman College. Moreover, the incorporation of feminist activism is another major
difference in the different generations represented in the participant narratives. The
different educational approaches can be explained by the institutional commitment to
developing the Comparative Women’s Studies major and minor as part of the required
core courses for all students in 1996. In addition, the continued work to infuse feminism
throughout the curriculum and co-curricular experience over a ten year period serves as a
good explanation for the more pronounced feminist perspectives in the Class of 2006 and
2014 WEL participant narratives.

**Faculty and alumnae interaction, mentoring and support.** Participants
discussed Spelman College as a community where there is a strong history and legacy of
sisterhood that permeates the culture, community, curricular, and co-curricular
experience. Many of the participants shared that the Spelman sisterhood becomes a
reality as soon as new students enter the gates of Spelman. More specifically,
contributors to this study discussed being inspired by alumnae who served as an example
of what success looks like and what the future may hold for them upon graduating from
Spelman. In essence, alumnae were perceived as bringing greater context and
perspective to the Spelman experience as they helped participants gain greater
understanding of themselves and the role and experience of Black woman.

We are part of a unique community of Black women leaders who are a force to be
reckoned with. Every sector of Spelman has some form of leadership weaving
through the fabric of curriculum and activities. You can’t escape the institutional
expectation for being an ethical leader and making good decisions. Having
opportunities to connect with alumnae who are global leaders gives us examples of phenomenal women who inspire you to look and act as a global leader. One thing I will never forget is Spelman women are smart, quick and they have voices. Anything you do you have to have urgency and agency for social change, says Simone.

During Kimberly’s interview she very clearly talked about how connecting with alumnae with similar career goals provides a realistic look into the generational styles of leadership, in addition to providing an opportunity to explore what it means to be a Black woman and a leader. Kimberly indicated that the experience with alumnae clarifies and validates the value and uniqueness of the Spelman experience.

Thus, participants say that alumnae validated and/or supported the importance of a place like Spelman as the curriculum and experience provided an opportunity for self-development and exploration of a framework for understanding, recognizing and being able to address various societal issues from a Black feminist-activist leadership perspective with a strong ethical and moral lens. As alumnae, participants are now responsible for serving as the teachers who provide real life lessons and experiences that help students to learn, grow and balance, womanhood, Black identity and care and justice perspectives in their daily lives.

**Summary.** The documented experiences of the participants in this research demonstrates that participants shared expectations for seeking excellence in themselves, paying it forward or giving back to the community and being a part of the Spelman legacy of global leaders. In Chapter 5 I will discuss the shared themes, examine the
findings as related to the research, and review associated limitations and insights for future study.
Chapter 5: Discussion

In this study, I sought to gain an understanding of the character development and ethical leadership development and unique features of the Spelman College experience as illuminated and framed by the combined perspectives and personal reflections of a select group of Black women who participated in the Women of Excellence Leadership (WEL) series as part of the Spelman College experience. The study was informed by Carol Gilligan’s (1977, 1988) theory of women’s development which illustrates that women are more concerned with care, relationships, and connections with other people as they engage in moral and ethical development, and guided by the following research questions: How do students at a historically Black women’s college describe their experiences with character and ethical leadership development? Discussion of the participant’s thoughts about the academic and co-curricular programs that best prepared them to be ethical student leaders is also explored in this chapter.

Introduction to the Discussion of the Findings

Spelman is one of two women’s institutions that maintained its educational mission to support character development and ethical leadership development of women of African descent amid the enrollment challenges and the competing interests of coeducational private, public and two year institutions that offer a diversity of academic programs and co-curricular experiences. The institution is described as “a pioneer in leadership education for Black women” in the 2010-12, Spelman College Bulletin (p. 3).

The research demonstrated that there were various academic programs that exposed students to the concepts of gender injustice across the African Diaspora and the
world. More specifically, there are a set of distinct academic and interactive learning experiences that recognized and celebrated the Black woman in a supportive academic environment. Participants in this study engaged in numerous conversations with faculty and alumnae who served in the civil and human rights movements, in addition to being consistently exposed to oral and written history, some of which are untold stories of social justice initiatives by pioneering women and alumnae. Faculty, some of whom are alumnae, inspired students to be activists engaged in social movements for justice, women’s equality and human rights. According to Dr. M. Bahati Kuumba (2014), Professor of Women’s Studies and Associate Director of the Women’s Research and Resource Center, developing, engaging in and supporting political rallies and protests is part of the intellectual health and fabric of the Spelman College community.

Thus, the shared experiences of participants seems to indicate a living mission and lived educational philosophy that intentionally directs decision making, operations and resources in support of the Spelman College academic mission (Kuh et al., 2005). Even more, the curricular and co-curricular experiences emphasize character development and ethical leadership development as communicated in the Spelman College mission and espoused in learning centered experiences that are shared by faculty, staff, students, and alumnae.

A Civil and Human Rights Legacy

HBCU institutions began with the explicit purpose of providing a quality educational experience for Black students. As such, there were snippets of information shared about the engagement with the civil rights movement as part of the HBCU
experience shared by participants. In truth, exploring concepts of race and oppression have always been critical components of the historically Black college and university curriculum and collegiate experience. This section addresses the sub-theme of the civil and human rights legacy of Spelman College as a historically Black women’s college.

The Atlanta Regional Council on Higher Education reports that historically Black colleges and universities, in particular, institutions in the Atlanta University Center, have always been engaged in the study of race and leading civil rights movements. The city of Atlanta and the Atlanta University Center Consortium, comprised of Clark Atlanta University, the Interdenominational Theological Center, Morehouse College, Morehouse Medical School and Spelman College, has served as the epicenter of many civil and human rights planning and action initiatives. Atlanta and the Atlanta University Center Consortium also served as home to civil rights leaders and former students such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. John Lewis, Ralph David Abernathy and Hosea Williams, and organizations like the NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership that spearheaded many protests and demonstrations against segregation in housing and education, voting rights and inhumane acts against African-Americans in the South (http://www.atlantahighered.org/civilrights/essay_detail.asp?phase=3). Some of the current faculty, staff, and administrators are alumnae and/or individuals who were friends, relatives and/or activists who engaged in the 1960’s and 1970’s civil and human rights movements.

The archival history of Spelman College demonstrates that the institution served as a catalyst for addressing educational inequities and systemic issues of injustice through
various civil and human rights movements. Research by Dugan and Komives (2007) suggests that engaging in conversations across differences, development mentoring relationships, and engaging in distinct programs such as community service enriches campus leaders and leadership programs. As such, character development and ethical leadership development are critical institutional learning outcomes for historically Black colleges and universities. In particular, Spelman College’s commitment to engaging women in community activism and serving the needs of local urban communities is well documented in the history of Spelman College and the Atlanta University Center Consortium. Students and alumnae in this study discuss learning, experiencing and talking about race and gender in a safe environment free from the associated feelings of anger, guilt and the shame of being the minority or the only one who understands and can communicate the experience.

