Bridging Race and Deafness: Examining the First-year Experiences of Black Deaf Students at a Predominately White Hearing College

Mary Karol Matchett
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Abstract
Despite increasing enrollment of Black deaf college students in recent decades, graduation rates have not improved. This study clarifies Black deaf students’ experiences and highlights strategies that facilitate student persistence in college. This qualitative phenomenological study used a triangulated method of data collection to enhance credibility and gain participant trust. It included demographic surveys and in-depth interviews supplemented by field notes. After data analysis, findings were identified based on Tinto’s student integration theory (1993). Three major themes are identified, including Peer Connectedness, which participants considered the most important factor in Black deaf student retention; Defining Black Deaf Identity, which considered the unique challenges Black deaf students face in defining their own identities; and Strategies that Support Black Deaf Students in College, which identified skills some Black deaf students use to navigate academic and social challenges, addressing implications for professional practices of educators. Recommendations are made for future research.

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Bridging Race and Deafness: Examining the First-year Experiences of Black Deaf
Students at a Predominately White Hearing College

By

Mary Karol Matchett

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the Requirements for the degree
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by
Dr. Jeannine Dingus-Eason

Committee Member
Dr. Susan Schultz

Ralph C. Wilson Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College

May 2013
Dedication

My big gratitude goes to God, who has been with me during this journey. This study is dedicated to my late mother, Marna Kay McCarthy and my father, Richard J. McCarthy. They have taught me so much about God, life, and most importantly, their involvement in my life and education journey. I love you both.

To my family, especially my husband, Douglas S. Matchett, who has been my steadfast ‘rock’ during this process. The ongoing love, support and encouragement you give me every day is the reason for this accomplishment. This truly meant a lot to me, I love you. Thanks to my son and daughter, Scott D. and Kara L. Matchett, for giving me the unwavering support for continuing my education. I love you both very much.

Last, I wanted to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Jeannine Dingus-Eason, and my committee member, Dr. Susan Schultz, whom I am honored to have, for giving their invaluable time and commitment to work with me during my journey. Thank you for being you.
Biographical Sketch

Mary Karol Matchett, is the director of Career Exploration Studies at National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology. Mrs. Matchett attended Rochester Institute of Technology from 1985 to 1988 and graduated with a Bachelor degree of Social Work. In 1989, she received a Masters of Social Work degree at Syracuse University. In the summer of 2010, she began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College. Under the direction of Dr. Jeannine Dingus-Eason and Dr. Susan Schultz, Mrs. Matchett pursued her research in Black Deaf students’ perception of their first year college experiences.
Abstract

Despite increasing enrollment of Black deaf college students in recent decades, graduation rates have not improved. This study clarifies Black deaf students’ experiences and highlights strategies that facilitate student persistence in college.

This qualitative phenomenological study used a triangulated method of data collection to enhance credibility and gain participant trust. It included demographic surveys and in-depth interviews supplemented by field notes. After data analysis, findings were identified based on Tinto’s student integration theory (1993).

Three major themes are identified, including Peer Connectedness, which participants considered the most important factor in Black deaf student retention; Defining Black Deaf Identity, which considered the unique challenges Black deaf students face in defining their own identities; and Strategies that Support Black Deaf Students in College, which identified skills some Black deaf students use to navigate academic and social challenges, addressing implications for professional practices of educators. Recommendations are made for future research.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2006), the Commission on the Future of Higher Education reported that about 90% of the fastest growing jobs in the information and service economy require a college education. A college education provides a channel to future career opportunities for students and boosts the U.S. economy by producing people who are educated and employable citizens (Ishitani, 2006). The attrition of students during the first year of college can derail them from achieving opportunities to secure salaried jobs that can create financial stability, and may affect their quality of life (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Rawlings, 1994, Schroedel & Geyer, 2001). The number of dropouts in two-year and four-year colleges and universities across the nation continues to increase as one out of every three students leaves her studies without completing a degree (NCES, 2007; Terenzini 1987; Tinto, 1987, 1993).

Higher education institutions have attempted to respond to first-year attrition with the implementation of programs intended to improve academic and social skills. Freshman seminars, learning communities, tutoring services, and academic advising are examples of programs intended to support the retention of newly arrived students, but they have been only partly successful (Astin, 1975, 1984, 1993; Alexander & Gardner, 2009; Bean, 2001; Braxton & Mundy, 2001; Brown, D’Emidio-Caston, & Benard, 2001; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 2006). These first-year academic interventions are often implemented to address gaps that may exist in first-year students’ academic preparation and they provide multiple
opportunities for positive social experiences on campus (Barefoot, Gardner, Cutright, Morris, Schroeder, Schwartz, Seigel, & Swing, 2005; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004).

Many colleges and universities in the U.S. have implemented summer transition academic programs for first-year students in an attempt to improve retention (Hawley & Harris, 2005; Palmer, O’ Kane, & Owens, 2009; Woosley & Miller, 2009). Alternatively, many first-year college students participate during their first fall term in similar transition experiences as a way of connecting with the institution as soon as they arrive on campus. In some universities and colleges, freshman seminar courses are offered across two full terms while others only offer them once in the fall term (Barefoot, et al., 2005; Bean & Eaton, 2001; Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Tinto, 1993). Freshman seminars, commonly called first-year seminars, are small, interactive courses designed to assist first-year students in developing basic academic and social management skills. Also, freshman seminars help first-year students to become familiar with the college environment, and to experience a personalized learning experience with good instructor-student interaction (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993; Wilmer, 2008).

Learning communities are one of the other academic intervention approaches used in many universities or colleges during the first academic year. Students who have low American College Test (ACT) and COMPASS scores in reading, writing, and math, are often grouped in learning communities (Wilmer, 2009) that offer a tailored, interlinked, and active-collaborative curriculum for first-year college students (Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolff, 1986; Tinto, 1994, 1996). In institutions that offer such learning communities, first-year students participate in similar small group discussion sessions in conjunction
with the freshman seminar, and English and math courses. The social engagement of first-year students is enhanced by the shared, collaborative learning experiences among students, faculty, and staff across the curriculum (Braxton, Milem, Sullivan, 2000; Stevenson, Buchanan, & Sharpe, 2006; Tinto, 2003). With strong social engagement, there is a better chance for students to achieve good academic outcomes that encourage them to persist in attaining a college degree (Astin, 1984; Bean, 2001; Bean & Eaton, 2001; Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Braxton & Mundy, 2001; Burgette & Magun-Jackson, 2008; Terenzini, Rendon, Urcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, & Jalomo, 1994; Tinto, 2000).

Studies have documented some success as a result of these efforts. For example, the research on summer bridge programs highlights that first-year students’ exposure to such programs prior to starting the fall semester helps resolve gaps in academic preparation (Hunter, 2006; Stephens, 2001; Wilmer, 2008). In many higher education institutions, summer bridge programs lasting two to four weeks provide workshops for first-year students who come from a variety of academic and social backgrounds to learn about coping tools they can use in and out of the classroom. Such programs expand opportunities for new students to assimilate academically and socially within the institution more quickly, and familiarize them with the college environment as they live in the dormitory and mingle with other students on campus (Walpole, Simmerman, Mack, Mills, Scales, & Albano, 2008). Also the academic and personal development offered through summer bridge interactive group activities enables first-year students to increase their understanding and awareness about financial aid, how to deal with
conflicts, and ways to establish and commit to goals before college classes start (Stolle-McAllister, Sto. Domingo & Carrillo, 2011; Wilmer, 2008).

Ongoing student affairs programming is another approach many colleges in the United States offer for first-year students with the goal of promoting a smooth transition so that they feel truly a part of the college environment. Weekly workshops containing helpful strategies for succeeding academically, and student cultural events such as honoring the history and cultures of different racial and ethnic groups, are examples of student affairs programs (Braxton & Mundy, 2001). Learning about institutional policies and practices, student organizations and clubs, and other available resources on campus are some of the topics offered at the workshops (Alexander & Gardner, 2009; Astin, 1975, 1984, 1993; Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Williamson, 2007). The motives for such programming are to provide first-year college students with full exposure to the institutional culture, to enhance their social networking skills, and to help them become members of the institution (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). The visibility of a multicultural staff also helps first-year college students from diverse backgrounds to feel that they are valued, and to encourage them to stay in college and complete their degrees (Rendon, Jaloma, & Nora, 2000; Williamson, 2007).

Another retention strategy reported in research findings is the early alerts system, a communication tool used by faculty in many higher education settings. In these systems, faculty notify first-year students via email about low test grades or other academic concerns, with the goal of intervening before problems gets too big to manage (Barefoot, Gardner, Cutright, Morris, Schroeder, Schwartz, Siegel & Swing, 2005; Wilmer, 2008). The first-year student’s chairperson and academic advisor both are copied
on the email and this allows them to follow up with students immediately. Fifty-seven percent of higher education institutions in the U.S. currently use an early alert system as a way to remove the obstacles that prevent first-year students from succeeding academically, especially during the beginning of the fall term (Hobsons, 2009; Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004).

<table>
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<th>White Hearing Students</th>
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<td>without Disabilities</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>with Disabilities</td>
<td>42%</td>
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Figure 1.1. Number of Students Completing a College Degree. Keasley, 2002; Marschark, Lang, & Albertini, 2002; National Council on Disability, 2003; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008

Clearly, a wide variety of strategies are used in higher education to improve the attrition rates for first-year students (Barefoot, 2000; Palmer, et al., 2009; Tinto, 1987, 1993, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2006). Despite ongoing interventions and strategies provided for many students, the number leaving college without completing a degree continues to be a concern. This is a particular issue for students with disabilities, especially deaf students,
and some students from various socioeconomic groups who may need more support and guidance during their first year in college (Belch, 2004; Boutin, 2008; Easterbrooks, 1999; Foster & Kinuthic, 2003; King, Brown, & Smith, 2003; Lang, 2001; Mamiseishvile & Koch, 2011; Marschark & Waunters, 2008; McCaskill, 2005; Myers, Clark, Musyoka, Anderson, Gilbert, Agyen, & Hauser, 2010). There is a need for more attention and understanding of the complex attrition phenomenon by administrators, faculty, and staff (Tinto, 1987, 1993).

**Problem Statement**

The first year in college can be a valuable time for students to build a foundation for academic and social success (Borglum & Kubala, 2000; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006; Smith & Werteib, 2004; Tinto, 1987, 1993, 1997, 1998, 2003, 2006; Woosley & Miller, 2009). Without this foundation, college students lose opportunities to learn more about themselves, to develop interpersonal relationships, and to deal with adjustment issues, all skills they will need in the working world (Palmer, et al., 2009; Walpole, et al., 2008). Studies by Pascarella & Terenzini (1983) and Tinto (1997) have reported that persistence rates increase as students’ academic and social integration increases in higher education.

The research literature identifies poor academic preparation as a key factor in determining why college students leave during their first academic year (Fike & Fike, 2008; Hawley & Harris, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Researchers have reported that parents who never went to college are not familiar with the especially rigorous high school courses that may be useful for higher-education-bound students. In addition, not all high schools offer Advanced Placement (AP) courses or any other college preparation
courses (Myers et al., 2010). The lack of adequate preparation demands greater effort from higher education students who may be first-generation citizens, originate from different cultural backgrounds than their Predominantly White peers, or are members of low-income families, to keep up with their studies. Without adequate preparation, students enroll in or complete fewer classes and thus have fewer opportunities for academic and social integration in college (Engle, 2007; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Schroedel, Watson, & Ashmore, 2003; Schwartz & Washington, 2007; Williamson, 2007). Without sufficient preparation, these students struggle to keep up with the college level academics and eventually drop out.

Insufficient financial aid is the second key factor that contributes to first-year students’ attrition (Escobedo, 2007; Ishitani, 2006; Ishitani & DesJardins, 2002). The cost of college is a concern for many first-generation students and their parents in low-income families who qualify for financial aid but are not always familiar with program structures and requirements (Engle, 2007; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). Additionally, the first-generation students are likely to delay their degree completion due to working part-time and living off-campus where opportunities to socialize with other students may be fewer (Engle, 2007; St. John, Cabrera, Nora, & Asker, 2000; Vaquera & Maestas, 2008). Several forms of financial aid such as loans, grants, and scholarships are sometimes packaged together to meet the needs of eligible students, while other students may be offered only one type of financial aid, such as work-study funds (Astin, 1975; Metz, 2004). Faced with many options, unfamiliar electronic application systems, and complicated financial aid language, first-year students and their parents may easily be overwhelmed and as a result miss opportunities for aid. Without the necessary financial
support, such students are in danger of leaving the university (Ishitani, 2006; Ishitani & DesJardins, 2002; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2001).

Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993) argue that there is a parallel between the students’ financial situation and their social and academic integration processes. For example, when students have sufficient resources, such as having private tutors for academic support, and attending summer educational camps yearly, their social and academic integration occurs much more easily. When financial issues do arise, the social and academic integration process is interrupted and is, therefore, a retention concern for the students who are impacted by them.

A third factor involves social issues that influence first-year students’ attrition (Belch, 2004; Berger & Milem, 2000; Boutin, 2008; Braxton, 2001; Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Felter, 2009; Fike & Fike, 2008; Ishitani, 2006; Lehmann, 2007; NCES, 2007; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Smith & Wertieb, 2004; Thayer, 2000; Tinto, 1987, 1993; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Tinto’s (1993) student departure model has emphasized the importance of supportive student communities for students who experience challenges making the transition to university and in becoming integrated during their first academic year (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). During the first year, all students arrive with a variety of individual characteristics such as family background, academic and social strengths and challenges, and pre-college schooling experiences that all play important roles in the social integration process (Braxton, 2001).

Strong relationships with peers, faculty, and staff assist all students in becoming socially integrated into college. Tinto’s (1987) integration theory has shown that involvement and engagement are most important during the transition process in the first
year of college, especially when the initial social and identity development processes occur (Foster & Kinuthic, 2003; Steele, 2000; Tinto 2000; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Furthermore, the extent of social engagement influences students’ self-perceptions of success or failure within the academic and social environment and is another factor that supports Tinto’s (1987) theory about factors that influence whether students will persist to graduation. Astin (1975), Pascarella (1980), and Terenzini (1982), reinforced the importance of student contact or involvement to a range of student outcomes, not the least of which was student retention.

Although research findings have identified the retention factors that have been discussed here vis-à-vis students coming from first-generation or low income families and diverse cultural backgrounds, there is scant research about the impact of such factors on students with disabilities, especially on students who are Black and deaf, and insufficient research about which factors most impact their attrition. The latter gap in research provides the impetus and focus for this study.

**First-year Attrition Among Students with Disabilities**

What remains largely unexamined are the factors contributing to first-year attrition among students with disabilities, particularly deaf students (Boutin, 2008; Cuculick & Kelly, 2003; Eilers-Crandall, 2009; Kelly & Albertini, 2008; Lang, 2002). The U.S. Government Accounting Office (GAO) (2009) reported that in the United States, 11% of students with disabilities are enrolled in higher education. The enrollment of students with disabilities continues to increase because of the passage of the American with Disabilities Act Amendments of 2008 which extended the protections of the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) (Mamiseishvile & Koch, 2011). Two
sections of the ADA require higher education to “provide any reasonable accommodation that may be necessary for those with disabilities to have equal access to educational opportunities and services available to non-disabled peers if requested” (Stodden & Dorwick, 2000, p.21). Figure 1.1 graphically represents the enrollment of students with disabilities in postsecondary education across categories of disabilities.

![National Figures on the enrollment of Students with Disabilities in college](image)

**Figure 1.2. The Enrollment of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education.**


Students from the orthopedic/mobility impairment and the other disabilities groups in Figure 1.2. have a higher attrition rate in college than students from the other disability groups including health impairment, attention deficit disorder, depression,
psychiatric conditions, sensory impairment, or learning disability (Henderson, 2001; Mamiseishvile & Koch, 2011; GAO, 2009).

The “Other Disabilities” group includes students who have speech or language impairment, developmental disability, brain injury, or other conditions not included in any other category. For example, a large number of deaf students may have speech or language impairment such as inferior fluency in speaking and writing in English. The sensory impairment group in Figure 1.1 includes students who are deaf and visually impaired. Therefore the overall data shows that deaf college students are one of several groups of students with disabilities that have the highest attrition rate in college (GAO, 2009; King, Brown, & Smith, 2003; Mamiseishvile & Koch, 2011).