The themes or components of shared expectations among the students and alumnae include seeking excellence in themselves, paying it forward or giving back to the community, and being a part of the Spelman legacy. The vehicle for supporting character development and ethical leadership development in a historically Black women’s college include: (1) an environment of support and expectations for student success; (2) conscious Black feminist-activist development; (3) opportunities to lead and develop as leaders; and (4) faculty and alumnae interaction, mentoring and support. These shared themes are discussed in the following sections.
A Supportive Environment and Expectations for Success

The value of being in a historically Black women’s college environment like Spelman is endorsed by participants as providing a unique opportunity to test personal values and engage in self-authorship. The process of self-authorship and identity development is supported through the learning partnerships with faculty, staff, peers, alumnae and corporate and community leaders who expect students to succeed (Baxter-Magolda, 2004). The reinforcement of the student’s experience comes with an expectation that students will be scholars, leaders, advocates and activists who are civically engaged in their communities and in the world. Reinforcement of the moral and ethical values are also derived from shared student, faculty, staff, and alumnae life experiences and stories of failure, success, and strategies to be and do better (Baxter-Magolda, 2004). Thus, students develop an understanding of self and others. In addition to learning to advance their own identity, students develop voice and agency through the validation of their service and leadership experiences that comes from interacting with and being mentored by faculty, staff, peer advisors and leaders, alumnae, corporate and community partners who view learning as reciprocal and relational (Denise L. Davidson, 2011).

The generations of Spelman women in this study suggest that the environment, academic and co-curricular experiences facilitate and inspire students to lead, find passion and develop moral agency and voice. Feelings of confidence and competency in their academic abilities, being encouraged to think and dream big, having freedom to go anywhere and a belief that they can do and achieve anything are also hallmarks of the
Spelman experience shared in numerous stories (Harwarth et al., 1999). The immediate connection with alumnae and engagement with curriculum and co-curricular experiences helps students to develop a sense of fearlessness as they take a stand on critical community issues. Alumnae share that failure is not an option, rather an opportunity to learn and strengthen leadership competencies and capabilities as they journey to becoming social change agents. In reviewing and analyzing the participant narratives, there were also shared expectations for personal excellence and becoming a part of the Spelman legacy. Personal excellence and becoming a part of the Spelman legacy are discussed as sub-themes in the next two sections to further understand the shared experience of participants in this study.

**Personal excellence.** Engaging in self authorship or learning to know and understand one’s beliefs, values, Black identity and feminist identity in relation to others in an environment free from the perceived negative complexities of race and gender issues is another unique feature of a historically Black women’s college. According to Baxter Magolda (2004) the elements of self-authorship include (1) developing greater self-confidence through learning to trust and understand the internal voice, (2) developing an understanding of personal values and a life philosophy, and (3) trusting one’s internal voice, personal values and life philosophy to guide interactions, life choices and decisions.

Participants describe their undergraduate experience as one with ample opportunities for self-authorship in an environment where faculty, staff and alumni take a personal interest in the success of students. Further, the participants share that the
environment was very nurturing, supportive, friendly and welcoming. Individuals move through the four phases of self-authorship, (1) being defined by authorities and others, (2) struggling to find voice, (3) choosing beliefs and values and learning to balance personal needs and the needs of others environment, and (4) developing an understanding of self, understanding of Black identity and feminist identity (Baxter Magolda, 2004). The personal lived experiences of graduating seniors and alumnae in the study suggest that the undergraduate experiences supports students as they become more self-confident in making life choices and decisions as socially conscious citizens.

**Becoming a part of the Spelman legacy.** While many students come to college to get an education, being immersed in the lived experiences of the graduating seniors and the alumnae participants in this study helped me to further comprehend the value of the Spelman experience. The women explored and expanded their understanding of identity and self, while also enhancing their understanding of the complexities and intersections of being Black and a woman during their undergraduate experience. Being a healthy, intellectual and authentic Black woman leader is reflected in the participant’s stories of self-confidence and self-assuredness and ownership of their academic, personal and professional experiences (Marcia, 1980). Graduates develop their voice, agency and participation as they serve as campus leaders who come to realize that “I am not alone in this journey” as a member of the Spelman sisterhood.

Upon graduating, the National Alumnae Association of Spelman College welcome graduates into a unique legacy of a very special and diverse group of Black women who are required to continue the Spelman leadership legacy. Furthermore,
graduates commit to use their education to “pay it forward” by addressing a diversity of social justice platforms, especially those related to poverty and the oppression of women and children in low-income communities, and opening doors of opportunities for other women leaders.

**Black Feminist and Activist Development in a Collaborative Learning Environment**

College environments represent a set of integrated academic and social experiences that support the College culture and academic mission. The Spelman collegiate environment is perceived to be fairly diverse and competitive as many of the students represent the best and brightest young women African descent who achieved recognition as scholars and leaders from across the nation and world. Participant’s share stories of learning and developing a value and appreciation for the diversity of perspectives and experiences of Black and other women from various regions of the United States and those form international ports such as the Bahamas, Brazil, Burundi, Czech Republic, Cote D’Ivoire, Gambia, Guyana, Japan, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Many of the students and alumnae communicated the importance of race and gender related content being intentionally included in the curriculum, communicated in the mission and institutional values and explored in all aspects of the academic and co-curricular experience. This is consistent with Hersh and Schneider’s (2005) research on fostering personal and social responsibility which indicates the need for a college agenda that reflects pervasive and intentional themes in the culture of the college.
The participants who engaged in domestic exchange and study abroad, as well as the alumnae who graduated and attended predominantly white graduate and law schools or worked in predominantly white environments, discussed the exploration of race and gender as being unique to their Spelman College experience. Having the experience of being in different environments dissimilar in culture to the Spelman experience allowed participants to compare and contrast their Spelman experience with a study abroad, domestic exchange, graduate or law school experience. Some participants shared a clear understanding of diversity and its positive benefits and contributions to personal identity development being in a place like Spelman where there is more than one Black faculty member, course, department, organization or month to address issues of race, gender, oppression and marginalization.

Spelman is described as “a pioneer in leadership education for Black Women” in the 2010-12 Spelman College Bulletin (p. 3). The College offers academic and interactive learning experiences in a supportive environment that celebrates the Black woman. African Diaspora and the World, Comparative Women’s Studies, English, Religious Studies, First-Year Experience course, Honors Program and the Sophomore Year Experience Participants were identified by participants as the courses and programs where they learned to question, analyze and communicate identity development, gender injustice and social justice ideas logically and coherently. The African Diaspora and the World (ADW) course is the only interdisciplinary course that all students must take over a two-semester sequence. The course is noted as “promoting the values and concepts central to Spelman: sisterhood, leadership, a love of learning, sensitivity to cultural
differences and the use of diverse methods of scholarly engagement (http://www.spelman.edu/academics/majors-and-programs/african-diaspora-the-world).”

There were several other shared themes that developed in the course of my interviews with participants, including feminist identity development, nurturing activism, and religious identity development. Therefore, these themes are identified as sub-themes and discussed in the following sections and pages of this research.

**Feminist identity development.** Each participant talked about Spelman College being a safe space where they learned or expanded their understanding of feminism and balancing the negative family and community perspectives of feminism as they sought to define Black feminism for themselves. Discussions about the challenges of being Black, a feminist scholar and activist in a Black community that does not understand or support feminism, perceives feminism as man-hating, too radical or something in which only white women engage were also topics shared by graduating seniors and alumnae.

Adopting a feminist identity can be associated with high self-esteem (Boisner, 2003). As women grow and understand themselves and become comfortable with their understanding of feminism and the complexities and intersectionality of being Black, feminist, and a woman, they learn to balance sometimes being in conflict with one’s own community as race has been the prevailing social justice issue in the Black community.

In many cases, the women in this study, in particular, the graduating seniors, discussed how they discovered their voice in an environment that supports a feminist paradigm. Further, participants learned to understand, acknowledge and develop a sense of freedom from the internal struggles, imperfections, thoughts or things they believed to
be wrong or challenging to their personal growth and development. Contributors also discuss being empowered as Black women and becoming a part of the Spelman legacy and sisterhood from the time of arrival as a first-year student. There is a clearly articulated understanding of one’s personal power, and an overall feeling of being competent, confident and comfortable in one’s role as Black woman leader with a feminist foundation.

Noted feminists and womanists such as Dr. Kimberly Crenshaw (1991), known for her work on Critical Race Theory, and Dr. Johnetta Betsch Cole, former president of Spelman College, and Dr. Beverly Guy Sheftall (2003), founder of the first ever Women’s Research and Resource Center on the Spelman College campus, posited that the experiences and activist efforts of most feminists do not reflect the intersections of race, gender and religion, all of which impact the Black experience. Thus, feminism is perceived as an ideology that appears to divide the community along race and gender lines. This is an internal and actualized struggle represented in the experiences of the participants. Participants shared that they were provided with numerous opportunities to discuss intersections of race, class and gender, in addition to addressing perceived stereotypes of Black and other women.

Thus, Black women in the Spelman community are taught to be feminist and womanist scholars and activists. The women in this study, in particular, those in the Class of 2014, share that the Spelman education requires every student to learn what it means to be a feminist and/or womanist scholar and ethical leader who is a good citizen, whether or not they take ownership and responsibility for immediately integrating these
paradigms in all facets of their lives. Being a feminist is easily understood by participants as being one who serves and uses her voice to address gender inequality, women’s leadership roles, gender stereotyping, equality of opportunities for women, and human rights, specifically, violent acts against women and girls, some of which may put them at odds with their communities as race has been the prevailing social justice issue for Black communities.

**Nurturing activism.** Just as important to the participants is learning through oral and written history of the untold stories of pioneering women and alumnae. Students engage in numerous conversations with faculty and alumnae who served in the civil and human rights movements. Faculty, some of whom are alumnae, inspire students to be activists engaged in social movements for justice, women’s equality and human rights. According to Dr. M. Bahati Kuumba (2014), Professor of Women's Studies and Associate Director of the Women's Research and Resource Center, developing, engaging in and supporting political rallies and protests is part of the intellectual health and fabric of the Spelman College community. Thus, activism is another important factor in understanding student identity development in higher education (Dominguez, 2009).

**Religious identity development.** Some of the participants also reflected on their religious and spiritual engagement before coming to college, and efforts to further enhance their religious and spiritual identity while in college. This is consistent with the Higher Education Research Institute’s (2003) findings in the Spiritual Life of College Students that suggested that “four in five indicate ‘having an interest in spirituality’ and
‘believing in the sacredness of life,’ and two-thirds say that ‘my spirituality is a source of joy (p. 5).

Moulin (2013) suggested that, “over time, the process of understanding oneself to be, or seeking to be recognized, or representing oneself in a particular way, as part of identity negotiation, contributes to religious identity construction—the identification with, rejection of, or partial or full integration, or presentation of elements of religious tradition (or ties with members of that religious tradition) with an individual’s worldview, lifestyle, beliefs, practices (and) actions” (p. 6).

Some participants discuss their engagement with Religious Studies program, housed in the Philosophy and Religious Studies department, as having provided an opportunity to examine the historical, social, and cultural underpinnings of various religious traditions. Participants also talk about being engaged in Sunday Chapel, religious organizations, and other spiritual and co-curricular activities with faculty and alumnae who helped to shape their religious and spiritual identity. Several participants struggled with their religious identity development as they considered student life and career choices. Faculty, staff, alumnae and administrators are perceived as having nurtured participant’s call to ministry and provide participant’s with opportunities to develop the spiritual leader within. One of the participants shared that she was able to embrace her call to be a pastor or minister as a result of the support she received from alumnae and faculty at Spelman.

Thus, participants’ involvement with faculty who encouraged the exploration of “questions of meaning and purpose” and/or opportunities to engage religious and spiritual
organizations, community service and charitable work are consistent with the Higher Education Research Institute’s (2003) findings that suggest that engaging with faculty, interdisciplinary courses, service and service learning, study abroad, reflection and other curricular and co-curricular experiences are likely to impact student’s personal development.

**Opportunities to Become Leaders and Learn About Leadership**

Participants were consistently challenged to think and engage in leadership and leadership development experiences that provided opportunities to explore questions of ethical leadership and understanding the intersections of race, class and gender. An important theme shared by the women in this study is the importance of relationships with alumnae, faculty, staff and peer role models who contributed to a healthy and positive perspective on leadership, Black identity and feminism.

While many women come to Spelman College as leaders, the participants indicate that seeing examples of and engaging with Black women who are leading and serving in fairly significant roles and sharing their personal leadership experiences enhanced their understanding of what it means to be an ethical Black woman leader with an obligation to pay it forward. Students were able to engage in leadership roles in campus organizations such as the Student Government Association, serving as Resident Advisors, by engaging in the Honors Programs and academic clubs such as the Computer Science Club and Chemistry club, and participating in service and service learning initiatives.