**First-year Attrition Among Deaf Students**

While different disabilities result in differing needs, the factors that generally create barriers for deaf college students often do not apply to students with other disabilities (Belch, 2004; Easterbrooks, 1999; Lang, 2002). Deaf students have different needs than their hearing peers regarding the types of resources needed for academic success, particularly language development and shared communication methods, and opportunities for social interactions (Boutin, 2008). An estimated 10% of deaf college students are born to deaf parents and not all use American Sign Language (ASL) as a primary communication method (Padden & Humphries, 1988; Foster & Kinuthic, 2003). Academic preparation, the challenges of using support services, and the dissatisfaction with social life are issues that research has identified as main factors for deaf college students’ attrition in higher education (Boutin, 2008; Cuculick & Kelly, 2003; Lang, 2002). Society considers deafness as primarily an invisible handicap; deaf people are
typically not considered in discourses on individuals with disabilities and their special needs (Easterbrooks, 1999). Although there is some limited research focused on deaf college students’ first-year experiences, “deaf college students” do not constitute one homogeneous group, which complicates the situation still further. They do not have a set of common characteristics, behaviors, upbringing experiences, education, communication preferences, culture, and beliefs.

Across the U.S., over 25,000 deaf students annually attend postsecondary schools that predominately serve hearing students. Deaf students also attend two universities that have a large number of enrolled deaf students (Lang, 2002; Myers & Taylor, 2000; Schrodel, Watson, & Ashmore, 2003). Over 90% of deaf college students come from hearing families, so many may not have met other deaf college students or been exposed to Deaf culture because they were oral in their family interactions and mainstreamed in hearing high schools (Marschark & Albertini, 2002; Padden & Humphries, 1988). By comparison, deaf college students in college mainstream environments may experience new social interaction and communication challenges,--encountering unfamiliar academic terms and the need to communicate in a faster paced environment--which exacerbate the barriers they have already encountered in secondary education where spoken English was also the main communication method (Thagard, Hilsmeir, & Easterbrooks, 2011).

In addition to institutional experiences and integration components, in his theory of student retention, Tinto (1987) considered the concept of external commitments that could influence deaf college students’ goals and commitment in college (Boutin, 2008). The external commitments included such factors as family involvement at home,
maintaining friendships from high school, and deaf students’ memberships in external organizations, all things that could influence deaf college students’ attrition rates.

Some deaf students have unrealistic goals about obtaining a bachelor’s degree (Cuculick & Kelly, 2003). While a majority of participants in the latter research planned to obtain a college degree within four years, only 17% of those who entered college had a 10th-grade or higher reading and language skills that satisfied the criteria for entering a baccalaureate program (2003). This substantiated the idea that a high number of deaf college students are dealing with one of the most several barriers to retention: lack of academic preparation.

While the retention of students has been an essential topic for a decade, the attrition of deaf students continues to elicit concern. Among the population of deaf students, Black deaf students are even more underrepresented in higher education (Mamiseishvile & Koch, 2011; Williamson, 2007). As a result research needs to focus even more on the attrition rates of Black students with disabilities.

**First-year Attrition Among Black Deaf Students**

While there is concern about the disproportionately low graduation rates for deaf students compared to hearing students, race plays a significant role here as in other social contexts: White deaf students are more likely to graduate with a college degree than their Black deaf peers (Leigh, 2010; Williamson, 2007). Considering college students with disabilities, studies about deaf students have largely examined the experiences of White deaf students with limited focus on the experiences of Black deaf students. The factors identified in research as contributing to White deaf students’ high attrition rates often do not apply to Black deaf students, because of their disparate cultural, social, and academic
experiences (Foster & Kinuthic, 2003; Leigh, 2010; Myers, et al., 2010; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Steele, 2000; Williamson, 2007). The intersection of race and disability presents a considerably more complex set of challenges for Black deaf students than for White deaf students. Black deaf students face the additional challenge of racial discrimination and, as a result, experience the sense of being outsiders on a campus that has values, customs, and traditions reflecting a Predominately White Institution. Not being members of the dominate culture, some Black deaf students struggle in college with their own cultural identities due to the way they have been perceived and treated by others in earlier school settings and communities (Steele, 2000; Williamson, 2007).

Additionally the chances of graduating with a college degree are much lower for Black deaf college students than their Black hearing peers (Brault, 2008; Jones, 2001; DeSousa, 2001; Myers, et al., 2010; Parasnis, Samar, & Fischer, 2005; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). One contributing factor is that both Black students and deaf students are often placed in special education classes in greater numbers than their White peers, which is generally due to teachers’ erroneous perspective about and stereotyping of deaf students, and especially Black students (Brown, D’Emidio-Castor, & Bernard, 2001; Myer et al., 2010; Steele, 2000; Williamson, 2007). Factors that influence the first-year success of Black deaf college students are therefore especially crucial. Figure 1.3 graphically represents the enrollment of Deaf students in postsecondary education in the United States. Approximately 136,000 deaf students are enrolled in higher education, in 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities nationwide. The enrollment of Black deaf undergraduates is 10.3%, comparing to White deaf undergraduates, 76.6%; Asian deaf undergraduates, 6.6%; Pacific Islander Deaf
undergraduates, .4%; Native American, .9%; Multiracial undergraduates, 2.4%; and other undergraduates 2.8% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). Also, in Figure 1.4, Deaf students’ enrollment at Brooke University shows the enrollment number of Black deaf students in higher education. The enrollment of Black deaf students at Brooke University has increased from 8% to 29% in the past 23 years (Brooke University Annual Report, 2010; Williamson, 2007).

Figure 1.3. The Enrollment of Deaf students in Higher Education. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007-08 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, (NPSAS:08); U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

The enrollment of Black deaf undergraduates at Brooke University, the largest state-of-the-art technical and professional education programs, one of the nine colleges at William Institute of Technology is 11%, comparing to 66% of White deaf peers (see figure 1.4).
While many colleges and universities are working diligently to provide all first-year students from various ethnic backgrounds and disabilities with environments that encourage them to succeed academically and socially, the attrition rate continues to be a problem for Black students and students with disabilities. Deaf students who are Black face added challenges because they are an even smaller minority than either their Black or deaf peers; because of institutional and peer cultural insensitivity; and because there are fewer opportunities for peer connection such as being in class with several Black deaf students or being enrolled in a major with a significant population of other Black deaf students (Myers, et al., 2010; Williamson, 2007). Many of the fastest growing jobs in the field of information and in a service economy in the United States require a college degree and currently, there are not enough college graduates to fill the gaps (Leonard, 2009; U.S Department of Education, 2006). The lack of a college degree will negatively
impact Black deaf students’ chances to find well-paying jobs. Therefore it is critical to address persistence rates for Black deaf college students.

While the literature examined experiences and factors contributing to high attrition rates among Black hearing first-year college students, the research on Black deaf college students who attended college was much more limited (Edman & Brazil, 2007; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003; Tyler, Love, Brown, Roan-Belle, Thomas, & Garriott, 2010; Williamson, 2007). The experiences and factors that faced Black hearing first-year college students may not be relevant to Black deaf college students. Many Black hearing students, including members of different ethnic groups, have deficient educational experiences prior to college and faced the need for extra academic preparation for college (Solorzano, 1992). Not all Black deaf students shared the same background, values, cultural heritage, or religion as their Black hearing peers. Black deaf students had different needs than their Black hearing peers regarding the types of resources needed for academic success, including language development, communication methods that can be shared with faculty, staff, and peers, and social interactions. Furthermore, the majority of the research on White deaf students’ experiences and successes in college may not apply to Black deaf students (Steinberg, Dornbusch & Brown, 1992). Black deaf students need to be studied as a separate heterogeneous group (McCaskill, Lucas, Bayley & Hill, 2011; Williamson, 2007).

Also, there was a lack of language and social development for Black deaf students, as 70% came from hearing families where a spoken language (English, Spanish, etc.) was used primarily for communication, and American Sign Language (ASL) was not widely used by the family members to communicate with their deaf family member.
(McCaskill et al. 2011; Myers, et al. 2010; Williamson, 2007). The conversations and social habits that constitute informal social and linguistic learning opportunities for hearing children were not readily available to deaf children.

Real world knowledge—the facts, practices, and habits that adults need to understand in order to navigate in the world-- constitute another area that is lacking for deaf students, especially those who do not have full access to communication at home, school, or in their communities. However, the lack of real world knowledge is greater for some Black deaf students who not only lack access to communication at their home, school, or in their communities, but also may come from socioeconomic backgrounds and neighborhoods that generally offer fewer educational opportunities. Real world knowledge can be accumulated almost unconsciously in places like dorm hallways, cafeterias, locker rooms, and in movie theaters, where hearing students routinely overhear what’s being said by others nearby. The inability for some students to readily access the informal curriculum is a serious concern. It clearly adds challenges during the first year of college for some students with disabilities, especially students who are deaf, and even more for Black deaf students who may encounter cultural insensitivity and fewer opportunities in higher education (Hopper, 2011).

Given the gaps in the research literature about Black deaf first-year college students, this study seeks to bridge race and disability by examining the experiences of first-year Black deaf college students. The study will examine the ways in which race and disability converge to impact the first year experiences of Black deaf college students.
Theoretical Framework

Despite the lack of research about Black deaf students, there are retention theories that serve as frameworks that contribute substantially to an understanding of the challenges and successful approaches that foster persistence and increased graduation rates for these students. Vincent Tinto is one theorist whose research is useful for generally understanding the phenomenon of student retention in higher education. According to Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure, strong relationships with faculty, staff, and peers are crucial for new students to become socially integrated into college. The unique character of each student’s psychological, economic, organizational, racial, and interactional experiences within the college, important factors for understanding student departure before graduation, can also be considered and used for reflecting on the reasons that students persist and stay through graduation. Personality characteristics, including psychological perspectives about the surroundings, people, and things, determine Black deaf students’ responses to comparable experiences with other higher education students (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997). While not all Black deaf students have similar experiences in college, the responses they articulated in this study have provided a clearer understanding about their experiences during the first year of college.

In addition to the psychological perspective, societal factors further affect student retention behavior (Braxton et al., 1997). The current study has examined data collected in demographic surveys completed by the participants and the coded results of three student focus groups. Demographic data includes place of residence; descriptions of high school settings; prior academic history; college academic major; parents’ academic
background; and preferred communication modes in academic, social, and home environments. Economic considerations in the student’s family and community also affect retention and graduation rates. The former measures the relative value of costs such as tuition, loans, and earnings against the benefits of college attendance (1997). Retention is also a product of the academic organizational structure that includes institutional resources, faculty-student ratios and institutional goals (1997). The last effect on student persistence is the interactionalist perspective which reflects the relationship between the student and the organization as represented by administrators, faculty, staff, and peers (1997).

**Research Questions**

The study sought to understand the particularities of experience of Black deaf college students who persisted beyond the first year in college. Additionally, the study explored what these students identified as impacting their ability or choice to remain enrolled in college beyond the first term. What were the particularities of experiences of Black deaf college students who remained enrolled beyond the first year? Specifically, what did Black deaf college students identify as the academic and social factors in their retention? These questions helped pinpoint experiences during the first year in college that affected attrition for Black deaf students. Most colleges and universities are predominately White and hearing, so the environment appeared to be unfamiliar to Black deaf students where the language, rituals, and culture traditions used on campus by their White peers were not similar to theirs.
Summary

This first chapter has discussed a variety of retention programs and strategies used in higher education for improving first-year students’ attrition rates. Several factors that contributed to first-year students’ attrition were identified, and although all of these factors applied to students with disabilities, they did not in consistent ways apply to deaf students because of their different needs and types of resources needed for academic success. Furthermore, the factors that applied to deaf students might not apply to Black deaf students, due to their disparate cultural, social, and academic experiences from their White deaf peers and other students with disabilities. There is no research about Black deaf students’ first year experiences at a Predominately White hearing college and the factors that impacted their attrition. This study, which identifies Black deaf students’ perceptions of their first year experiences in college, includes material that was not otherwise researched.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review explaining the current knowledge and research related to factors contributing to first-year attrition among Black deaf students, and their academic challenges and success in college. Chapter 3 describes the methodology for this study with the research setting, research participants, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. Chapter 4 examines the themes that emerged repeatedly in participant focus group interviews. Chapter 5 discusses the findings, identifies research limitations, and offers opportunities for further research.
Glossary of Terms

- American Sign Language (ASL)--a sign language containing “a collection of individual gestures or a code on the hands for spoken English” (Padden & Humphries, 1988, p.7).
- Attrition--a reduction in numbers of students (Tinto, 1993).
- Black-- a term used for identifying any group who has its own cultural background as from other countries where groups represent the majority culture, and other individuals who were born to American parents (Myers, Clark, Musyoka, Anderson, Gilbert, Agyen, & Hauser, 2010; Williamson, 2007).
- Deaf-- a person “who has predominantly profound or severe hearing losses without the use of hearing aids” (Lang, 2002, p.1).
- Total Communication— a communication mode that has a combination of both signed and spoken language.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

Postsecondary education is the pathway to a better quality of life, self-improvement, career mobility, earnings, and occupational status for all minority groups, including African American, Latino American, and Native American (AALANA) first-year college students. This is especially true for Black deaf first-year college students. While the up side is that enrollment of Black deaf first year students at U.S. colleges and universities has increased substantially in the past decade, the down side is that their attrition rates continue to be problematic, as well as the fact that their graduation rates have not increased (Boutin, 2008). There are numerous factors identified in the literature that attempt to explain the academic performance of these students. The current study considered the following topics: empirical research findings with evidence that supports Tinto’s theory, methodologies used in various research studies, and gaps and recommendations, if any.

This chapter describes the current state of scientific knowledge on the persistence of Black deaf first year college students as portrayed in the literature of empirical research. Twenty-five peer-reviewed articles from 2000–2011 were reviewed. Tinto’s student departure theory (1975, 1987, 1993) was discussed in an effort to understand Black deaf students’ experiences in their first-year of college. The gaps in the literature review were discussed as well as recommendations for future study.
General Factors Related to Students’ Persistence in College

The learning and cognitive development that occurs during the first year of college is important for students to build a successful foundation for academic performance that will enable them to persist throughout undergraduate studies. The First College Year Project, a two-year national research and development effort, was established as an effort to gain an understanding of the multi-faceted interconnected factors that influence academic success and persistence among first-year college students (Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo 2006). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), consistent with Reason, Terenzini, and Domingo (2006), showed that students who participated in the project and attended their first-to-senior-years gained between 80% and 95% in English, science, and social studies during their first two years of college. That same pattern persisted for mathematics learning and critical thinking skills. Students totaling 6,700, and 5,000 faculty members on 30 four-year campuses nationwide were studied by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) to identify the individual, organizational, environmental, programmatic, and policy factors that individually and collectively shaped first-year students’ academic success. According to Reason, Terenzini, and Domingo, their study was guided by Astin’s Inputs-Environment-Outputs approach (1993), including Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella, and Nora (1995) as an extension, and has been adopted to examine and understand students who arrived at college with a variety of pre-entry demographics, personal issues, and academic characteristics and experiences. Multiple regression with ordinary least-squares (OLS) was used in their study to analyze the data, with both preliminary and final equations variables inserted in a two-step hierarchical process, beginning with the student and institutional characteristics, followed by the
performance indicators (Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006). Their findings indicated that most of the explained variance in academic competence is attributable to what happened to students during their first academic year, and not to the characteristics they brought with them to college.

The impact of higher attrition among first-year college students on institutional reputations and finances has brought considerable attention from administrators who made it a top priority for study. Palmer, O’Kane, and Owen (2009) and Barefoot (2000), discussed how universities were quick to provide an immediate intervention by setting up first-year seminars, open days, study skills sessions, tutoring services, and adding transition subjects or new courses into the curriculum. Palmer et al. had several directed objectives: to investigate the earliest part of a turning point; to interpret students’ understanding of coping with the turning point experience; and to ascertain how students carried forward their transient turning point experiences into becoming members of the university. A turning point is an event or experience happening within the first few weeks of the semester as college or university students go through in the ‘betwixt’ space, a transient phase between home and university. It is the phase where students go through the process of becoming full members of the university.