Programs that taught participants how to lead as a Black woman were viewed as critical to the participants’ experiences. The Women of Excellence Leadership (WEL)
series was a program consistently shared by participants as having contributed to their overall character development and ethical leadership. WEL is under the umbrella of the Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement (LEADS), and is a strategic initiative that supports the academic, character and leadership development of students as outlined in the mission of the College. The WEL Series is a competitive program that engages up to 35 juniors and seniors in a social change model of leadership, as the program emphasizes civic engagement, social responsibility, ethical leadership, and social change for a just society. According to Dr. Jane Smith (2014), Executive Director of LEADS, the WEL Series is a certificate program designed to cultivate ethical, articulate, and solution orientated students prepared for leadership roles in the global community” (Smith, 2014, http://www.spelman.edu/student-life/leads-at-spelman/women-of-excellence-leadership-series). There have been over 450 participants in the Women of Excellence Leadership series since its inception in 2001.

WEL provided opportunities to engage with Black women and other leaders in learning how to become authentic leaders and ethical leaders. The core leadership values of the program include honor and integrity, academic and personal excellence, community service, social change, and life-long learning. The curriculum includes a review and discussion of feminist theories, leadership theories, and leadership styles.

As I reflect on the shared values of leadership experiences communicated by the participants, there is an underlying theme communicated in this study that suggested that Spelman gives students a chance to develop and understand their identity as Black women leaders and as an ethical leaders in a safe, yet vulnerable place with other women
who look like them and share similar values and experiences. This outcome is consistent with research that demonstrates that leadership experiences provide a laboratory for learning through intentional curricular and co-curricular activities that support the mission of a college (Dalton & Crosby, 2012). The findings are also consistent with Dugan and Komives (2006) research that suggests that student involvement is positively related to student’s personal development in college.

Participants engaged as leaders and had numerous opportunities to participate in leadership development. The importance of alumnae and faculty interaction and mentoring, involvement in community service, and socio-cultural conversations and interactions with peers contributed to the development of listening skills, clarification of personal values and perspectives, and development of personal perspectives on social and political ideologies which is consistent with Dugan and Komives’ (2006) research. Thus, participants experienced self-development or personal development as they tested and reflected on their values and translated their beliefs into the action of leading and serving the college and community (Dugan & Komives, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; & George et al., 2007).

**Faculty and Alumnae Interaction, Mentoring and Support**

Another unique feature of the Spelman College experience is being able to be mentored and supported by faculty and alumnae who look like you and share similar cultural values and experiences. Participants believe that they were positively challenged and empowered by mentors who also served as role models who supported them as they
explored their Black identity and what it means to be a successful and ethical Black woman leader in a safe space.

Campbell, Smith, Dugan, and Komives (2012) suggested that mentoring, in its various forms, enhances leadership development and socially responsible leadership of students in college. Participants in this study discuss a comfort in connecting with alumnae who share their struggles as Black women leaders through classes, lectures, workshops, leadership experiences and alumnae mentoring activities such as History & Traditions, the Induction Ceremony, Women of Excellence Leadership series, Sister-to-Sister Network, Founders Day, and SGA and Alumnae Affairs Spelman on the Hill, Washington, D.C. advocacy program, etc. In addition to being motivated by these experiences, participants discussed feeling supported in an environment where the conversation and experiences were free from judgment, fear, guilt and shame that is often perceived as being a part of the fabric of coeducational, majority serving or predominantly white college and university environments.

My observation is that participants came to Spelman College seeking empowerment, enhanced self-esteem, greater understanding of Black identity and feminist identity, and opportunities to examine and explore their leadership potential (Charmaine Bissessar, 2013). While at Spelman, participants learned the skill of maintaining a healthy outlook on their Black identity and personal values when challenged by people and/or environments that do not necessarily have the same underlying foundation. Spelman, then, is perceived as reinforcing already prescribed values, while also creating a stronger sense of self, identity, values and roles in society
which is described in James Marcia’s (1980) work on identity development. Participants also shared that faculty and alumnae also helped them with career planning and development and encouraged a commitment to paying it forward as part of the Spelman alumnae legacy. The next two sections reflect on career development and paying it forward as sub-themes in this research.

**Career development.** As women engaged in the WEL series they perceived themselves as being among the top campus leaders. Even more, these women acknowledged that they were a part of a legacy of successful alumnae, faculty, staff, community and corporate role models, mentors and big sisters who shared their own personal identity struggles and real life character and ethical leadership dilemmas as related to their careers and balancing personal life experiences. The alumnae and community leaders were fully invested in giving kernels of wisdom and suggestions on how to successfully navigate academic, personal and career leadership issues as a Black woman leader.

Campbell, Smith, Dugan and Komives (2012) suggested that career mentoring focuses on the “socialization to the world of work, networking, and job-oriented skills” (p. 615). In addition, Campbell et al. (2012) further documented that psychosocial mentoring supports self-reflection, the development of coping skills, and challenging oneself to explore new and different experiences. My observation is that mentoring provided alumnae and participants with an opportunity to discuss coping skills necessary to maintaining their identity and values when challenged by people and/or environments that do not necessarily have the same underlying foundation. Spelman, is then, perceived
as enhancing career experiences, while also reinforcing community values and cultural experiences.

**Paying it forward.** Participants shared numerous experiences with civic engagement. Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum, president of Spelman College, has used various phrases throughout her presidency to reflect Spelman’s commitment to civic engagement. Moreover, she often shares what it means to be a Black woman leader with students. President Tatum encouraged students to be “keepers of the flame,” and advocates for human rights as she reflected on the 50th year of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, “I have a Dream” speech, and the role Spelman women played in civil rights movements in her 2013 convocation speech. At the 2014 WEL retreat participants were encouraged by Dr. Tatum to reflect on the “activist flame that is our inheritance.” Thus, volunteering and community service was perceived by participants to be a part of the fabric of Spelman College.

Spelman College integrates service and service learning into the mission and educational philosophy, and further communicates the importance of service in the 2017 Strategic Plan. The Bonner Office of Community Service and Student Development was dedicated to the College in 2004 to infuse service and service learning into the curriculum and co-curricular experiences. The tagline for the office, *“Where Women Enter to Learn and Exit to Serve”* is clearly labeled throughout the office and its literature. The program includes a community scholars living and learning program and various campus service initiatives that help students to develop as community advocates and ethical leaders. The Bonner Office of Community Service and Student Development coordinates the Project
Impact initiative that engages students in community service within a 1.7 mile radius of the College.

Thus, service and service learning are cultural values shared throughout the Spelman community as it is believed that service contributes to student development. “At Spelman, faculty and staff strive to cultivate students who possess a sense of civic consciousness that provokes catalytic change in society” as cited in the first paragraph of the Bonner Office of Community Service and Student Development webpage (http://www.spelman.edu/student-life/leads-at-spelman/bonner-office-of-community-service-and-student-development). Participants in this study engaged in very distinct community service initiatives that provided them with the opportunity to explore socio-cultural issues as part of their leadership experience. Research by Dugan and Komives (2007) suggests that engaging in the exploration of socio-cultural issues contributes to student leadership development.