Another important aspect, investigated by Palmer et al. (2009), was student transition from high school to college. Palmer’s research used a three-stage approach to gain an understanding of both the transition process and the concept of turning points within the first-year experience. During the process in this approach, students were first introduced to the concept of transition; second, they explored their feelings about this process and related turning points, and third, they were asked to reflect on their
experiences of the study; their comments were compiled into a detailed report. The participants were 18 students who took a first-semester introductory marketing course at a university in the UK. The research method used was an interpretative qualitative methodology that collected detailed descriptive information relating to the students’ experiences during the first few weeks of the semester. Palmer et al. explained that in the first stage, students were asked to describe their experience moving to university with 10 words; in the second stage, students described their critical turning points; and in the third and final stage, students participated in a reflective whiteboard exercise, discussing the previous elements of the data collection and their interpretations, along with the students’ experiences involving them. Palmer et al. found a wide range of turning points associated with the students’ experiences in the transition during their first years of college that shaped, altered, or emphasized the ways for making connections within the university environment.

During the past 30 years, research studies have found many indicators of college persistence, including the one recognized as the most valuable predictor of student persistence — integration into the social and academic cultures at the university or college, as described and elaborated by Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007). These researchers stated that a sense of belonging was found to predict student intentions to persist, controlling for background variables and other predictors of persistence. This explains why their study focuses on a more systematic study of one variable that has received sparse attention in the other studies of student persistence: students’ sense of belonging to their university or college. Supported by Tinto’s integration model, this study concluded that college students who felt connected to their university or college
were the ones who participated in on-campus activities. Hausmann et al. (2007) had two objectives: to investigate the sense of belonging role and how it predicted college students’ intentions to persist while gathering other variables that predicted persistence, and to evaluate the intervention programs, for example, freshman seminars, and their effectiveness for enhancing college students’ sense of belonging. Overall, the students’ sense of belonging and intentions to persist declined over the academic year. However, Hausmann et al. pointed out the decline in sense of belonging was smaller for students in the intervention group.

Woosley and Miller (2009) expanded previous research on student success and persistence by focusing on early college experiences as predictors, particularly of social and academic integration and institutional commitments for first-year students during the first few weeks of the semester. The purpose of this study was to understand the timing and impact of integration issues for students during their first year in college. A cohort of first-time, first-year, incoming students entering in the Fall, 2007 semester at a large, public, residential Midwestern institution, were chosen. Of 3,581 students, 3,051 completed the survey for a response rate of 85%. This study used data collected from the 2007 Map-Works Transition Survey by Educational Benchmarking, Inc. (part of the initiative “MAP-Works Marking Achievement Possible”). The survey was administered on-line to the participants during the beginning of the third week of the Fall 2007 semester. The group of participants’ pre-entry characteristics, and Fall 2007 and Spring, 2008 Grade point averages (GPA) were included in the binary logistic regression model, and hierarchical multiple linear regression analyses were used for predicting Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 GPAs. On the survey for academic integration, social integration, and
institutional commitment, each had a different set of questions but all used a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = “not at all” to 7 = “extremely.” The findings showed that retention and academic performance were predicted by the early transition experiences of academic integration, social integration, and institutional commitment.

Research studying specific minority groups can benefit from a general understanding of persistence and graduation rates. Compared to other racial and ethnic groups, there was clearly a disproportionately low number of Latino American students finishing high school and college (US Government Accountability Office, 2009; Escobedo, 2007). Salinas and Lianes (2003) sought to understand the influence of social behavior and academic characteristics on the attrition and persistence of Latino freshmen at the University of Texas Pan American (UTPA). The UTPA had a large percentage of enrolled Latino American students, but only 22% graduated with bachelors’ degrees between 1990 and 1994. In Salinas and Lianes’ study, Latino first-year students went through three different stages of social integration: separation, transition, and incorporation, compared with other ethnic groups of first-year students.

Escobedo (2007) discovered a decrease in retention rates each semester for all ethnic groups at a two-year multi-campus urban community college in the Southwest. To get more perspective on retention, the two-year urban community college compared the Fall Quarter 2002 Student Retention Specialist (SRS) cohort and general population students who did not have an assigned SRS beginning in the same term. Follow-up data reflected significantly higher retention rates for the Fall 2002 SRS cohort as compared to the general student population. At-risk students in need of developmental education were targeted for interventions, and those students who received at least one contact with a
SRS persisted to their 2nd semester at higher rates than the general student population. The higher retention of SRS cohort students was consistent regardless of ethnicity. Qualitative research and formative evaluation with outcomes on data for three fall cohorts were collected and analyzed. Analysis of the data revealed that there was a significant difference between the persistence rates of three fall cohorts that had an assigned SRS compared to the general population without an assigned SRS. The intervention strategies applied to the fall cohorts with SRS resulted in increased persistence rates (Escobedo, 2007).

**General Factors Related to Black Students’ Persistence in College**

Researchers identified several factors related to Black college students’ persistence. The assessment for the Hausmann et al. (2007) study was based on the correlation of sense of belonging within a sample of African American and White students who were in their first year of college with the outcome status of the intervention programs’ success in enhancing the participating students’ sense of belonging to their college. This study was conducted at a large public and predominantly White university located in the mid-Atlantic area where the student body was composed of 77% White, 8% Black, 12% other racial/ethnic backgrounds, and 3% undeclared race/ethnic students. The participants were full-time, first-year, non-transfer Black students and a random sample of 291 of their White peers who were asked to join in a three-wave survey during their first year of college. During the second week of the Fall semester, the first survey was mailed out to the participants. Those who filled out Survey 1 and were still enrolled for the spring semester were invited to complete Survey 2 during the first week, and Survey 3 during the 11th week of the spring semester. In this longitudinal study,
participants who filled out surveys were randomly assigned to an enhanced sense of belonging group or one of two control groups where the numbers of Black and White students were distributed evenly in each group. Those who were placed in the enhanced sense of belonging group received several notes from the administrators stressing that they were valued members of the university and their participation in this study would be used to make the campus a more welcoming place for all students. Additionally, the students received small gifts of appreciation for participating. The purpose of these activities was to promote a feeling of connectedness with the university for the participants. The other students in the control groups were asked to complete the same survey but did not receive either the notes or gifts of appreciation. According to Hausmann et al. (2007), the students in the control groups received regular communication from a professor in the psychology department, but during this “regular communication,” the students’ membership in the campus community was never mentioned.

The research of both Hausmann et al. (2007) and Singer and Willett (2003), used a multilevel model for change (MMC) technique known as individual growth modeling for their data analysis that utilized multiple levels instead of grouping data according to between-subject characteristics. All variables were measured in MMC analysis at all time points, which allowed one to examine whether variables changed over time, and what factors were associated with the change variables underwent over time.

In their findings, Hausmann et al. (2007) reported that student background predictors showed a better-fitting model for peer-group interactions, interactions with faculty, academic integration, peer support, and parental support. A number of variables
were associated with the sense of belonging at the beginning of the academic year and after the course. Interestingly, the experimental students who received notes and gifts did not have their sense of belonging decline as rapidly as the other students in the two control groups that received no notes or gifts. Students with higher SAT scores interacted less with the faculty in the beginning of the academic year compared to others who had lower SAT scores. However, the interaction with faculty by students with higher SAT scores increased over the course of the academic year. This increase was not related to the students’ race, gender, or financial difficulty. Another positive finding was that those Black students who appeared to thrive had their parents’ support, and developed a sense of belonging in college during the first academic year. Furthermore, the results from this study recommended that relationships between institutional commitment and peer-group interactions, peer support, parental support, and sense of belonging happen at the beginning of the first academic year in college rather than developing steadily over time.

Despite ongoing research, solutions to the problems inherent in ethnicity and college success remain elusive. Schwartz and Washington (2007) claimed that many Black women who sought higher education continued to experience obstacles to their success. At a historically black, private, liberal arts college in the Southeast U.S., 213 first-year female Black college students were surveyed about their academic preparation and readiness for college. The purpose of this study was to evaluate if cognitive, non-cognitive, or demographic variables could predict academic success and retention among Black females who attended the private liberal arts college. If any of the variables could be identified as predictors of success and retention, or even as possible indicators to pinpoint potential problems, then early intervention could be planned. The Black
women’s responses were compared against actual academic performance and retention during the first year of college. Tracey and Sedlacek (1987) and Schwartz and Washington (2007) explained the two instruments used in this study. First, the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) consisted of 20 Likert-type items regarding college expectations and self-assessments educational aspirations, and about goals and accomplishments. The second measurement instrument, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ), was designed by Baker and Siryk (1989), and contained a total of 67 items for students to self report their level of adjustment on each of the items using a 9-point scale. Schwartz and Washington (2007) explained that the SACQ has four sub-scales: (a) academic adjustment; (b) social adjustment; (c) personal-emotional adjustment; and (d) institutional adjustment. The findings showed that the best model for predicting retention for Black students stressed campus environment, places where students participated in various recreational activities, and first term final grade point averages (GPAs). Schwartz and Washington (2007) reported that regardless of the students’ racial or ethnic background, high school grades and rank remained significant predictors of academic performance and the two variables correlated with persistence, social adjustment, and attachment to the college, with social adjustment being the most significant.

Educational attainment varied across racial groups of students according to a study that investigated longitudinal persistence behavior of first-generation college students and their timely graduation rates at four-year colleges (Ishitani, 2006). First-generation students were less likely to complete their degree program within the expected time frame. Event history modeling was used to analyze the first-generation students’
attrition behavior and multiple logistic regression modeling was used to analyze the dichotomous nature of degree completion behavior (Ishitani, 2006). The findings showed that the attribute of being first-generation students had a negative effect on college persistence and timely graduation rates (2006). Higher earnings and better career opportunities, indirect college gains, were linked to the value of higher education. The investigation of the timing of specific events such as dropout rates and graduation, and the probabilities of these events occurring due to diverse student characteristics and attributes, was conducted with event history modeling, a quantitative method (Ishitani, 2006). This quantitative methodology could also be used, by other researchers, depending on the subject of comparison or type of relationship between transfer and dropout behavior, in a longitudinal framework examining educational issues (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 2002). The examination of differences in the analysis between students whose parents had only a high school education and those whose parents had some college education showed that of 427 participants, 14.7% were first-generation students and 34.8% were students of parents with some college education. Family income and parents’ education background had some influence on students’ graduation from college (Ishitani, 2006). The Kaplan-Meier method, another quantitative approach, illustrated longitudinally that the gaps in survival rates between first-generation students and their peers widened during the first two years in college (Ishitani, 2006).

Students’ background characteristics, college choices, dormitory experiences, perceptions of the transition to college, and perceptions of the campus climate, were all included as independent variables to compare students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds regarding their sense of belonging (Johnson, Soldner, Leonard, Alvarez,
The sample for this study was retrieved from the 2004 National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP), and only first-year students were included in the analysis. The entire sample of first-year students examined was distributed as follows: 4.9% Black, 9.9% Asian Pacific American, 3.3% Hispanic/Latino, 3.6% Multiracial/Multiethnic, and 77.3% White. A 258-item Internet survey was used to collect data for this study. The responses were divided into scales using exploratory factor analysis with principle axis factoring and orthogonal rotation, along with Cronbach’s alpha as an estimate of internal consistency. The analysis included student perceptions of academically supportive residence hall climates, socially supportive residence hall climates, course-related faculty interactions, smooth academic transition to college, smooth social transition to college, interactions with diverse peers, and perception of the campus climate, to create a dependent measure of students’ overall sense of belonging (Johnson et al., 2007).

Johnson et al. (2007) discovered that a sense of belonging was a significant predictor for Hispanic/Latino students. The research revealed no significant predictive relationships between institutional selectivity and a sense of belonging, and participation in Living-Learning provided no influence or contribution to their sense of belonging. The measures on the college environment and student perceptions regarding their residence hall climate was the most powerful indicator in the model for predicting sense of belonging for all racial and ethnic groups, except in the cases of multiracial ethnic students. Furthermore, a smooth social transition to college significantly predicted a sense of belonging for all racial/ethnic groups. In this study, Black students were more likely than other racial and ethnic groups to report a smooth academic transition to
college. Interactions with a diverse group signifying the campus racial climate were an important predictor of college retention only for Hispanic/Latino students. With regard to student perceptions about a positive campus racial climate that contributed to a sense of belonging on campus, the findings showed that White students were the ones who reported the fewest positive interactions with peers from different racial/ethnic groups, and a small number of Black students reported positive perceptions of the campus racial climate (Johnson et al., 2007).

Relationships with the faculty, staff, and peers in college are critical indicators for enhancing students’ academic performance, social integration, and their first-year persistence, according to Tinto (1993), Hurtado and Carter (1997), and Rendon, Jalomo, and Nora (2000). Hurtado and Carter identified the need to have a better understanding of Latino-Americans’ integration experiences during their first year of college. Their research on Latino American students’ sense of belonging is considered to be one of the critical foundations for this proposed study on Black deaf first-year college students. Hurtado and Carter’s research has been further investigated by Johnson et al., (2007) to see whether their sense of belonging model was applicable to other racial and ethnic groups in addition to Latino American college students. Also, Johnson et al. added a socializing factor, students’ residence hall experiences, that is now considered very important, but was not originally included in the sense of belonging model.

Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) added several other factors including enthusiasm about their institutions and the desire to recommend others to attend, to Hurtado and Carter’s original sense of belonging model. Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, and Salomone (2002) contributed the factors of first-year students’ perceptions about academic and
social support from others; interactions with faculty, staff, and peers; experiences of isolation from peers, and classroom experiences. As a result of follow-up research on Hurtado and Carter’s (1997) work on Latino American college students, the expanded sense of belonging model is being used to examine and better understand students from a wider range of racial and ethnic groups, adding dormitory experiences as the college environment in order to learn about additional key predictors of students’ sense of belonging.

**General Factors Related to Deaf Students’ Persistence in College**

Researchers have acknowledged several factors related to Deaf college students’ persistence. Hyde, Punch, Power, Hartley, Neale, and Lesleigh (2009) reported the importance of deaf college students having positive university experiences at Griffith University, known as Mt. Gravatt College of Education, the first and only university in Australia that provides a full support services program called the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Student Support Program (DSSP). The study by Hyde et al. (2009) was jointly supported by Griffith University’s DSSP and Centre for Applied Studies in Deafness. The purpose of this study was to examine the campus experiences, particularly with the deaf or hard of hearing students and graduates who attended Griffith University or Mt. Gravatt College of Education.

Second, this study also explored both the students’ and graduates’ academic experiences vis a vis timing and degree of hearing loss. The participants were 72 former and current students attending Griffith University or Mt. Gravatt College of Education and they were asked to report their level of hearing loss across five categories: mild, moderate, moderate-severe, severe, and profound. From this pool, 22 students (31%)
shared their hearing loss as being in the mild/moderate range; 26 (36%) in the moderate/severe range; and 24 individuals (33%) indicated that they had profound hearing loss. Four students (6%) reported using a cochlear implant and 38 (53%) claimed their hearing loss had occurred at birth or prior to the age of three years. Hyde et al. (2009) stated half of the participants used spoken English as their primary means of communication in everyday life, while Auslan (Australian Sign Language) was reported to be used by 23 (32%) as their primary means of communication. According to the findings, the majority identified the hearing community as a primary choice compared to ten students who chose the deaf community and the remaining 19 reported a bicultural/bilingual identity.

Bicultural/Bilingual identity occurs when a person can switch back and forth between deaf and hearing without any difficulty in such code switching. The survey used both forced-choice and open-ended questions, and both quantitative and qualitative methods, for measurement in this study on the campus and academic experiences at Griffith University. The forced-choice survey collected background information about communication preference, cultural/linguistic affiliation, and education setting during primary and high schools, degree of hearing loss, time in life when hearing loss happened, and usage of hearing aids or cochlear implants.

In contrast, the open-ended questions allowed the participants to explain from their personal perspective about which communication tools they used to succeed both academically and socially, as well as to identify challenges and highlights during their stay in university. Also, the participants were asked about the program they studied and reasons for choosing their program.
A review of research on deaf students in higher education reveals a significant body of knowledge about the barriers these students face in gaining access to information in the classroom. Much less is known about the potential solutions to these problems (Lang, 2002). In addition, there is a dearth of research on the effectiveness of support services such as interpreting, note taking, real-time captioning, and tutoring, particularly with regard to their impact on academic achievement. This study summarized relevant research and suggested directions for educational researchers interested in enhancing academic success and the retention of deaf students in higher education programs (Lang, 2002).

Location of students' residence and age are important factors to take into consideration as pre-entry attributes. The theory of persistence includes a longitudinal model that begins with pre-college entry attributes that students bring to college and ends with the departure decision. Deaf students who chose a major during the first year rather than later were more likely to persist and stay in their college program. No differences existed between hearing and deaf students with the same GPA average. The higher the GPA average, the more likely they would persist.