Participants who graduated in 2004-2014 suggest that they developed a greater understanding of diversity in the Black community, while also learning different life perspectives and understanding of what it means to be a citizen leader engaged in the generosity of service. Participants discussed feelings of being a privileged Black woman as they experienced the oppression of others through community service. Moreover, they learned to use the power of their own life experiences to advocate for social equity and community development as they served students and communities that are perceived to be far less fortunate than the average Spelman student.
Jois and Topp (2005) examined voting and volunteering as measures of social capital in their paper, *Civic Engagement Among American Youth: Research, Activism, and Democracy*. Their research demonstrates a degree of apathy as students or individuals in the age range of 18-24 are likely to vote less, “listen to violent, misogynistic music,” and heavily engaged in social media or technology (p. 1). Community service or volunteering where their efforts have a direct impact or provide direct service to a community is of greater interest to this demographic (Jois & Topp, 2005, p. 5). The authors of this research seem to suggest that community service or volunteering is this generation’s way of being activists engaged in positive change, rather than voting in an election that is not perceived to be ineffective in addressing solutions to community challenges.

Dalton and Crosby (2010) suggested that community service and service learning “...deepen students’ awareness of community problems” and enhances their “...capacity for caring and compassion” as related to the well-being of others (p. 4). Engagement in community service and/or serving as a leader on and/off campus helped participants in this study to enhance their personal, character development and ethical leadership experiences as they began to identify, understand and address the needs of others in the community. It is through these experiences that participants develop voice, agency and a direct role in bettering the experiences of women, children and others in underprivileged and underserved communities.
The final lesson that participants say that they learned is one of paying it forward through giving, service to community, committing to positive social change, and opening doors of opportunities for women and for a diversity of people.

Theory Guiding the Study

Carol Gilligan on women’s development. Exploring Black women’s character development and ethical leadership development at Spelman College was the focus of this study. The research was framed by Gilligan’s (1977, 1988) work on women’s development which illustrates that women are more concerned with care, relationships, and connections with other people as they engage in moral and ethical development. Gilligan’s (1977) work suggested that women progress from the initial level of “individual survival” (p. 492) to “goodness as self-sacrifice” (p. 496), or caring primarily for others (second level), and finally to “morality of non-violence” (p. 504), an integration of concern for the needs of both self and others (third level). Thus, care, in accordance with Gilligan’s (1977) theory on moral development, is defined as demonstrating feelings of “empathy and compassion” (p. 490) for self and others.

I approached the use of Carol Gilligan’s theory of women’s conception of self and morality as an opportunity to reflect on the experiences of the women in this study and as a method of guiding and developing the meaning and essence of their experiences with character development and ethical leadership development (Moustakas, 1994). The experiences of the participants suggested that women’s lives are very much based on interpersonal relationships when seeking to address or negotiate moral and ethical dilemmas faced throughout their collegiate leadership experiences (Gilligan, 1977, p.
More specifically, women’s character development and ethical development is very closely tied to empathy and compassion for others as they seek to resolve the ethics of social inequality, oppression, systemic injustice and inhumanity faced throughout their collegiate experience, whether their own personal experience or the experiences of those helped through community service.

The participants in this study indicated that being in a place like Spelman College built just for Black women and/or women of African descent provided them with a critical education to be able to ask questions, analyze arguments and communicate ideas as feminist activists and women of impact who are willing to use their voice to address systemic injustice and social inequality, especially as evidenced through racism and sexism in local and national communities. As such, the women in this study very clearly reflect on their leadership and community service and leadership development experiences as advocates and activists engaged in the “morality of non-violence” as they voiced concerns for the education and economic despair of those in local urban communities.

Thus, Gilligan’s theory of women’s development is reflected in this study as participants moved from goodness as self-sacrifice of time, intellect, talent and, in some case, physical strength in helping others in need. Engaging as leaders bringing about positive social change helped participants to integrate their concern for the needs of others and themselves. In addition, participants expanded their knowledge, understanding and skill in addressing social justice questions and concerns. The value and importance of relationships with Spelman sisters, alumnae, faculty and community
leaders supports Gilligan’s (1977, 1988) theory that women are more concerned with care, relationships, and connections with other people as they engage in moral and ethical development.

**James Marcia on identity development.** As I engaged in the analysis of the participants’ experience, identity development was a recurring theme that I thought was important to include as part of the conceptual framework. Identity development is critical to vocational direction (John Holland, 1985, 1992). College is a time when students learn who they are as they experiment and test prescribed values and engage in new behaviors (Dalton & Crosby, 2006). College experiences such as the engaging with a diverse curriculum, opportunities for leadership and faculty and alumnae interaction, mentoring and support provide opportunities to teach ethical values such as honor, integrity, compassion, fairness and respect (Dalton & Crosby, 2006).

James Marcia (1980) identity status theory supports the notion that college is a time when values and choices are being re-examined. It is a time where the end outcome of undergraduate study leads to commitment to one’s identity, values and roles in society. Further, identity is determined by the academic, personal, social and career choices and commitments one makes while in college (Marcia, 1980).

Many of the participants in this study discuss identity development as a set of “values and ideals” and having developed a clearer “vocational” direction (Marcia, 1980). The participants discussed the collegiate experience as contributing to a well-developed identity, and a sense of personal excellence through the understanding of their
own uniqueness, strengths, weaknesses, what it means to have voice and agency or understanding how to impact positive social change (Marcia, 1980).

In review and analysis of Marcia’s identity status theory, it was important to expand upon Black identity development as explained by Cross Model of Psychological Nigrescence (1995). The following section addresses Black identity development as it is a critical theme shared by participants in this study.

**Black identity development.** Prior to Spelman, almost all the students and alumnae shared limited discussions and experiences with exploring what it means to be a Black woman, a leader, and a feminist in racialized and non-racialized settings. Spelman is perceived as providing the first safe place to discuss being a Black woman leader, stereotypes of Black and other minority women leaders, and feelings of marginalization in an activist community. Being in an environment where students are free to be themselves and talk about historic and current gender and racial constructs and movements at Spelman College helped participants to engage in self-authorship as they developed their own sense of self and discovered voice, agency and participation which helped them to better frame an understanding of their role in the continued struggle for equality and economic participation.

The Cross Model of Psychological Nigrescence (1995) describes identity development in the five sequential stages of Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization and Internalization-Commitment. In the pre-encounter phase, race is not perceived to be important which is consistent with participants in this study. Coming to a racialized space like Spelman College, for many participants, represented
the encounter phase that forced participants to realize their desire to better understand their Black identity in a community built just for Black women, and one with such a significant role in the civil rights movement.