The primary difference between hearing and deaf students is that many deaf students continue to struggle to receive and interact with classroom information while hearing students do not face the same challenges (Boutin, 2008). Even with the increase of support and access services provided in colleges and universities across the nation for deaf students, there has been no change in persistence and graduation rates (Cuculick & Kelly, 2003). Lang (2002) reported that there had been insufficient study on the impact of access services on deaf college student success. Other findings highlighted the impact of
developmental education programs and internet-based courses on student persistence. Additional predictors included financial aid, parents' education, the number of semester hours enrolled in and dropped during the first fall semester, and participation in the Student Support Services program (Fike & Fike, 2008).

**General Factors of Black and White Deaf Students’ Persistence in College**

A group of researchers have recognized the contributing factors for Black and White deaf students’ persistence in college. There are a variety of specific issues regarding the diversity among deaf students, both Black and White, enrolled in colleges in the United States. Myers and Taylor (2000) discussed the importance of understanding that not all deaf students’ communication, knowledge about support services, education background, motivation, and expectations for college were similar, and not all deaf students knew other deaf people. Bilingual abilities scores have been demonstrated by Clark, Bergue, Gilbert, and Weber (2000) and Freel, Clark, Anderson, Gilbert, Musyoka, Agyen and Hauser (2011) as measurements of the combination of American Sign Language (ASL) and English skills, and are significantly related to reading ability scores.

Additionally, Allen, Hwang, and Stansky (2009) discovered that while complex English syntax skills and ASL skills are not significantly related, they independently predict reading skills. Myers, et al. (2010) investigated Black deaf students’ and White deaf students’ background culture, family characteristics, reading experience, and education. Myers et al. (2010) proposed several hypotheses to determine the difference between Black and White deaf participants’ reading skills and the influence of ASL, culture, family characteristics, and reading experiences at home, school, and education. The participants in this study identified themselves as Black deaf or White deaf and 18-
40 years old, either as students at Gallaudet University or members of the Black Deaf community in Washington, D.C. area. The total sample was 47 with 17 Black deaf and 30 White deaf participants.

The four measures used in this study were (a) the VL2 (Visual Language and Visual Learning) Background Questionnaire, (b) the Early Reading Questionnaire; (c) the American Sign Language-Sentence Reproduction Test (ASL-SRT); and (d) the Woodcock-Johnson III (WJ III) Passage Comprehension subtest. The VL2 Background Questionnaire contained 101 questions that asked about participants’ background characteristics, including ethnicity, age, high school GPA, and hearing status. It was administered online at www.surveymonkey.com. The Early Reading Questionnaire (ERQ) had 20 questions asking about reading experiences, including reading interests, literacy interactions with parents, and average number of hours of reading, and was administered by pencil-and-paper.

The third assessment, the American Sign Language-Sentence Reproduction Test (ASL-SRT), contained 20 video clips of signed sentences and was administered on a computer. The participants were guided to reproduce or repeat the sentence verbatim and the order of difficulty increased each time successful completion for each sentence occurred. Myers et al. (2010) noted that the Early Reading Questionnaire (ERQ) was modified for this study to provide two adjustments to increase the test validity among the populations and better discriminate between native and non-native adults and children.

The fourth assessment, the WJ III Passage Comprehension subtest (Woodcock, McGrew, Mather & Shrank, 2001), consisted of two practice items and 47 scored items that were arranged in order of increasing difficulty for greater passage length, more
complex vocabulary, and greater syntactic and semantic complexity. The participants were required to read a short passage and identify the missing key word that was most appropriate given the context of the passage. Analysis of the data with Mann-Whitney $U$ tests, independent $t$ tests, simple and multiple linear-regression analyses tracked in SPSS, showed that there were major differences between Black deaf and White deaf participants’ reading level. Myers et al. (2010) reported that on average, Black deaf participants read at a fourth-grade level, while White deaf participants were found to have an eighth-grade reading level. Interestingly, there was no predictive relationship between ASL skills and reading ability among Black deaf participants. However, Myers et al. (2010) and Marschark and Waunters (2008) reported that the relationship between early reading skills and ASL proficiency do have high correlation showing that the relationship is also potentially an important factor for Black deaf students’ academic success.

Cuculick and Kelly (2003) found that deaf college students had an unrealistic view of their degree goals, as well as a lack of comprehension about the amount of time required for degree completion. Only 17% of the incoming deaf students at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), one of the nine colleges at Rochester Institute of the Technology (RIT), met the criteria for being accepted into a baccalaureate program. From the pool of deaf new students, about 60% expressed their goal of getting a bachelor degree. The purpose of this study was to provide a clear understanding about the influence and relationship that deaf college students’ reading and language skills levels had on their graduation rates. According to these researchers, the three areas that promote academic success for deaf students are: (a) students who persist in degree programs; (b) reading level; and (c) language skills. Nine hundred and five deaf college students
enrolled in the academic years 1990-1998, in courses for one or more quarters in all colleges at RIT including NTID, were selected as participants for this study. The evidence showed that there was a clear relationship between the level of reading ability and type of degree earned. Over the eight-year period that this study examined, 93% of the deaf students who graduated with bachelor’s degrees had reading grade levels between 9th and 12 grade, while 85% of the deaf students who graduated with a two-year associate’s degree also read above the 9th grade reading level. A surprising result of this study was that 80% of deaf students with measured reading skills associated with college readiness and graduation (9th through 12th grade reading range) left the university without obtaining a degree, suggesting that factors other than reading ability were necessary for persistence to graduation. The findings also showed that the students’ hearing loss and their parents’ hearing status had no significant impact on degree completion. This study used one-way analysis of variance (ANOVAs) for the data analysis and Fishers Protected Least Significant Difference (PLSD) for examining pair-wise comparisons between students who completed the degree program, and students who left the institute without a degree. The group of students who completed the program degree had significantly higher mean cumulative GPAs than the other groups of students who hadn’t earned a degree.

**General Factors Related to Black Deaf Students’ Persistence in College**

A small group of researchers identified a number of factors related to Black deaf college students’ persistence. The enrollment number of Black deaf students entering university or college continues to increase but the graduation rates are much lower than for other college hearing and deaf students. (Boutin, 2008; Cuculick & Kelly, 2003;
Marschark & Waunters, 2008; Myers et al., 2010; Brooke University Annual Report, 2010; Schwartz & Washington 2007; Walters, 2010; Williamson, 2007). Numerous factors identified in the literature have attempted to explain the academic performance of Black deaf students, but there is scarce research specific to the first year attrition of Black deaf college students. There has been no change with Black deaf college students’ graduation rates in the past 40 years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008).

**Tinto’s Student Departure Theory**

To determine what influences students to persist, it is necessary to examine variables such as students’ background characteristics, high school grades, achievements, and the college’s environment for evidence to show that Tinto’s student departure model is valid. Nora and Cabrera (1996), both quantitative researchers, have found sufficient empirical evidence to verify the validity of Tinto’s (1975, 1987) model of student departure (Braxton, 2000). Also, Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993) indicated that an integrative framework among individual, institutional, and environmental variables is important in the persistence process as it is needed to monitor the influences of institutional retention plans and also, to evaluate the past behavior of students. Furthermore, both Astin’s (1984) and Tinto’s (1993) models have been used with a wide range of student populations, including Black students attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs), yet have failed to investigate or recognize Black students’ perspective, especially about the impact of involvement in Black student organizations, and relationships with faculty (Guiffrida, 2002; Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1997).
Tinto’s (1993) theory failed to consider the impact of students’ particular social identities, such as race and disability. However it offered a framework that emphasized the relevance of personal identity, past experiences, and current socialization patterns with academic and peers to explain the reasons why Black deaf students choose to remain during and after their freshman year. Through the experiences of Black deaf students shaped by these markers of identity; race, and disability, it is possible to see how these discourses have interacted with and informed each other, offering a plentiful and detailed look into the everyday existence of Black deaf students’ first year of college.

**Methodological Review**

For the study of student persistence and attrition in college, quantitative methodological approaches have been widely used. Several quantitative studies (Johnson et al., 2007; Ishitani, 2006; Woosley & Miller, 2009; Reason et al., 2006; Schwartz & Washington, 2007) utilized analysis of variance, event history modeling, ordinary least-squares, binary logistic, and multiple regression procedures. These varieties of analysis served the purpose of measuring the effects of independent variables on outcome measures and also predicting retention.

Other quantitative studies (Roberts & Styron, 2010; Hicks & Heastie, 2008; Hausmann et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2007; Cuculick & Kelly, 2003) evaluated students’ background characteristics, engagement in academic and social activities, and perception of academic advising, social connectedness, faculty approachability, and department business procedures with 5-point Likert-style surveys and used analysis of variance or chi-square analyses to test for significance in the responses. The assessment in the Johnson et al. (2007) study on statistical differences among the significant predictors
from the hierarchical multiple regression analysis were based on paired $t$ tests conducted on the unstandardized regression coefficients for all racial/ethnic groups. After the findings from the regression analyses, ANOVAs and chi-square distribution as limited ancillary descriptive analyses were used to further elaborate more specifically. In the living-learning program study the data was collected only one time from the students between mid-Jan and early March from the students during their first year of college, which limited a full assessment of relationships between the campus environment and sense of belonging outcome from the beginning to end of the first academic year (Johnson et al., 2007). Thus this study did not address the full details of the students’ transition experiences during their first weeks of the semester, when the high attrition of first-year students tends to occur.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the value of using a variety of data analysis techniques to fully understand the meaning of the information collected from participant students. Qualitative studies (Palmer et al., 2009; Escobedo, 2007; Myers et al., 2010; Hyde et al., 2009) in this literature review used a variety of analyses such as Unconditional Growth Model (UGM), self-assessment, and meta-cognitive skills building. For interpretation, prediction, and intervention, students’ personal education plans, open-ended questions, and Mann-Whitney $U$ tests were also used. Similarly, the Hyde et al. (2007) study used open-ended survey questions to identify two important areas: access to the academic curriculum and social experiences.

There are numbers of concerns about these studies. First, there are few empirical studies on Black deaf first-year college students’ persistence. Second, the various methodologies utilized—whether they were paper dialogue approach, questionnaires, or
surveys—were all written or typed in English, the primary language used by the hearing majority. And third, Black deaf college students’ pre-entry characteristics, test scores, and high school achievements may not have always revealed their potential and ability to succeed during their first academic year in college. This may provide challenges for Black deaf college students with different language and cultural background to provide the most accurate information.

**Gaps and Recommendations**

A major gap in the literature review concerned the study of Black deaf students’ experiences during their first year in a Predominately White hearing college. While the variables that were examined in the studies reviewed were shown to predict persistence for first-year African and Latino American hearing college students, it is not known whether the findings would also apply to Black deaf first-year college students. One study by Palmer et al. (2009) did extend research to Black deaf first-year college students to identify their transitional symbols (objects), the reason for their parting from their object of transition, and their strategies to become incorporated into the university life and how the objects, such as clothing, food, and music, provided a common identity in different places. However, one study merely showed that there was a need for more research on Black deaf students to fill in missing gaps. The Hyde et al. (2007) study identified important social factors that were critical to deaf students’ academic success, and because it was conducted in an Australian university where the majority of the deaf students were White, it provided a clear contrast to the United States.

With regard to the Woosley and Miller (2009) study, their results may not generalize to other types of universities or colleges such as smaller private or community
colleges or colleges where there are large numbers of non-traditional students. Secondly, the institution studied had a specific student population and a variety of programs to support the success of first year students, while other institutions generally do not have similar programs or interventions for Black deaf first year students.

In the Myers et al. (2010) study, not all Black deaf participants were Gallaudet University students as some were from the community in the Washington D.C. area while all the White deaf participants were students at Gallaudet University. This resulted in mismatched education levels between the Black deaf and White deaf participants that obviously contaminated the reading and ASL skills differences between the two groups.

In the future, it would be beneficial to include and examine Black deaf individuals from other geographical settings and backgrounds. This will reinforce the impetus for administrators, parents, guardians, educators, and communities to collaborate to foster Black deaf students’ academic success (Williamson, 2007). One of the qualitative methods (Myers et al., 2010) is recommended for future research. However, it will need to be modified for use with deaf students. The Myers et al. qualitative approach with modification could provide Black deaf students with the opportunity to talk about and reflect on their experience during their first academic year at a predominately White hearing college. Students would be able to share their experiences in American Sign Language (ASL) with confidence during interviews, knowing that they were being heard and understood. The experience of taking surveys and tests is stressful and challenging for many Black deaf college students because of the predominant use of both spoken and written English.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenology study was to better understand Black deaf students’ perceptions of their experiences during their first year at a Predominantly White hearing university. Phenomenology, a qualitative inquiry strategy, was a good fit for this study, which interprets “subjective understandings” of the participants’ first year experiences (Creswell, 2007, p. 7). It investigated and discovered, “what constitutes the nature of their lived experiences,” and provided a description of the specific phenomena relevant to participants when they attend a Predominately White hearing college (Creswell, 2007, p. 59; Moustakas, 1994; Schultz, 1967; Seidman, 1991).

The research question and sub-questions for guiding this study were: “What are the particularities of experiences of Black deaf college students who remain enrolled beyond the first year at a predominately White institution?” Specifically, “What academic and social factors do Black deaf college students identify as important to their first year retention?” These questions were addressed by this phenomenological study in order to develop greater understanding about each of the Black deaf students’ lived experiences during their first year of college. This chapter provided a detailed explanation of the qualitative methodology that was used, along with a description of the study setting, participants’ selection and recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and a summary.
Study Setting

This study took place at Brooke University in a suburban area of the Northeast. Brooke University is a large, privately endowed, coeducational technological university that offers associate, baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral degrees through nine colleges for students who are deaf and hearing. The university draws hearing and deaf students from across the United States and internationally. Known for varied communication techniques in classrooms and student activities, deaf students are provided with a variety of communication strategies used for instruction including sign language, spoken language, finger spelling, printed/visual aids, and Web-based instructional materials. Deaf students who have classes with mostly hearing students at Brooke University’s nine colleges receive support and access services such as note takers, tutors, real-time captioning services, and sign language interpreters.

Brooke University has a total of 17,206 enrolled students; 15,685 hearing students and 1,521 deaf students. While overall, women make up only 33% of the total university enrollment, the male-to-female ratio of deaf students is 50:50. Outreach programs during the summer serve both high school students and incoming freshmen to prepare them for the academic and social realities of college life. During the early fall bridge program, deaf and hard of hearing college students experience career sampling, career planning, assessment of academic skills and competencies, and adjustment to college life. Brooke University provides ongoing support, guidance and academic preparation for first-year deaf and hearing students during the beginning of the fall term. Table 2.1 illustrates the racial/ethnic demographics of students, faculty, and staff at Brooke University.
Table 3.1

*School Demographics for Brooke University*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Population</th>
<th>Deaf Student Population</th>
<th>Deaf Student Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Faculty/Staff Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Faculty/Staff with Disabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17,206</td>
<td>1,521</td>
<td>65.2% Caucasian</td>
<td>77% Caucasian</td>
<td>18% Deaf or hard of hearing employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11.4% Hispanic</td>
<td>11.0% Black</td>
<td>28% Minority employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.6 Asian</td>
<td>3% Hispanic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.5% International</td>
<td>3% Minorities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.8% Native American</td>
<td>.5% Two or more races</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Participant Recruitment and Selection**

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants in order to collect descriptive data about Black deaf students’ experiences during their first year of college. To produce an effective participant pool, Black deaf male and female students who were currently in their last spring quarter of the first academic year and also, Black deaf second- and third-year students who completed their first academic year at Brooke University in any of the
technical/major programs were recruited to participate in the study. First-, second-, and third-year Black deaf students who completed the first year of college and beyond were able to retroactively describe their academic and social experiences in classes, dormitories, organizations/clubs, and social events on campus. Also, first-, second-, and third-year students were more likely to have better recollection of their experiences during their first year of college, as their memories were still fresh.

Study participants were Black deaf students (inclusive of those of Caribbean, African, and American descent). Participants were full-time students who had been enrolled in 12 or more credit hours of study (one full-time term or equivalent) during their first academic year. Studying the experiences of Black students with a variety of cultural backgrounds has ensured that, as Tinto has suggested, the diversity of their heritages is reflected in the findings, and conclusions are not biased in favor of some groups. Participants also had a 2.5 or higher grade point average (GPA), or were currently enrolled in their second and third year at Brooke University and had maintained a 2.5 GPA during the first year. Students’ full-time status and academic performance are relevant for this study because they provided perceptions of challenges and barriers—in both academic and social experiences. Participants were traditional college age students between 18-22 years old and had been first-year students with a declared major at Brooke University for the first time. Transfer students from other colleges or universities and returning students who had been suspended previously for academic reasons and had not completed their first year of college were not eligible for participation. Because transfer and returning students had different experiences, and transfer students already experienced their first year of college at another university or college, their prior
experiences might not have been relevant to the first-year experiences at Brooke University.

Permission was requested from the Associate Dean of Student Academic Services (SAS) at Brooke University for conducting the students focus group interviews. With the letter of support and the approval from both the St. John Fisher College IRB and the Brooke University IRB, the recruitment flyer was posted around campus in different buildings, in each floor lounge of the dormitories, and the cafeterias on campus (see Appendix A). The flyer highlighted the purpose of the study and the eligibility requirements (see Appendix A).

The researcher obtained a letter of support from the Brooke University Associate Dean of Student & Academic Services (SAS). The former also asked the chairperson of Counseling Services for permission to seek help from academic advisors to recruit eligible Black deaf student participants for this study (see Appendix B). Advisors and other staff were asked to post informational flyers in cafeterias and other public spaces, highlighting the purpose of the study and the eligibility requirements (see Appendix A) in order to reach out to Black deaf students who met the criteria for participation (see Appendix A). The academic advisors forwarded the email and explanatory attachments from the researcher to Black deaf students who met the criteria for participation (see Appendix A, B, & C). Also, the director of the Student Life Team (SLT) was asked to invite the researcher to department meetings to discuss this study and explain how the SLT program coordinators might help to identify potential participants. At the SLT department meeting, the SLT program coordinators were coached on how to reach out to Black deaf students and given recruitment and application materials to share with
interested individuals. Also, in both counseling services and SLT department meetings, the flyers were distributed to the academic advisors and SLT program coordinators for them to post in their office areas.

When Black deaf students expressed interest in participating in this study, the researcher responded by sending an email to them with several scheduled date/times for the focus group interview sessions. This allowed them to choose one that fit their class schedule and when it had been confirmed, the researcher sent a reminder in advance of the upcoming scheduled session. On the day of the focus group session, the participants received the consent forms to read and they were explained in American Sign Language (ASL), in advance for communication accessibility and to ensure that participants received the full details about the study. Students who wanted to participate then signed the consent form (see Appendix C). An additional form, the demographic data survey, was distributed to the participants (see Appendix D) and was subsequently used to collect demographic information. Then the interview question guide summary was read and signed in ASL (see Appendix E). Three major themes emerged from the examination of data self-reported by 10 Black deaf students who completed their first year at a post-secondary institution.

Data Collection

Data collection in this phenomenological study consisted of the following triangulated methods: (a) Participants completed demographic data forms (see Appendix D); (b) in-depth focus groups interviews (see Appendix E) were held; and (c) the researcher prepared field notes utilizing the focus group videos. After the data were collected, the sampling of Black deaf students as participants was reviewed and each of
the participants was labeled with a numerical designation and pseudonym for confidentiality purposes (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Demographic Data Forms**

Prior to the beginning of the in-depth focus group sessions, the participants completed the demographic data survey. The purpose of gathering demographic data was to gain insight into the participants’ views, experiences, and the likely direction of future behavior during the first-year of college (Tinto, 1993). In the demographic data form, the participants reported about parents’ highest education and students’ communication preferences at home, school and in the community. Because participants came from a variety of geographically and culturally diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, detailed demographic data could provide richer data for this study. The participants used pseudonyms on the demographic data. Participant demographics are contained in Table 3.1, Table 4.1, and Table 5.1.

**In-depth Focus Groups**

In-depth focus groups captured of Black deaf students’ authentic voices about their perceptions of their first year of college and allowed them to describe the experience and meaning of this phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Moustakas, 1994). A focus group commonly consists of six to twelve participants guided by a group moderator (Chrzanowskia, 2002). In this study, for communication accessibility, the number of participants was limited to five or fewer per focus group session. The focus group approach provided several advantages for this study as participants used their primary language, American Sign Language (ASL), an advantage for the participants who were less proficient in documenting their experiences in writing and could
communicate directly with the researcher who knows ASL and is deaf as well. Another advantage for using the focus group approach was that the information could be easily collected at one time at the same place (Patten, 2007). Also, the interaction among the participants enhanced the synergistic approach for openly discussing their experiences. Capturing this synergy necessitated that all focus groups be video recorded by a video camera technician.

The three focus group interviews were conducted separately: The first group consisted of three Black deaf second-year students; a second was composed of four Black deaf first-year students, and the third group consisted of a mixture of one Black deaf first- and two third-year students. Using a variety of groups assisted in establishing the trustworthiness of the data. The focus group interviews took about an hour and a half and were held in private rooms at one of the buildings on the campus of Brooke University.

All interviews were videotaped and translated through the methodical process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming as part of data reduction by a certified Registry Interpreting for the Deaf (RID) interpreters who abided by the Registry-mandated conduct of confidentiality (see Appendix F).

Open ended questions were created to solicit rich dialogue among the participants on topics related to their first year experiences at a Predominately White hearing college. Seven interview protocol questions were asked during the focus group interview sessions that enabled the participants to talk about their own academic and social experiences regarding arrival on campus during the first few weeks, as well as their experiences throughout the school year as first-year students (see Appendix E). Following each focus group interview session the video tape was professionally translated and transcribed by a
certified Registry Interpreting for the Deaf (RID) interpreters who abided by the Registry-mandated conduct of confidentiality (see Appendix F).

**Composition of Focus Group #1**

Two out of three participants used spoken English only at home for communication because their parents did not use sign language. The third participant used total communication, a combination of speech and sign language while communicating with her parents. The participants who did not use sign language at home with their parents, identified themselves as hard of hearing, and the third participant identified herself as deaf. In this group, all the participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of behaving appropriately in the academic setting and also, were very aware of their parents’ expectation of them to succeed in college.
Table 3.2

Profiles of Study Participants in Focus Group #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Nat-Nata</th>
<th>Tameraa</th>
<th>Bobbya</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Status</td>
<td>Deaf</td>
<td>HH&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>HH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home State</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>NJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Setting</td>
<td>Mainstream</td>
<td>Mainstream</td>
<td>Mainstream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT score</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication-Academic</td>
<td>TC</td>
<td>ALL&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication-Social</td>
<td>TC</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>TC&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication-Home</td>
<td>TC</td>
<td>Oral&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Education-Father</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Education-Mother</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Grad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Pseudonyms were created to ensure the confidentiality of participants’ identity.

<sup>b</sup>HH stands for Hard of Hearing. <sup>c</sup>Oral, Total Communication and sign language all are used depending on the communication mode faculty and students use. <sup>d</sup>Total Communication- a communication mode that has a combination of both signed and spoken language. <sup>e</sup>a communication mode that relies on spoken language only.

Composition of Focus Group #2

In the home environment, all participants used spoken English with their parents and family members, as none of them used sign language. Whitney was the only participant in the group #2 who had a sign language interpreter in several mainstreamed classes, and attended several deaf contained classes where sign language was used as a primary language by the teacher and students. Taraji, the other participant attended all mainstreamed classes without a sign language interpreter. She reported that there was a
deaf program at her school, but she rarely socialized with them because she did not know any sign language. George and Mary both attended a deaf residential school where American Sign Language (ASL) was the primary language used by the teachers and students. Both George and Mary experienced a big struggle with the transition from a deaf school where everyone used the same communication mode, American Sign Language in class, to a mainstreamed class. Spoken English was used by teachers and classmates and a sign language interpreter tried to keep up with everyone. Also Mary reported being accustomed to having the teacher use ASL, but arriving at college, was confused with teachers using total communication, and both spoken English and sign language. It was very distracting for her to hear the teacher’s voice and at the same time watch the signs. All participants in this group identified themselves as hard of hearing.

Table 3.3

Profiles of Study Participants in Focus Group #2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>George</th>
<th>Whitney</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Taraji</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Status</td>
<td>HH</td>
<td>HH</td>
<td>HH</td>
<td>HH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home State</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Setting</td>
<td>Deaf</td>
<td>Mainstream</td>
<td>Deaf</td>
<td>Mainstream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT score</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication-Academic</td>
<td>TC</td>
<td>TC</td>
<td>TC</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication-Social</td>
<td>ASL</td>
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<td>TC</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication-Home</td>
<td>Oral</td>
<td>Oral</td>
<td>Oral</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Education-Father</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Grad</td>
<td>HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Education-Mother</td>
<td>Grad</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>HS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Composition of Focus Group #3

Omobola was the only participant in this group # 3 who used both ASL and total communication (a combination of sign language and spoken English) at home. Both Aries and Hazalyn did not use sign language at home. Omobola’s twin hearing sister was her SEE interpreter in all mainstreamed classes through high school. The twins had an older deaf sister who completed a graduate degree and was Omobola’s role model. She was the only participant in this group who identified herself as deaf. Aries attended a deaf residential school where ASL was used as a primary language. Hazalyn was a mainstreamed student in high school and used a sign language interpreter for communication access.

Table 3.4

Profiles of Study Participants in Focus Group #3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Aries</th>
<th>Omobola</th>
<th>Hazalyn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Status</td>
<td>HH</td>
<td>Deaf</td>
<td>HH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home State</td>
<td>ILL</td>
<td>ILL</td>
<td>MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Setting</td>
<td>Deaf</td>
<td>Mainstream</td>
<td>Mainstream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT score</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication-Academic</td>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication-Social</td>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>ASL+TC(^a)</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication-Home</td>
<td>Oral</td>
<td>ASL+TC</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Education-Father</td>
<td>Grad</td>
<td>Grad</td>
<td>HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Education-Mother</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Grad</td>
<td>HS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Can use either ASL or TC depending on others’ primary communication mode.
Field Notes

Because the researcher is deaf, videotapes of the participants’ actions, body language, reactions, and facial expressions were recorded during the focus group interviews. Following the focus groups, the researcher immediately reviewed the videos to capture the field notes to identify the emotions described through the participants’ facial expression, body language, and the way their experiences were described in sign language.

Anything observed was immediately transcribed, organized, and saved in a secured file. Standard data storage protocols were used to maintain the confidentiality of participant information. The entire methodological approach was provided in-depth capturing rich data that could only come from the participants’ voices. Finally, the “essence” of the participants’ experiences were represented through a variety of visual tools, tables, and figures that supplemented discussion (Creswell, 2007, 2009).

Reinforcing Data Integrity

The use of triangulated methods of data collection enhanced the credibility of the study outcomes and strengthened the richness and inclusiveness of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Through triangulation, the findings were confirmed through seeing or hearing multiple occurrences of it from different participants by using different techniques. The participants’ involvement in reviewing the preliminary findings was also encouraged as part of member-checking. The goal for this was to ensure the credibility and truthfulness of data presented and also, gained the participants’ trust, especially Black deaf students (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Also, the researcher reorganized the
assessment, shared the findings, and used the inputs to triangulate the initial findings, and thus become enabled to dig in deeper to the findings.

**Data Analysis**

The analysis process began with the *notice, collect, and think process* (Seidel, 1998), the connection between the codes and the data. The significant phrases were separated in categories through line-by-line and sentence-by-sentence analytic procedures that were identified as “a prior codes” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). A Priori codes were developed based on Tinto’s student departure theory (1993), research questions, and the interview questions. The next step was to translate the interpretative data into analytical data. At this step the codes were reviewed to determine which were considered important and which were less significant, discovering the patterns that emerged repeatedly and eliminating redundancy. The process led ultimately to the saturation of themes (Creswell, 2007). After the descriptions and codes were found, the participants reviewed the findings as a member checking process. The participants’ feedback was incorporated into the analytic process.

The transcribed data, demographic survey, and field notes were analyzed and significant phrases were identified for illustrating the lived experiences of the Black deaf students in the study. The whole transforming process began with data collection, and advanced as further data reduction was achieved through data coding, creating clusters, deriving themes, and writing field memos that illuminated interview content.

**Summary**

The methodology, data collection methods, and data analysis described in this chapter were intended to yield a greater understanding of Black deaf students’
perceptions of their academic and social experiences during their first year of college at Brooke University. Also, this chapter contained the rationale for a qualitative study, criteria for selecting participants, data collection methods, and focus group interview protocols. The document analysis, overview of focus group interview questions, and the benefits from the usage of triangulation were also discussed.
Chapter 4: Study Findings

Introduction

In Chapter 4, the findings of the study are arranged into three major themes which were identified through cross-data analysis. The themes emerged repeatedly in the data self-reported by 10 Black deaf students who had completed their first year at a post-secondary institution and participated in one of three focus group interviews, supplemented by data extrapolated from a demographic survey and field notes prepared to elucidate focus group videotapes. The research questions that framed this study focused on the ways Black deaf participants described their experiences during the first year of college, and the social and academic factors they identified as influencing their decisions to remain enrolled. The questions were posed in the context of Tinto’s integration theory and other research findings.

The first theme, *Peer Connectedness*, centered on the ways participants defined “peer” in their new college setting, and the invaluable roles that peers played in helping them achieve academic and social success. *Defining Black Deaf Identity*, the second theme, considered the complexities that Black deaf participants encountered in determining what they must do to be successful in a White traditional academic environment, and how they identified themselves there among all the expanded possibilities.
The third theme, *Strategies that Support Black Deaf Students Success in College*, examined the ways Black deaf participants managed the pressures they faced as they suddenly became the main decision-makers in their own lives, and met new academic demands while adjusting to an unfamiliar environment. These three themes will be described in detail in the next section as they relate to the research questions, and the chapter will conclude with a summary of results.

**Theme 1: Peer Connectedness**

Participants reported that they talked with their peers about their classes, learned new information from one another, and found out whom to approach for help. In the focus groups, participants described that they began to become socially connected with their peers when they felt comfortable together, equal in status, and shared one or more important characteristic. They shared anecdotes that demonstrated this sense of connectedness was initially based on visible factors such as common race or shared situations (being Black or being in the same orientation group), yet participants reported that these changed over time as they learned more about each other, as they grew intellectually, and when they matured socially themselves. The definition of “peer,” therefore, was situational. In college, students faced a considerably expanded universe of potential peer groups and with these, new connection opportunities and related challenges.

Peer relationships on campus had many advantages among deaf students, according to several participants from Whitney’s focus group #2. They could rely on peers for advice and they gained opportunities to imitate their peers’ behaviors, attitudes, and ways of thinking because Deaf communications were so visual and easy to
comprehend. Peer bonding provided opportunities for exchanging ideas, thoughts, and support, and in focus groups, these communications were described as a top priority. Participants emphasized the amount of time they spent between classes and during the evenings, on the week days, and over the weekends with their peers, becoming new members of the college community where they felt accepted and that they belonged.

According to participants, access to support services was gained through peer relationships much more than through connections with faculty and staff. Peer support helped participants in the classroom too. Participants reported that peers were the people who helped the most to stay motivated through college. Nat-Nat, a second year Applied Computer Technology (ACT) major, stated, “Yes, I trust my friends. I see my friends when needed help as it is easier that way as we understand each other.” Nat-Nat made a point that it is easier to discuss about any issues with another peer who has gone through the similar experience and they can exchange the support and guidance. Another participant, Mary, a first year ACT major, shared her experience participating regularly in a study group with classmates in her deaf classroom. This was one way Nat-Nat and Mary and their classmates got academic support from each other. As the only Black student in class, Mary felt the group participation enabled her to better keep pace with her White deaf classmates. The study group also helped her finish assignments in a timely manner. She also used the group to get advice from her peers about what questions to ask teachers: “If I wasn’t sure if questions were appropriate or how to ask the right questions. I would ask friends first. I asked them to clarify and it went more smoothly for me.”

Mary also pointed out that having peer connections gave her access to guidance from her White peers while not putting anyone in either the authority or inferior position.
As study group peers, they were all able to be equals in how to ask the right questions in the traditional White academic environment. Those connections were made in both social and academic settings, and helped them to adjust to both aspects of college life.

Peer groups took many forms and fulfilled both social and academic purposes. While participants said they were sometimes surprised at the differences in opinion and values among them, learning to deal with conflict and to listen when individual views differed was, however, on balance experienced as a positive experience. As participants encountered different ideologies and values, they developed a broader understanding of issues; this enhanced knowledge helped them academically. The experience also provided the participants with opportunities to better understand what they themselves and their peers valued.