Participants discussed immersion in and study of Black culture as being prevalent in the environment and curriculum at Spelman and throughout the Atlanta University Center Consortium which includes Morehouse College, Morehouse Medical School, Clark Atlanta University and the Interdenominational Theological Center. This extends into the city of Atlanta, Georgia, which has its own unique role in the civil rights movement. Experiences with other racial and ethnic groups were limited, except as initiated by an academic program or co-curricular activity. Participants talk about developing an understanding and appreciation for their history and the fight to maintain the Black identity and experience, which gave some participants a greater sense of responsibility to their communities. Cross (1995) refers to this phase as Immersion/Emersion.

As participants engaged with other Black students, faculty, staff, alumnae and in the study of race, in particular, the Black experience and experience of Black women, they became more comfortable with their understanding of themselves and their own life experiences, which Cross (1995) refers to as internalization in the Cross Model of Psychological Nigrescence. Participants also engaged in addressing Black and other low income and urban community issues which helped them to develop a greater understanding and appreciation of the community issues and an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences and how those experiences have shaped their identity as a Black
woman. This final stage is known as internalization-commitment in the Cross Model of Psychological Nigrescence.

Overall, the participants come to understand Black identity first-hand through personal experiences with peers, faculty, staff, alumnae who look like them and share similar experiences in the communities in which they live, lead, serve and engage in community service and service learning initiatives.

**Summary**

In sum, the findings in this study are also consistent with Mayhew et al. (2012) who concluded that “…at the heart of developmental gains in moral reasoning lie good teaching, prompt feedback, quality faculty interactions with students, and challenging pedagogies that force students to integrate ideas, information and experiences” (p. 25). The Spelman academic experience is described by participants as supporting their development of voice, agency and participation as activists in the pursuit of social justice.

Even more, student movements, peaceful assemblies and protests are a part of the student experience that creates opportunities for further discussion and debate of the issues of injustice, inhumanity, and other social concerns. In keeping with the general character of women’s colleges, participants were encouraged to become a part of the legacy of women who lead and used their voice to speak for others and bring about positive social change (Harwarth et al., 1999).

**Policy and Practice Insights**

This study provided insights into the character development and ethical leadership development practices and efforts to help students live more purposeful lives (Dalton &
Crosby, 2010). It goes without saying that every college and university endeavors to incorporate curriculum, programs and activities to address the personal development of students in an academic setting. This study has implications for various co-educational settings as many colleges and universities seek to be egalitarian spaces free from oppressive conditions. In particular, there are numerous implications for institutional leaders who are aware of the challenging experiences of underrepresented student communities, and seeking ways to address the needs of these unique populations.

It is recommended that colleges and universities continue to emphasize character development and ethical leadership development as core components of the mission. It is further recommended that institutions consider an integrated and holistic approach to character development and ethical leadership development. This is based on the literature review and findings of this study that indicate that character development and ethical leadership development require engagement with socio-cultural issues, a diverse faculty and curriculum, and co-curricular experiences that infuse mentoring and civic engagement into campus leadership experiences (Dugan & Komives, 2007).

In addition, this study provides insights into the importance of developing distinct leadership programs for women to engage as campus leaders (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Moreover, colleges and universities should consider creating safe spaces for women, in addition incorporating curriculum elements that explore socio-cultural conversations on race, class, and gender to engage students in “leadership learning and meaningful conversations” (Dugan and Komives). Developing educational practices that create safe spaces and curriculum that supports students feeling comfortable are also policy insights
from this study designed to help students grow and develop into their “more genuine self” (Shavers & Moore, 2014).

This study also identifies community service, civic engagement and activism as contributing to the character development and ethical leadership of students. Colleges and universities should consider engaging students in more community service and activism. According to Dugan and Komives (2006), faculty interaction and mentoring, involvement in community service, and socio-cultural conversations and interactions with peers contributes to the development of listening skills, clarification of personal values, and development of personal perspectives on social and political ideologies.

Finally, the research also demonstrates the importance of having a diverse and supportive faculty and staff. Colleges and universities should consider recruiting diverse faculty who teach race, gender and feminist scholarship to actively engage all students in the coeducational community. A diverse faculty, curriculum and co-curricular experience serves to enhance students knowledge and experience with issues of race, class and gender that are core socio-cultural components of character development and ethical leadership development (Johnston, 2014).

Ideally the research will generate much conversation on college and character development. The rich data yielded in this study should inform these discussions, and encourage further clarification of campus programs and services that provide an integrated and holistic approach to character development and ethical leadership development.
Study Limitations

Currently, there is only one other qualitative study that looks at character development and character education at a historically Black college that was published by Mobley (2010). While this study provides thematic insights on Black women’s character development and ethical leadership development, it is limited in its scope and application. According to Yin (1994), Patton (2002) and Merriam (1998), a case study is designed to be an intensive study and analysis of a phenomenon within its real life context. This study is focused on the personal lived experiences with character development and ethical leadership development of a select group of Black women who have participated in the Women of Excellence Leadership series as part of the Spelman College experience.

As such, the study may be limited as it provides experiences from a singular institution and a select group of Black women who have participated in the Women of Excellence Leadership series. The study is also conducted by a single researcher, which can be perceived as leading to bias in the data collection. Moreover, the data collected on this select group of Black women cannot be generalized to a larger population or to other colleges and universities.

The selection of participants for this study was narrowed to 10 student leaders and 8 alumnae of the Women of Excellence Leadership (WEL) series. The contact information was provided for all current and previous WEL participants, and a letter requesting participation in the study was mailed. As such, participants self-selected to participate in this study. Interviews were conducted with graduating seniors after the close of the 2014 Spring semester in May, and with alumnae in the month of June 2014.
Member checking was a bit of a challenge as only a few of the participants responded. However, I am confident that I captured the experiences of the participants as I digitally recorded the information, took copious notes, and had great transcription of the data to assist with accurately reporting the data rich experiences of participants.

Given that Spelman is a selective liberal arts institution, the background and experiences of the students and alumnae in this study and the competitiveness of the Women of Excellence Leadership series, one could infer that the participants already had strong character, and perceived themselves to be ethical leaders. The findings of this study supports character development and ethical leadership development as being formed prior to students entering college, but also demonstrates that personal values are tested and strengthened through the engagement with curricular and co-curricular experiences during the time of enrollment at Spelman College.