Socializing with peers outside of the class has benefits for academic support. Several participants from different focus group mentioned the importance of having a good time with friends. Tamera, a second year Criminal Justice (CJ) major, commented, “We [with friends] usually go to the mall for shopping or go to the movies. It helps to relieve the mind from the stress of homework.” Other participant, Bobby talked about what he does during his free time:

I hang out with my girlfriend and a few other friends when I am on a break from homework. We sit and talk about different things in life. It helps me to relax and have a good time. Sometimes we go to the gym together.

Bobby mentioned that socializing with his friends who have similar academic goals motivated him to stay on top with his studies. Other participants described having an easier time adjusting to campus life and making friends quickly. Tamera, a second year
Criminal Justice (CJ) major who presented herself in her focus group as very outgoing in personality, described feeling a more immediate sense of belonging soon after she arrived on campus. She enthusiastically recounted her memories of socializing with peers during her first year of college:

"I loved going out with my friends. I liked eating at Denny’s at 3:00 a.m. with my friends. I did that so many times during my first year of school. I had so much fun hanging out with my friends as we enjoyed talking about anything.”

All the participants in the three focus groups talked about the activities they shared with their friends for socialization. One participant said that shopping with her friends provided stress relief and allowed her to feel comfortable in her new peer relationships. Another participant in the same focus group added, “We usually went to the mail or the movies. We sat and talked about different things in life. It helped to relieve the stress of homework. We went to parties.”

Other participants also recognized that as more characteristics were shared, the academic support they received from their peer relationships was more effective. Whitney said, “I always ask someone deaf who is inside the classroom to help me out because someone outside doesn’t know what I am going through.” She felt peers with whom she shared the same deaf identity and a knowledge about the lectures and discussion in class could be more helpful. The common experience of being deaf and in the same class provided participants more complete access to information than did their relationships with hearing classmates alone.

Other students from the same major, sharing career and academic goals, also formed peer groups like Mary’s study group. Taraji, a first year LST major, said that her
social peer group initially came from the academic environment and from there, they became good friends:

I interacted with the same people in the classroom. We all had little cliques. My clique was with the science majors. Everyone tended to hang out with their own major. We debated about science or psychology. It was fun.

While Taraji’s peer group began with students who shared an academic interest in Science, as they exchanged knowledge about the courses, their relationship expanded outside the class environment and became social. As reported, the more they knew about each other, the tighter their bonds became.

Forming supportive academic peer groups was reported as successful. Black participants in some majors, nevertheless, found it more difficult to identify peers who shared their academic interests. Nat-Nat, a second year ACT major, did not have many Black students in her computer classes, stated, “I go to my friends within the Black community when needed help. Sometimes, I went to my White friends because most of my friends in the Black community were taking Business classes.”

Nat-Nat’s Black friends from outside class offered support, but she believed her White classmates were capable of offering more help academically. She felt that students from Predominantly White high schools were sometimes better prepared for college than Black students. It was not clear whether this idea was based on her observation or represented her own internalized stereotype thoughts about race and ability.

Peer connectedness was perceived by Black deaf students in different ways based on hearing status, major, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family history, and geographical origin. The more traits participants shared, the more connected Black deaf
participants felt and the more effective they were in supporting each other. Peer connectedness was important for social and academic reasons, and without social connections, Black deaf participants felt that they were less likely to remain in college. The next theme will discuss Black deaf participants’ experience in establishing their identities and adapting their behavior to college.

Focus group responses suggested that students who were enjoying a good time with their friends were more likely to feel confident about expressing themselves authentically. These peer relationships created a ripple effect among students, and when someone became discouraged, participants reported, they promoted a desire to stay in college with their friends and continue their education.

Deaf participants believed that peer connectedness was an essential factor in their decision to remain in college, even more critical than connections with faculty and staff. These connections were made in both social and academic settings, and helped participants to adjust to both aspects of college life. The next theme will discuss Black deaf participants’ experience in establishing their identities and adapting their behavior to college.

**Theme 2: Defining Black Deaf Identity**

The choices Black deaf college students could make about identity were numerous and sometimes conflicting. While all people experience some identity choices based on factors like gender, race, and language preference, Black deaf participants faced additional challenges, including stereotypes about race and ability, in defining their own identities. How they define themselves as Black Deaf college students? Were their White peers more accomplished academically?
The second theme examined personal identity as it was affected by participants’ feeling the need to meet multiple and sometimes conflicting social and academic standards, and to avoid others which had been internalized as stereotype threats. The latter are defined as a fear of conforming to stereotypes and as a consequence, being negatively judged by their White peers (Steele 1995, 2000). Black deaf participants frequently articulated the belief that White behavior was the standard they needed to meet socially and academically. Implied more than stated, participants had observed “White” behavior as the norm throughout their lives, and participant comments reflected that the norm had been internalized in conscious and unconscious ways. Even when it had not been internalized, participants’ comments suggested they were capable of “Acting White,” playing the role, when to do so would align them with the White position of privilege and power. One Black deaf participant communicated similar normative beliefs about the oral community; she said she did not want to be identified as Deaf.

These standards were often conflicting and came from both external sources (parents, peers, institutions) and internal, many of which were absorbed unconsciously by Black students as a result of living in a racialized society. Deaf participants encountered similar internal conflicts, their own stereotype threat, in relation to their identity as deaf students. Omobola described her experience with the pressure of feeling she had to choose the deaf community over the hearing community although she had come from an African hearing community:

I still don’t totally feel that I understand the Deaf community. I am accepted by the Deaf community but I feel more connected to the hearing community. I kind of straddle both worlds. I go back and forth but I grew up in a hearing
environment so most of my time has been associating with the hearing community. I can’t just get rid of that. I have internalized the hearing culture in me.

In her African cultural heritage, she had identified most closely with the hearing community. She emphasized that she could not easily give up her Black hearing community, historically her primary support system, for a new culture, the deaf community.

As a Black student were different from what was expected of other students, insisted that he has never been pressured by anyone about who he was or how he ought to act:

Honestly, I do not feel pressured at all. I am who I am. I do not feel the need to be a more “hyper” Black person, like I see in others. I remain who I am. This is how I have been since birth and I am proud of that.

In contrast, in response to another question, describing his efforts to fit with White peers behaviorally in college, Bobby said:

By looking at various college situations, you see how students act appropriately and then I had to be like a magnet and match what White classmates did. I didn’t have to copy their personalities but I had to imitate their approaches to academic life.

Bobby seemed to have equated “White” with ‘acting appropriately’ and with academic success here. Further comments addressed his belief that his White classmates took their assignments seriously and that he sought to act mature himself, to fit in with
White peers on campus. When Bobby was asked to clarify what he meant about “acting maturely like them,” he elaborated:

Basically, when I was talking about acting maturely what I meant was that I saw a lot of White people dressed appropriately, and conducting themselves appropriately so I tended to do the same thing because this was college environment kind of stuff. So yes, I did look at other people, but also, I made my own decisions about changing my outward appearance. You can’t look too wild or you will look like Bozo the clown. Hanging out with White students was fine and you just should not do anything ridiculous because that will make them avoid you.

His initial comment emphatically insisted that he “was his own man.” By the end of his remarks, though, not only did he seem to define “appropriate” as White, but he implied that as a Black deaf student, it was necessary to exercise some vigilance in avoid appearing “wild” or “ridiculous,” stereotypes that he equated with Black people. Bobby was subtly expressing that he had chosen ability--academic success—and minimized his identification with his Black culture. His comments reflected the deeply conflicted nature of identity for Black students in predominantly White colleges.

Instead of adopting White behaviors, some participants tried to distance themselves from the negative stereotypes about Black people which they had internalized or merely recognized as unacceptable in White college culture. Tamera expressed concerned with not seeming “stupid,” and talked about her sensitivity to acceptable decorum in a predominately White classroom: If I was partnered with someone [White
classmate] or in a group [White peers] I tended to be more serious about it because I didn’t want them to think that I was stupid.

She implied that “stupid” was a stereotype about Black people that influenced how they were perceived. In a similar context, Nat-Nat, a second year ACT major, expressed self-consciousness as a Black student fitting into a mostly White classroom:

Being the only Black student in [a deaf] class, sometimes I feel like I can’t chill with them. I have to figure out a nice way to talk to them because I don’t want them to judge me or look down at me because of my silliness or the typical silliness of Black people.

She not only referred to a stereotype she recognized; she herself may have internalized it. In a racialized society, she must have been exposed since childhood to White facial expressions and body language that suggested disrespect when the latter observed Black people communicating. She may have been told as she grew up to avoid certain behavior that her parents feared would subject her to negative White judgment.

Participants’ own observations about White authority and power were sometimes reinforced by information they received from their parents. Nat-Nat mentioned advice she received from her father:

Growing up, my Dad was always telling me to behave. But I just liked to express myself and be who I was. I was not going to act crazy in class, obviously. Like he said, if you are in the environment that you are in so that you are not the only one standing out like a sore thumb.

Other participants wanted to model what they perceived was “college level” maturity. They were sensitive to appropriate classroom behavior and that their work be
submitted as the teacher had assigned it; they were anxious to ask questions in the classroom at the right time and in the proper format. In defining those standards, “White” behavior again became the measuring stick.

While several participants talked about their desire to behave the way they thought “successful” students behaved, only Mary, a first year ACT major, specifically discussed why she focused on White students. Describing her previous educational environment she said, “White” behavior was easily seen and felt by Black deaf students, although it was enacted by White peers and then modeled by Black classmates. Mary unconsciously acknowledged White privilege and authority which are acted upon, albeit not always consciously, by Black and White communities alike. She said that she did not yet have the social position to initiate the conversation because she was the only Black student in class. She talked about the process of making introductions in her computer class. She said that she needed to keep her guard up as a precaution, uncertainly anticipating whether her White classmates would accept her. Mary said, “Actually…they [White classmates] started first to include me, then I went ahead. I guess they included me and then I socialized more.” She believed that recognizing her White classmates’ authority to initiate conversations in a predominately White institution might be returned by White classmates’ acceptance of her in their peer group. Despite their overt signs of acceptance, she still behaved cautiously until she felt secure that she had been accepted by her White classmates.

Black students expected their Black deaf peers to self identify as Black. Aries, a first year ACT student, shared her experience joining a sorority during the first year of college:
A group of my Black deaf friends asked why I didn’t join the Black sorority group. That honestly happened all the time as it was expected for me to be in the same group with the same race and cultural background even by my Black deaf friends.

When Aries explained this in her focus group, all the other participants laughed together and one said, “Yes, that’s true!” in sign language while the others nodded their heads in agreement. Participants’ comments repeatedly illustrated the conflicts inherent in establishing “self-identity” in a culture that routinely marginalized its minority members.

Taraji reported about being oral and not knowing any sign language or have met other deaf students at the deaf program in her high school. She stated, “There was a deaf program in my high school but I was fully mainstreamed without any supportive services. At high school, I never asked for help because then they wouldn’t think that I am a poor deaf child.”

Taraji experienced not only conflict about her hearing identity, but was pressured by her own internalized similar normative beliefs about the oral community as she did not want to be identified as deaf.

Whitney shared her experiences dealing with the conflicting race identities of her own cultural background and the labeling of her identity by other peer groups:

Before college, I always tried to fit deaf or hearing peers, but never their ethnic background because I attended all White schools. In college, I see a group of African Americans and other races. Some people bluntly tell me that I am Black period! It’s somewhat of a struggle for me as sometimes I am Indian and other time as Black. So I decided to label myself as mixed race American.
Mary talked about the stressful experience she had when arriving in a deaf class and discovered that she was the only Black student there: “I was the only Black deaf student in class. I was awkward but knew that everyone is deaf so that made it easier to mingle with them.” Her preoccupied thoughts about whether she will be accepted by her classmates have been replayed over and over: “Sometimes I still have the gut feeling that they may reject me. We have the same [deaf] culture, but we have different backgrounds.” She admittedly waiting for them to include her in the conversation and once it has happened, then she socialized more. Her facial expression showed that she was being guarded and slowly joined the conversation. She was asked how she started the conversation with them. She laughed and said, “Actually, they started first to include me and then I went ahead afterwards.”

The possibilities for identity confusion in a multicultural society are nearly infinite. In addition to resulting from race or ability, preferred communication mode must also be considered. Nat-Nat experienced studying with deaf peers for the first time in college, as she had been the only deaf student in a hearing high school:

But here at college, things are a little different. A big difference is because I was raised mainstream, but this is a deaf college. And there was nothing I can do about that. I have to accept it and learn about Deaf Culture.

Nat-Nat’s comment indicated a certain fatalism about the need to identify with peers who had different identities, cultures, and values.

While young adults typically identify with peers who look and act like themselves, Black these deaf Black participants faced unique identity issues. They were pressured by internal and external factors, to meet diverse standards and to identify
themselves in different ways--by race, hearing status, physical and academic ability, among others. The standards they had already internalized from their experiences and those imposed by families, peers, and college institutional expectations were often conflicting. In addition, the participants did not always share a similar communication mode or language with those with whom they interacted or have easy access to them. As a result, their interpretations of what constituted “the standards” may have been flawed. Finally, Black deaf participants needed to sort out these standards in an environment of White and hearing privilege, power, and authority. How they developed strategies to prevail in such a difficult atmosphere is the subject of the third and final theme.

Theme 3: Strategies that Support Black Deaf Student Success in College

Black deaf participants had successfully completed their first year in college despite formidable challenges. Their personal tenacity and resilience were evident, as was their creativity in solving problems and removing barriers to academic success. The focus group members reported facing “new” burdens formerly carried by others at home or school: Making decisions and acting independently; managing life skills such as time and task management; budgeting; balancing part-time jobs and school obligations; understanding college financial aid resources; and learning new coping and multitasking skills.

Several participants talked about the overwhelming experiences of trying to stay on top of their studies as well as keeping up with their social life and how they got the help to get back on track. Whitney, a first year Business major, shared her struggle with time management during the fall term:
High school was fine for me. But the hardest part in college was time management. I did everything last minute. College was harder. I was so stressed. I held everything in because I didn’t want my parents to think that I was fucked up. I socialized too much and realized I needed to focus on my homework and less on my friends so I had to find that balance. I had some help from my Dad as he was in college back in 2006. Plus, [the help] from my brother as he recently graduated. Whitney’s comment demonstrated her increasing ability to balance studies and social life, and her growing knowledge of who to ask for help.

Another participant, Bobby, a second year AIS student, admitted that during his first year, he was spending too much time with friends and slacking off from studies: As far as my life outside the academic world, I would say that I didn’t use a lot of good time management skills, and used up the time hanging out with my friends too much. I have to tell you that initially, I was slacking off in freshman seminar class because I thought it was pointless and boring. But in the 7th week I started to take the class seriously and applied lessons that I have learned in the class to help me get through college life.

Bobby’s statement showed that he quickly saw what had been happening with his academic performance in Freshman Seminar class and how his social life with friends impacted his academics. From there, he knew he had a choice to make, either get himself turned around or fail the course, and this led him to make a quick decision to focus on his studies.

The need for strategies to address new life skills demands was discussed by several participants who talked about budget challenges. Sometimes it was necessary for
students themselves to untangle the confusion among contradictory viewpoints and create solutions and strategies to address them. Omobola talked about being clueless of financial processes because her parents had handled the fiscal responsibilities while she was growing up:

During my first year, I was so naïve about financial issues. Back in high school years, I did not have to worry about it as my parents used to take care of the bills. I called my Dad and asked if he could pay but was told that he did not have the money as he had already paid [some] bills.

Omobola described the “wake-up” call she experienced when facing that she could not have her college bills paid off in time for registering classes for the next term. She said that after this experience, “I decided to look for a part-time job to save money as a back-up if my Dad was not able to pay for it,” as she recognized the need to be prepared for the unexpected situation if it did arise. This required her to plan far in advance so that all would go smoothly.

Another participant, Mary shared her budgeting experience: “I really learned how to figure out how to budget. When going to the store, I separated out the things that I needed and what I didn’t need. I totaled it all together and then bought what I needed.”

In focus group #3, all the participants mentioned their struggles with balancing studies and financial issues during the first year of college. Hazalyn faced several obstacles during the fall term. After finding out that she owed $6,000, her mother had a car accident that left her unable to work, and her father was not able to help out much due to supporting a young family, she said, “I do not come from a rich family but do come from somewhat middle class and my mother did not save a college fund for me.”
researched financial aid including Vocational Rehabilitation support, scholarships, grants, and assistance to help pay her college bills: “I have been paying for my education from my own pocket and it was not easy. It was hard to keep up with the academics in college and at the same time support myself financially.”

Hazalyn not only solved her financial problem, but used the experience to practice her research skills, a talent she would need repeatedly in her college career. Aries a first year AIS major, understood what Hazalyn was going through:

I can relate with you [Hazalyn]. I get Social Security Income (SSI) but my Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor will only cover some, not all. I am forced to pay the rest myself and I do not come from a rich family like you. I was not prepared at all of what I was getting into during my first year of college. I was told earlier that VR counselor will take care of the rest even if it’s an emergency but it did not happen.

Aries learned to navigate complex government systems for SSI, VR, and also found that she needed to be skeptical and to probe and ask clarifying questions to get the information she needed from bureaucrats.

Not only did participants grasp the importance of independence, they were especially resourceful in devising strategies for meeting their needs and solving problems in college. In focus group #2, Mary a first year ACT major, reported doing most work independently, but said she asked the teacher specific questions about things she did not understand. Another participant in focus group #3, Omobola, a third year Engineering Technology (ET) major, mentioned about her strategy to get more information for the course from the teacher. She said, “I would tend to email the instructor and request an
one-on-one meeting.” As she felt that the one-on-one meeting has helped her a lot as she is able to understand of what was required from the teacher and there was no distraction going on around them. Whitney, a first year Business major, mentioned that she looked for answers on the Internet or got a book. “There always has to be a way,” she said. The third participant, Taraji, a first year LST major added, “If I did not understand at that moment, I would look on the internet. But if I could not find it, I would wait until the next day and ask. But I preferred to find it myself first.”

One participant in focus group#3 talked about how she got an appointment with her counselor for academic advising: “If it is something that I cannot wait on, I will email to [staff assistant] and ask for an appointment with the counselor.” According to this participant, it was reported that being proactive about meeting with the counselor has been helping a lot as she was able to get the academic advising she needed in time before registration day.

Regardless of whether participants had attended mainstream or deaf high schools, or whether they entered deaf or mainstream colleges, mastery of the English Language was described by several participants as essential to success in college. Mary, a first year ACT major, explained that her perception of her English proficiency did not match her teacher’s expectations:

I had a hard time writing English well. I thought I did it well but the teacher said I needed to improve. I tried, it didn’t work… But I kept going and finally succeeded. My mom helped [with writing English] and also I went to a tutor and it really helped.
In some cases, the participant’s major program selection had an impact on the English proficiency required to succeed in that course of study. Omobola said that her Chemical Engineering Program, selected after she started her college studies, required a more advanced level of English proficiency:

I wanted to be in Chemical Engineering Program but learned that I needed to complete the English requirements first. I have accepted and took their advice of majoring in Civil Engineering Technology. It was worth it as I have learned something new about the major; Civil Engineering Technology.

She concluded that even though the language proficiency requirement caused her to take longer to complete the degree, it had been worth the effort. As a result of that experience, Omobola’s subsequent strategy of learning as much as possible in advance about the requirements of actions she was considering was likely to prove valuable throughout college and beyond.

Whether participants’ preferred method of communication was visual or oral, encountering staff, teachers, and peers whose preferences were different caused problems in and out of the classroom. Differences between teacher communication preferences and participants’ previous language experience sometimes caused conflict. Tajari, who did not know American Sign Language (ASL), discussed her strategies to keep up with class discussions conducted in ASL:

My freshman seminar instructor only signed [in American Sign Language]. I didn’t understand a word he said. He told me I had to learn sign. I called Mom every night, telling her that I couldn’t succeed. She told me to bear with it and I
did. I relied on other deaf oral student who knew some signs under her belt and started practicing attending to sign language.

On the other hand, she was encouraged by her deaf teacher and peers to do her best in learning ASL. Taraji discovered that asking questions and observing others’ signing helped her to learn ASL which was useful to her in academics. Mary, in Taraji’s focus group#2, added about her tendency of not saying anything when she’s confused or not understanding what is going on: “The most difficult moment I had with my peers was communication difficulties. I learned to be more proactive and ask to repeat. Before I wouldn’t say anything.” She shared her frustration about her deaf peers who tended to sign sloppily and it was difficult to follow and she would not ask them to repeat. But, after realizing how much information she was missing so she decided to speak up.

Tamara experienced a difficult breakup with her boyfriend that she did not feel she could cope with on her own. She explained how she was able to take advantage of a campus service to help her deal with her unhappy situation:

I got involved with major drama; this boy became my ex-boyfriend and then he brought in a new girlfriend…all that stuff. It affected me so much. I took advantage of the women’s center because during that time I felt like I wanted to leave, transfer to another school. It was an awful feeling for me. I was so stressed. Tamera used the support from the Women’s Center. She believed that talking openly about her experiences with the staff helped her manage her own grieving process and at the same time, helped her to continue achieving her goal of completing a college degree.
Other participants, like Tamara, coped with issues of an emotional rather than a material nature. Nat-Nat shared her experience of dealing with rumors during the fall term and how she overcame them:

During one quarter, it was a wonder that I got a good GPA because it was when people kept spreading rumors about me. And then they would look at me as if I was a bad person. I am not. I got fed up with arguing with them because they never listened to what I was trying to tell them. So I decided to back off and let them see that I was not the guilty one at all. I always tell the truth.

Nat-Nat’s strategy was not to take the rumor unnecessarily personally, and to concentrate her energy instead on her schoolwork and her relationships.

Serving as a role model was described as a positive experience for many participants. They talked about being role models for their siblings, cousins, and the family members Some participants said that having others depend on them motivated them to succeed themselves in college, thus providing a good example for those who looked up to them. Taraji a first year LST major, shared how watching her mother attending school to earn a degree while at the same time raising five children has motivated her to pursue a college degree. Her older brothers, in comparison, dropped out of college. “I am the third to go to college. I want to graduate and make sure I am the example for the last two,” said Taraji.

Mary, a first year ACT major added, “I also wanted to be a role model for my younger siblings and also for my older brother who has dropped out of college.”
Rather than serving as a role model, Omobala was fortunate to observe an outstanding one herself, her deaf sister. She looked up to her and was sustained by her advice and example when things got too difficult:

I saw my sister graduate with a Masters Degree at Gallaudet University. And I realized that we are all equal and we can do it. She would tell me do not worry, you can do it no matter what. So I believed from that moment on. She was deaf and so it meant that deaf people could do it.

Despite the number and difficulty of their challenges, these individual participants used their unique resources to manage them. Black deaf participants turned problems into learning and growth opportunities in the areas of communication mode and English language proficiency. They learned to manage personal finances and institutional resources, to form and maintain personal and professional relationships, the value of role modeling, and in general how to thrive in an environment of change and diversity. Black deaf participants used their skills of problem-solving and their determination to persevere to meet challenges, as well as using institutional resources like counseling and tutoring services.

The last theme highlighted the strategies Black deaf participants used, some of them reliant on their own individual skills, some specific to their own cultures and not readily available to White or hearing populations. For example, deaf participants had expanded skills of visual observation that helped them interpret meaning when words were not clear. Black deaf participants also used the skills they had been forced to practice in order to survive in often hostile environments, like problem-solving.
perseverance. They took advantage of institutional resources like counseling and tutoring services. They drew on the support of family members, peers, faculty, and staff.

**Summary of Results**

Black deaf participants turned problems into learning and growth opportunities in the areas of communication mode and English language proficiency, managing personal finances and institutional resources, forming and retaining personal and professional relationships, and thriving in an environment of change and diversity. To reach the second year college level despite overcoming sustained and severe challenges, they had proven themselves to be survivors.

The fifth and final chapter discusses the findings, points to research limitations, and offers opportunities for further research.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The research examined the ways study participants, — who all continued beyond their first year of college,—experienced academically and socially in that initial year and their identified factors for their retention. While enrollment rates continue to increase for Black deaf students in higher education, an alarmingly high number of Black deaf students leave college before graduation (Boutin, 2008; Cuculick & Kelly, 2003; Escobedo, 2007; Government Accountability Office, 2009; Marschark & Waunters, 2008; Myers et al., 2010; Schwartz & Washington, 2007; Walters, 2010; Williamson, 2007). The findings from this study illustrate that Black deaf students continue to experience the enrollment and attrition of Black deaf students continue to be paralleling. The relationship of the findings with the research questions supported by Tinto’s Student Integration Model (1993)

Student Retention

The findings relate specifically to two research questions and Tinto’s (1993) model of student integration. Tinto’s student integration model, supported in research by Hausmann et al. (2007), Reason et al. (2006) and others, postulated that student attachment to college occurs in stages, and the earlier the connection is made, the stronger it will be (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Terenzini et al.,1995). Tinto concluded that the institution’s observable commitment to all its students is important to retention; that retention depended on students’ successful separation from their home communities
and replacement by new connections in the college community; and that it relied on students’ ability to communicate effectively with peers, teachers, and other campus staff (Hausmann et al; 2007; Hoffman et al, 2003; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Palmer et al, 2009, Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Woosley & Miller, 2009).

To apply Tinto’s theory of student departure more specifically to Black Deaf college students, the research questions posed in this study were: (a) What are the particularities of experiences of Black deaf college students who remained enrolled beyond the first year at a predominately White college?; and (b) What are the academic and social characteristics that Black deaf college students identify as factors in their retention?

A qualitative phenomenological inquiry was used to develop greater understanding about “what constitutes the nature of “lived experiences,” and to provide descriptions of the specific phenomena relevant to Black deaf participants during their first year at a predominately White hearing college (Chrzanowska, 2002; Creswell, 2007, p.59, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Schultz, 1967; Seidman, 1991).

**Discussion of Study Findings**

While new challenges always exist for students as they enter an unfamiliar college environment, these were multiplied by issues of race and hearing status for the Black deaf participants in this study. Deaf students’ preferred communication mode,--either oral or using sign language –were often different from at least some of their peers, faculty, and staff (Marschark & Waunters, 2008; Myers & Taylor, 2000). Even when they shared a common language mode, participants still faced challenges resulting from stereotype threat (Steele, 1987), including coping with the perception and reality of White privilege.
and power, the effects of socioeconomic and ethnic variations in speech style and idiom, and a multitude of definitions of what constitutes “appropriate” behavior. To complicate matters further, the definition of peer is dynamic and situational (Foster & Kinuthic, 2003; Leigh, 2010). At home, for example, a Black deaf student with a limited number of deaf peers might align himself with the Black community, while on the campus of a Deaf college, the same student could define his peer group as the Deaf community.

**Peer Connectedness**

The Black deaf students in this study perceived that the sooner they connected with their peers and the more characteristics peers shared, the more successfully were they able to support each other socially and academically (Astin, 1984; Tinto 2003). Further, the connections they made and sustained with peers in and out of the classroom figured predominately in their retention, more important than the bonds they formed with teachers and staff (Hausmann et al., 2007; Schwartz & Washington, 2007; Singer & Willett, 2003; Tinto, 1993). Consistent with the findings of Reason, Terenzini and Domingo (2006), regardless of students’ personal circumstances, past experiences, and high school academic performance, what happened during their first college year was most critical in whether they persisted.

Participant peer relationships began to form early, often during the summer or fall orientation sessions held to prepare students for college life (Hawley & Harris, 2005; Hunter, 2006; Palmer et al., 2009; Stephens, 2001; Woosley & Miller, 2009). The most successful peer connections were often those formed earliest (Tinto, 1987, 1993, 1997, 1998, 2003 & 2006; Walpole et al., 2008). This common experience,—all the students were “in the same boat,”—connected many of them initially. The more characteristics
participants shared, the more effectively they were able to provide social and academic support; the more time participants spent with their peers, the more likely they were to discover that their similarities were more numerous and important than were their differences (Stolle-McAllister, 2010; Wilmer, 2008).

At first, the factors that initially drew participants together were easily-identified commonalities like sharing a dorm room or enjoying the same sports. While some relationships that formed this way persisted over time, others fell away as students grew more familiar with one another’s personalities, values, and standards, some of which represented vast differences among peers (Johnson et al., 2007; Schwartz & Washington, 2007). These disparities could sometimes be useful. For example differences among peers underpinned by individual personalities, disparate academic and social priorities, and conflicting values, offered opportunities for participants to sharpen negotiation and problem-solving skills. At the very least, they provided peers with a window into the diversity of other people and cultures (Hausmann et al., 2007; Palmer et al., 2009; Salinas & Lianes, 2003). This multiplicity of ideas that were represented within a group invited peers to broaden their individual stores of ideas, and to encounter the complexity of human thought and opinion. As a result, the peer groups that remained intact were able to investigate ideas, discuss them from various perspectives, solve problems when there was conflict among peers, and draw more informed conclusions because they had more information about the ideas they encountered in and outside the classroom (Boutin, 2008; Foster, 2002; Lang, 2002). All of those abilities represent life skills necessary for success in work and social contexts, especially in the multicultural society and global economy in which the majority of the world now coexists (Walters, 2010).
Like the peer groups that formed during orientation, students often formed peer groups when they were assigned to the same classes or were enrolled in the same course major where they could easily discuss assignments, share information, and debate opinions (Johnson et al., 2007). Peer groups were dynamic, forming and re-forming as participant interests and proximity changed and grew. Regardless of how peer groups originated, students who extended their relationships beyond the classroom boundaries and enjoyed relaxing and socializing together expressed the most satisfaction with these groups: These were the places participants felt they were accepted by their peers in their most authentic, still-emerging selves. Acceptance, however, did not mean unquestioning fealty to a common set of ideas or values. As in other social groups like families or work groups, individual personalities punctuated group cohesion and it became necessary to resolve conflicts or at least, to try to understand others’ opinions. When compromise could not be reached, subgroups formed and in the best cases, collaborated or at least co-existed respectfully.

**Defining Black Deaf Identity**

Establishing an adult identity is a particularly complex issue for new college students. Most are without the guidance and the modeling of their parents for the first time. Individual personality traits like extroversion or introversion, perseverance, and independence may make self-identification an easier or more difficult task. Sometimes the very task of fighting for one’s personal independence can help to form more resilient people, able to overcome even greater challenges and obstacles.

The society in which one is raised creates added identity considerations.
Black people in America have always faced a number of challenges as they identified themselves not only by race, but by socioeconomic status, home geography, family history, and numerous other characteristics unique to each individual (Jones, 2001; McCaskill, 2005; McCaskill et al. 2011). A critical factor in Black Deaf identity in the U.S. has been living in a society in which White privilege and power were so constantly evident and permeated the culture that it had, subconsciously, become part of who they were,—“less than” their White peers (Leigh, 2009; Steele, 1997, 2000). White identity was equated with the socially and academically superior position that participants both consciously and unconsciously internalized. White behavior stood in for the standard for maturity and appropriate college decorum, with its attendant privilege and authority (Hausmann, Schofield & Woods, 2007). Some Black participants wanted to identify with that standard, to “act White,” either to fit in or to merely overcome White resistance while others railed against the affront to, and negation of, who they were as Black people (Steele, 1997, 2000). Since White reality was so often hidden from them, the appearance of competence could often be confused with its reality, further complicating attempts to develop a bicultural identity (Hyde et al., 2008; Leigh, 2009; Padden & Humphries, 1988; Williamson, 2007). The internalization of negative stereotypes was reported in this study data by Black deaf participants who described efforts to distance themselves from Black identity. They struggled to walk a fine line: proud to be Black, but at the same time, fighting negative stereotypes that White peers and teachers might accept, or being uncomfortably aware of their own acceptance of the White standards or norms (Steele 1999).
While Black deaf students certainly face extraordinary challenges and prejudices among White hearing people, in this study participants mentioned Deaf identity confusion much less frequently, and their remarks did not reflect the same level of negative self-image that they seem to have absorbed about being Black (Leigh, 2009; Steele, 2000). However, while prejudice against deafness was not specifically named in focus groups, in eight of ten demographic surveys, respondents identified themselves as “hard-of-hearing” rather than “deaf,” suggesting that they did not wish to identify themselves as deaf. Participants were also very clear in focus groups about their frustration and resentment at not being able to communicate easily with peers and faculty. When ability is added as yet another variable of identity—deaf, hard-of-hearing, wheelchair-bound—the definition of self becomes even more complex (Foster & Kinuthic, 2003; Henderson, 2001; Leigh, 2009; Mamiseishvile & Koch, 2011; McNeil, 1993). A Black deaf student, for example, adopts a primary identity based on a number of factors. Has she grown up among and been educated with Black people or deaf people? Were her parents college-educated? Has her identity as a young black woman, valued in the world, been reinforced in her family and society, or debased? Is her preferred communication method oral or visual? If she is visual, does she sign in SEE or ASL or some other form? Culturally is she Deaf or deaf? A person who is a member of the Deaf culture where they share the same language, culture, and beliefs considers himself as Deaf. Someone who is not culturally deaf or part of the Deaf culture, would be considered “deaf,” spelled with the lower case “d.”