Finally, while I perceive that my role as Dean of Students and overall personal and professional experiences enabled me to be a better researcher engaged as an observer, interviewer, facilitator, interpreter, and reporter of themes and perspectives on the topic of character development and ethical leadership development, there may be some perceived researcher bias in the data collection that limits the scope and application of this study. Patton (2002) stated that “reflexivity” (p. 64) emphasizes the importance of self-awareness. Reflecting on the character development and ethical leadership development experiences of Black women is closely related to my own personal interests and professional work.
Therefore, it is important to be true to the ideas and the perspectives of those studied, as I operate from the emic perspective, or insider’s perspective of being a student affairs administrator (Patton, 2002). As such, it was important to me to provide an unbiased description of graduating senior and alumnae experiences with character development and ethical leadership development, and to engage faculty and student affairs peers in the review of the data and research outcomes to ensure the integrity of the information presented.

**Future Research**

My research was limited to a select group of Black women who have participated in the Women of Excellence Leadership series as part of the Spelman College experience. I believe the representation of the experiences of students in historically Black college and university settings will add to the diversity of literature on character development.

The data from the research identified areas future studies on character development. Distinct women’s leadership development programs represent an area of consideration for future studies. The Women of Excellence Leadership series is a program for upperclass women. There is value in learning more about the character development and ethical leadership development experiences of first-year and sophomore students in historically Black college and university (HBCU) settings. Future research should be conducted on the character development and ethical leadership development experiences of first-year and sophomore students in HBCU and other college and university settings to better inform institutional practices.
Mayhew et al. (2010) suggested that “gender, race, verbal ability, motivation, political orientation, entering levels of moral reasoning or course-taking behaviors, at the heart of reported developmental gains in moral reasoning lie good teaching, prompt feedback, quality faculty interactions with students, and challenging pedagogies that force students to integrate ideas, information and experiences outside the classroom” (p. 25). There were clear socioeconomic, gender and religious dynamics evidenced in this study. Further research should be conducted on the impact of gender, race, socioeconomic status, political orientation on character development and ethical leadership of students in various educational settings.

This study was limited to a historically Black women’s college setting. Women’s development in other collegiate spaces is also a good topic for future research studies. Applying Carol Gilligan’s theory on women’s development in other historically Black colleges and universities, women’s institutions, and co-educational institutions will also expand the available literature on character development and the impact of curriculum, campus experiences, faculty, staff and alumni relationships, mentoring and role modeling experiences contribute to women’s personal, ethical and identity development in coeducational and non-racialized collegiate environments.

The research also identifies the significant role that Black alumnae, faculty and peers play in character and ethical leadership development. Further research is needed to understand faculty perceptions of their role and the impact of environment on character development and ethical leadership development. Finally, further research is suggested
to understand the alumnae generational perceptions of character development and ethical leadership development as this may also have implications for institutional practices.

**Conclusion**

This study chronicles the experiences with character development and ethical leadership development of 10 graduating seniors and 8 alumnae of the Women of Excellence Leadership (WEL) series as part of the Spelman College experience. The study demonstrated the importance of supportive college environments that contribute to Black women’s shared expectations for seeking excellence in themselves, paying it forward or giving back to the community, and being a part of a strong sisterhood and institutional legacy. Elizabeth Whitt (1993) suggests that women’s colleges provide a unique experience for women’s leadership development in a paper entitled, *I Can Be Anything!: Student Leadership in Three Women’s Colleges* presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education.

This study documents how a historically Black women’s college supports the character development and ethical leadership development needs of Black women. The overall question is one that reflects the impact of college on character development and ethical development of Black women. One of the major themes of the college experience is developing personal excellence as influenced by the exposure to the various collegiate influences such as engaging learning experiences that celebrate the Black woman, a safe place to develop as a Black feminist and Black woman leader, and opportunities to engage as a leader and activist. Participants demonstrated that they had numerous
opportunities to develop their Black identity as they were surrounded by people who look like them and engaged in experiences that reflect their culture and heritage.

The study also demonstrated participant’s strong desire to be a part of the Spelman legacy and to connect with supportive alumnae faculty and staff who welcomed participants into the sisterhood and provided support for their academic, personal, and career journey. Finally, paying it forward or giving back is the final shared theme revealed in this study. Participants shared numerous experiences with civic engagement and activism that had an impact on their overall identity and development of their voice and overall passion for leading.

The research indicates a systematic approach to character development and ethical leadership development that has influenced the way in which I approach my work in student affairs. I better understand my role as an educator, leader, role model and mentor to women and girls. In addition, I have a healthier perspective on the enduring mission of character development, how colleges manage to put all the pieces together to teach character development and ethical leadership, and how we inspire civic engagement and social change with students. Engaging in this research experience has also brought about a greater understanding, appreciation and value for historically Black colleges and universities and women’s colleges whose unique mission supports identity development and greater understanding of oneself and one’s passion and gifts to the college, community and world.
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Appendix A: Human Informed Consent

You have agreed to participate in a research study on the ways in which Black women engage in character development and ethical leadership development in an HBCU environment. The process of informed decision-making by research subjects generally includes signing the written informed consent document. The goal is to ensure that informed decision-making by subjects participating in its research activities.

Name of Student Researcher: Kimberly M. Ferguson
Title of Project: Exploring Character Development and Ethical Leadership Development at Spelman College

I am asking your voluntary participation in my dissertation research project. Please carefully review the information to determine your commitment to participating in the study.

Purpose of the Project
The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe Black women’s personal lived experience with character development and ethical leadership development at America’s oldest historically Black college for women, Spelman College.

Your Role as a Participant
As a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview designed to explore your lived experiences with character development and ethical leadership at Spelman College. The total time required for your participation in this study is no more than 1 hour.

Potential Risks and Discomforts
As part of the Spelman College and Ohio University IRB processes, the researcher is requested to identify and address the risks of harm or discomfort to which subjects may be exposed as they participate in the proposed research. The design of the research is such that all risks are minimized as much as possible, and that any remaining risks are clearly identified to participants below so that they may make an informed choice about whether or not to participate in the research.

The potential risks include:
1. The research may ask questions regarding your campus experience as related to character development and ethical leadership development. As a result, you may experience varying degrees of emotion ranging from happiness to sadness as you reflect on your personal growth and development during your undergraduate career.
2. Any data and other information provided will be recorded and coded to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of all participants.
3. The decision to participate is strictly voluntary.
Benefits
Although knowledge creation is a core value of research, the benefits of this research to the higher education community are great in number. Colleges and universities actively encourage the dissemination of research results as widely as possible, especially to those who will benefit most from them. Participants who engage in this study will contribute to the limited research on Black women’s character development and ethical leadership development in an HBCU setting. Participants will also contribute to the understanding of campus academic and co-curricular programs as the research outcomes will assist with identifying ways in which practitioners can engage with students via educational programs on character and ethical decision-making.

Confidentiality and Records
The researcher guarantees complete confidentiality and absolute protection of identity of all participants. Each survey will be returned to a research investigator and numerically coded and will not require any identification beyond general demographics. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and holds not negative consequences. Please be aware that you may disengage at any time. You also have the option of not answering specific questions. With your permission, all interviews will be digitally recorded and destroyed at the conclusion of the study in August 2014.

Compensation
There will be no compensation for your participation in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the College. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Kimberly M. Ferguson at (614) 557-6021 or via e-mail at kfergu15@spelman.edu. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University at (740) 593-0664; and/or Dr. Carmen Sidbury, Associate Provost for Research, at Spelman College at 404-270-5706.

Signature Verification of Voluntary Participant Consent
By signing this form, I attest that I am 18 years of age or older and have read and understand the aforementioned consent form information. I have also been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered, and understand that my participation is this research is completely voluntary and that I may leave the study at any time. If I decide to end my participation in this study, there will be no penalty and I will not lose any benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I freely give my consent to participate in this research study.

SIGNATURE VERIFICATION

Printed Name of Participant_____________________________________________________

Signature of Participant_________________________________________________________

Date________________________
Appendix B: Character Development & Ethical Leadership Development Interview

This phenomenological study will explore the relationship between Black women’s character development and ethical leadership development at a small, private, historically Black college for women located in the southeastern region of the United States. This study will give voice to and recognition of student experiences and understanding of character development and ethical leadership development at HBCUs that are not currently part of the literature and major discussions on college and character.

1. Why did you choose Spelman College? How did the mission of the College influence your choice to attend?

2. What are the primary values you believe your parents/guardians instilled in you while growing up?

3. What characteristics define a student leader?

4. What characteristics contribute to ethical-decision making?

5. How would you describe the relationship between your character and your leadership?

6. What is the relationship between a student leader’s character and ethical leadership?

7. How do students learn to be ethical leaders? What academic and/or co-curricular programs contributed to your development as an ethical leader at Spelman College?

8. How do students learn ethical decision-making? What academic and/or co-curricular programs contributed to your ability to engage in ethical decision making?

9. How does a student’s participation in leadership positions enhance their ability to engage in ethical decision-making?

10. Overall, how do you think the collegiate environment in which women lead or learn to lead has affected student’s character development and ethical leadership development?
Appendix C: Written Document Analysis

1. TYPE OF DOCUMENT:
   □ Archival Document
   □ Book
   □ Memorandum
   □ Newspaper
   □ Press Release
   □ Speech
   □ Student Handbook
   □ Undergraduate Bulletin

2. DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT:

3. AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT:

4. POSITION (TITLE):

5. FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN?

6. DOCUMENT INFORMATION

   A. What are three points the author wrote that you think are important?

   B. Why do you think this document was written?

   C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written?

Adapted from the Written Document Analysis Worksheet designed and developed by the Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration.
Appendix D: Spelman College Letter of Cooperation

Spelman College
A Choice to Change the World

VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS
PHONE: 404-270-5138
FAX: 404-270-5137

LETTER OF COOPERATION

May 28, 2014

Ohio University
1 Ohio University
Athens, OH 45701

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great pleasure that I write in support of Kimberly M. Ferguson who is a doctoral student desiring to conduct a phenomenological case study at Spelman College. It is my understanding that Ms. Ferguson’s research will describe Black women’s personal lived experiences with character development and ethical decision making at Spelman College, America’s oldest historically Black college for women.

Ms. Ferguson has worked with the Dr. Jane Smith to develop her dissertation proposal as the Women of Excellence in Leadership Series (WELS) program outcomes have not been formally documented since the inception of the program in the 2011-2012 academic year. We are particularly excited about her efforts to expand the limited research available on the experiences of our students as civically engaged leaders.

I look forward to Kimberly M. Ferguson completing her research and dissertation as I believe it will be a wonderful opportunity for us to share the success of our programs, in addition to further enhancing other leadership and ethical development opportunities available to students at Spelman College.

Sincerely,

Darnita Killian, Ed.D.
Vice-President for Student Affairs
e-mail: dkillian@spelman.edu
Phone: (404) 270-5138
May 28, 2014

Ohio University
1 Ohio University
Athens, OH 45701

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great pleasure that I write in support of Kimberly M. Ferguson who is a doctoral student at Ohio University who has expressed interest in conducting a phenomenological case study at Spelman College. It is my understanding that Ms. Ferguson’s research will describe Black women’s personal lived experiences with character development, ethical decision making and leadership at Spelman College, America’s oldest historically Black college for women.

Ms. Ferguson has worked with me to develop her dissertation proposal which will formally document the leadership experiences of the Class of 2014 Women of Excellence in Leadership Series (WELS) and the experiences of the 2001-2004 alumnae participants of the program. This is much needed research that will provide a much needed information regarding the success of the program which was formed in the 2011-2012 academic year. We are particularly excited about her efforts to expand the limited research available on the experiences of Black women as civically engaged global leaders.

I look forward to Kimberly M. Ferguson completing her research and dissertation as I believe it will be a wonderful opportunity for us to share the success of our programs, in addition to further enhancing other leadership and ethical development opportunities available to students at Spelman College.

Sincerely,

Jane Smith
Jane Smith, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Center for Leadership and Civic Engagement
Appendix F: Ohio University IRB Approval

A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 2: research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

Project Title: Exploring the Relationship Between Black Women’s Character and Ethical Leadership Development at Spelman College

Primary Investigator: Kimberly Michelle Rodger-Ferguson

Co-Investigator(s):

Advisor: Peter Mather

Department: Counseling and Higher Education

Robin Stack, CIP, Human Subjects Research Coordinator
Office of Research Compliance

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
Appendix G: Ohio University IRB Approval

SPELMAN COLLEGE
IRB RISK APPLICATION APPROVAL

From: Karen Brakke/Psychology/Spelman
To: Chandra Chambliss/Spelman@Spelman, kfergu15@spelman.edu
Date: 06/13/2014 04:38 PM
Subject: IRB Risk Application (#480491) Approved

Co-Chair - Karen Brakke has approved your application for IRB Minimum Risk (#480491) with the following comments:

The Spelman IRB has approved your proposed research project, Exploring the Relationship Between Black Women’s Leadership, Character and Ethical Decision-Making at Spelman College” for the period of one year. A letter of approval will follow. If any substantial changes are made to the protocol, they must be approved by the IRB. Please include a mention of Spelman IRB approval in any recruitment materials. Also, please send the IRB approval from Ohio University for our files once it is secured (send to irb@spelman.edu) Best of luck with your project.

Please follow the doclink below.

Web Link >>
http://princess1.spelman.edu/irb.nsf/IRBProposals/01F9792814F7CA4285257CED00480491?EditDocument
OR Lotus Notes Document link >> Notes Link