The formation of identity is an ongoing process, changing as participants grow and learn and as circumstances change, and it is mediated by the values and opinions of
others—parents, teachers, and peers, both hearing and deaf (Hoffman et al., 2003; Hyde et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2007; Myers et al., 2010). Participants are often placed in the position of being forced to choose between race and ability as they define their own identities (Foster & Kinuthic, 2003; Jones, 2001; King et al., 2003; Mamiseishvile & Koch, 2011; Padden & Humphries, 1988; Steele, 2000). While such divided identities, almost “split personalities” can be most disorienting, they hold the potential of becoming something else altogether. In a truly multicultural society, participants could self-identify comfortably and competently, sometimes scholars, sometimes Black men, sometimes single parents, sometimes Deaf statesmen, as the situation demands (Palmer et al., 2009; Parasnis et al., 2005; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003).

Even in situations where students have already faced the identity challenges of race and ability in their earlier schooling, they are certain to encounter new academic standards and the need to find their place in an unfamiliar social hierarchy (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson, 2007). Identity is never a static position; as circumstances change, great adaptive strengths and resilience are constantly called upon, particularly in coping with the complex reality that is the life of the Black deaf student.

**Strategies that Support Black Deaf Success in College**

Black deaf students may not encounter a negative environment vis-à-vis race or ability when they enter college, but they will all face unfamiliar cultural and academic standards and challenges soon enough (Belch, 2004; Berger & Milem, 2000; Edman & Brazil, 2007; Williamson, 2007). Parents’ attitudes about college and their feelings about their adult children leaving home affect participants’ chance to adjust well to a new environment. Having already demonstrated their tenacity and resilience in getting this far,
students will now be required to construct a set of skills that all new students need to acquire to succeed in college. Among them are self-sufficiency, successful problem-solving, decision-making skills, time and task management skill, stress management, multitasking skills, and budgeting skills. A knowledge of the college financial aid system, especially aid available to deaf and minority students, is another essential skill. Individual personalities will dictate whether participants view these abilities as barriers to success or challenges they will enjoy mastering: Some participants reported great enthusiasm in facing the challenges of adult life and college. Others expressed feeling somewhat overwhelmed by the pace and size of classes and the complexity of assignments (Cuculick & Kelly, 2003; Lang, 2002).

The most critical issue that Black deaf college students are likely to encounter is the disparity in communication styles among peers, faculty, and staff (Marschark & Waunters, 2008; Myers et al., 2010; Luckner & Muir, 2001). Success in college demands that Black deaf students develop college-level English writing skills and, whether or not they ever become oral, alternative ways to communicate with peers, professors, and staff on campus (Eilers-Crandall, 2009; Keasley, 2002; McCaskill, 2005). The magnitude of that challenge depends upon the participants’ prior education experiences: They may have come from a deaf school where everyone communicated using ASL or another signing method. Others attended mainstreamed high school with support from note-takers and interpreters. Some participants came from a mainstreamed high school with limited support services and an all-oral faculty. Some students sign using ASL, while others have learned Signed Exact English (SEE), or SimCom. Some deaf students do not understand
sign, but have communicated until college using speech, speech-reading, and paper-and-pencil. Some students have excellent English language skills while others do not.

Participants seemed undaunted in finding ways to get the information they needed. Some used the Internet and reference books. Others contacted faculty via email or made appointments to ask questions and get clarification about class material. They discussed college academic and social issues with their friends, parents, and classmates. Differences among individual personalities, disparate academic and social priorities, and conflicting values, for example, offered opportunities to sharpen negotiation and problem-solving skills or, at the very least, they provided peers with a window into the diversity of other people and cultures (Celious & Oyserman, 2001; Edman & Brazil, 2007; Elkins et al., 2000). This multiplicity of ideas that were represented within a group invited peers to broaden their individual collection of ideas, and to encounter the complexity of human thought and opinion. As a result, the peer groups that remained intact were able to investigate ideas, discuss them from various perspectives, solve problems when there was conflict among peers, and draw more informed conclusions because they had more information about the ideas they encountered in and outside the classroom.

In the Palmer, et al. (2009) study about the turning points and the transition from high school to college, participants used their primary language, English, when using a white board exercise to reflect about their experiences during their first year of college. Both this study and Palmer’s have the same objectives about discovering the participants’ first year academic and social experiences,. In the current study, however, Black deaf students used ASL as their primary language to share their experiences. The peer groups
were dynamic, forming and re-forming as participant interests and proximity changed and grew. Regardless of how peer groups originated, students who extended their relationships beyond the classroom boundaries and enjoyed relaxing and socializing together, expressed the most satisfaction with these groups: These were the places participants felt they were accepted by their peers in their most authentic if still-emerging selves.

Tinto’s student integration model and other research (Escobedo, 2007; Palmer et al., 2009; Reason, et al., 2006), recognize the importance of creating new connections with peers and becoming independent of parents, and also stress the significance of participants’ background characteristics, high school grades, their parents’ education backgrounds, and past experiences as important factors for students’ academic success and persistence in college. Furthermore, this study’s findings, supported by Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods, (2007), suggested Black deaf students thrived on parental support because they relied heavily on their parents for guidance and encouragement when the former attended a predominately White college. The studies of Johnson et al, (2007), Woolsey & Miller (2009), Schwartz & Washington (2007), confirmed that Tinto’s student integration model was the most complete model. Along with Astin (1993) and Tinto (1987), they added the two factors of institutional relationships between the college and the student on campus and first term grades for predicting retention for Black deaf students. All of these students relied on English, a primary language for White hearing students, for most data collection. They also used 7-point Likert-like scales, and questionnaires in surveys conducted on the internet, data collection methods which might
not have been effective devices for collecting information from Black deaf students (Marschark & Waunters, 2008; Myers et al., 2010).

Using the foundation of Tinto’s model and subsequent related research, the research discussed here may have both a substantial impact on college persistence, and also offers opportunities for improved professional practices in working with Black deaf college students.

**Implications for Counselors, Teachers of the Deaf (TOD), and Teachers**

The literature review and findings of this study report the need for high school Black deaf students to become prepared academically and socially before entering college (Boutin, 2008, Cuculick & Kelly, 2003; DeSousa, 2001; Mamiseishvile & Koch, 2011; Myers, et al., 2010; Parasnis, et al., 2003; Strayhorn, 2008; Williamson, 2007). Black deaf high school students are often placed in special education classes where there is insufficient support for participants to make the successful transition from high school to college (Brown, et al., 2001; Myers, et al., 2010; Williamson, 2007).

Counselors, mainstream teachers, teachers of the deaf in schools for the deaf and mainstream programs, could all benefit from training that focuses on the cultures and needs of deaf and Black students (Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Strayhorn, 2008; Williamson, 2007). Such training would enhance understanding and respect and create a welcoming environment for new Black deaf high school students. Professionals who participated in such training could be better respected and utilized by their students, who may recognize that the people entrusted with their education were able and willing to academically and socially prepare them for higher education. Student’s self-confidence could be boosted and their motivation to succeed in high school could be enhanced.
High school counselors require more extensive, detailed information about colleges and universities, especially vis-à-vis their deaf programs and the services they offer deaf students (Kelly & Albertini, 2008; Marschark et al., 2002) and programs available at Predominantly Black Colleges and Universities. Counselors might schedule periodic meetings with college admissions and counseling staff (in-person or by video conferencing) to review college-specific protocols and requirements that may differ from high school experiences and are noticeably absent or insufficient with existing new Black deaf college entrants. Counselors will be more effective in helping students choose and stay in college if they know about various college surroundings, academic and social programs, classroom configurations, and are aware of the primary communication modes which faculty and staff use most often, particularly in colleges where Black deaf students can receive the most effective academic and social support (Hopper, 2011; Luckner & Muir, 2001; Rawlings, 1994; Williamson, 2007).

High school counselors need to get involved with Black deaf students and their families early in students’ high school careers. White hearing counselors may be quite unaware of Black and Deaf cultural heritage, experiences, language habits, and beliefs. Establishing bonds between families and counselors before high school graduation will support Black families’ efforts to help their deaf children make the difficult transition to college more successfully (Terenzini et al., 1994; Walters, 2010; Williamson, 2007). Each Black family and each Black deaf student approaches college with unique strengths and challenges that must be individually accounted for and addressed in the best examples of college planning.
Group and one-to-one meetings among counselors, parents, and students; workshops; and college visits will better prepare high school students for college and help them to more effectively understand college expectations regarding communication modes, academic standards, and teaching methods. Black deaf students will gain awareness of the challenges they can expect. High school counselors can improve student transitions using a proactive approach by offering optional training to familiarize Black deaf students with federal and state financial aid procedures via their websites and publications; to learn elementary budget planning and handling of personal finances; to explore methods of coping with unexpected situations; and to practice organizational and managing time skills in high school as part of the transition process.

Another effort by counselors, teacher of the deaf, and teachers would include coordinating the transition process for Black deaf students such as helping students find financial aid and admissions information well in advance of application deadlines, and working with students side by side or in small groups to review college and financial aid applications, and to train Black deaf students to use self-advocacy skills in college. Where Black deaf students recognize that strong support is available in the transition from home to college, the support serves as an effective protective factor, a form of social capital, which supports college retention (Williamson, 2007).

Furthermore, in this study, Black deaf students’ first year experiences in a predominately White college, revealed their different way of becoming incorporated to the campus community as they maintained strong connections with parents and family members while making new peer connections with a variety of people. Tinto’s student integration theory supported the notion that students must break away from their parents
and friends at home, as they build new connections with faculty, staff, and peers on campus (Barefoot, 2009; Palmer et al., 2009). Peer connection is considered important to Black deaf students as part of transition to college. In this study, however, first-, second-, and third- year Black deaf students emphasized that their parents and family members were their main support during their transition. Cutting ties with their parents and family members had not occurred during the first year of college as Tinto’s student integration theory has suggested. While Black deaf students in predominantly White colleges may have seen peer connection as a way of ‘getting a “VIP card” of affiliation to the White campus community (Steele, 2000), they talked more often about their parents and family members; they were the ones students contacted first when they needed guidance, and support.

**Implications for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors**

Several participants reported receiving inconsistent information about government Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) support. Sometimes they were unaware of it altogether and other times received conflicting information about the amount of support. Delays and frustration for some Black deaf participants created difficulty in coordinating financial aid with their academic institution’s enrollment deadlines. To provide a smooth transition from high school to college, VR counselors need to work closely with high school counselors, teachers of the deaf, and parents, during high school. Students’ Individual Education Plans (IEPs) should include financial and academic preparation for higher education. Advance planning would minimize the overwhelming confusion currently faced by many Black deaf students when they arrive at college, (Jones, 2001)
Implications for the Higher Education Institution

Administrators, faculty, and staff in higher education need to get involved by reviewing and tracking Black deaf students’ academic performance and also supporting the efforts of academic department chairs and counselors to assure that Black deaf students are being challenged academically. The more they become familiar with Black deaf students’ progress, the higher will be the chance that they will be able to intervene early and more successfully when problems are encountered. Institutions would benefit from advisory committees to oversee their progress in these endeavors, and Black deaf students should be included in the committee composition.

Limitations of the Study

The research design and small sample size in this study restrict the ability to generalize findings. Future studies could be expanded to include more participants in a variety of college settings including colleges for the deaf, small and large institutions, and institutions that offer a variety of classroom settings, teaching techniques, and communication modes, and can compare the performance of deaf White and Black students as well as students in mainstreamed classrooms and deaf-only classes. Audiogram records were not requested as part of the demographic survey. Their presence could have determined if the participants’ responses about their deaf classification were related to the audiogram record, or represented their own internalized stereotyped thoughts (Hyde et al., 2009; Steele, 2000). As a result, it was not possible to ascertain whether deafness was determined using objective measurement or was the subjective perception of the participants, and to consider the students’ motivation if it was the latter. For example, while seven out of ten participants identified themselves as hard of hearing,
two of those had attended deaf schools where sign language was primarily used (Leigh, 2010). Another Black deaf participant defined herself as deaf in the demographic survey, and made a note next to it, “But I can speak too.” This reflected her awareness of her deafness, but she also emphasized her ability to speak as hearing and hard-of-hearing people do. Speaking is an ability that many hearing people do not equate with deaf individuals, but the majority of deaf people share an oral capacity with their hearing peers.

The study would have benefited from the ability to compare male and female participants; only two Black deaf males participated in the current study. Also, more detailed questions about parents’ education backgrounds would have confirmed or disagreed with Tinto’s student integration theory, which concluded that deaf college student performance was affected by parents’ academic experiences. The survey did not include a section for parents to communicate their thoughts about their deaf child’s hearing loss and their opinions about what their deaf child needed to succeed in college.

Also missing from the demographic survey, the specifics of participants’ high school environments would have improved the understanding of findings. Two out of ten participants attended deaf residential schools where the primary language was American Sign Language and everyone in school used sign language, and the other six participants attended mainstreamed schools. One out of eight never had an interpreter in high school classes and mainly responded to questions using spoken communication; this student struggled when arriving at college. The other student who attended a residential school for the deaf throughout his life struggled using the sign language interpreters and note takers in his mainstreamed classes at college. A large number of Black deaf students
know some form of sign language, but not all are similar: In addition to ASL, there are Sign Exact English (SEE) and Pigeon Sign English (PSE), and many non-English versions of sign, all which differ in significant ways. It is most challenging in an academic setting to learn unfamiliar material in a new language in a very short time.

The wording of focus group questions and limited amounts of time to pose follow-up questions reduced the ability to draw significant conclusions related to high school and college faculty and staff impact on retention, a factor that Tinto’s theory postulates.

In addition, the focus group interview protocol lacked questions that led participants to extensively discuss their strategies to successfully communicate with peers, faculty, and staff in their first year of college in a multicultural environment. Finally, had the focus group design included opportunities to pose follow-up questions at a later time, comments raised in one focus group that had not come up in the other groups could then have been posed, providing better intragroup findings.

Videographers in the focus groups were not consistently experienced in conducting video interviews with deaf participants. Those with deaf experience or, alternatively, who had been trained in sign language video, would have known to attend to angle of presentation, facial expression, and hand shape when recording participant responses. Also, the person who transcribes participants’ signing into English text needs to be knowledgeable about Black and deaf cultures and idioms, to interpret these Black deaf participants’ language more effectively.

With only one focus group interviewer concentrating on student responses, it was not always possible to direct the videographer’s attention to participants who may have
been signing responses while the camera was focused on another participant’s responses. The videographer also needs to be knowledgeable about the various forms of sign language as well as Black culture to make the video project more effective. This would capture all the crucial small facial and body expressions, invaluable to capturing the meanings of participants’ true emotions which were important points for the study.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research might investigate the relationship between the first year college experience, retention, and participants’ previous mode of academic experiences. Researchers could study, in detail, the type of high school Black deaf students had attended and their social relationships with hearing and deaf classmates there. The study could look at whether they attended regular classes full time with their White hearing peers, with or without supportive services, or half time at a contained classroom for the deaf or other students with different disabilities, and half time at regular classes with White hearing peers. Studies could consider whether deaf students’ preferred academic communication style was speech/oral or sign language. The study could also evaluate and compare the support and guidance provided by counselors in both mainstream high schools and deaf residential schools, particularly concerning Vocational Rehabilitation services and financial aid. Black deaf student identity formation from the first year in college through graduation might be studied further. By investigating how participants describe themselves and their goals, and the ways peer relationships changed and which were maintained consistently would provide a better understanding of the role of peer connections, and the passage of time and development of maturity, in supporting the Black deaf students’ retention in college. With the variety of communication modes
Black deaf college students used at home, school, and community, it is important to investigate how the participants adjusted to new language in the college academic setting.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings of this study support Tinto’s (1993) Integration Model Theory, particularly Black deaf participants’ first year peer connection experiences, the effect of their academic preparedness; and their ability to use a variety of strategies to keep up with the academic and social standards on campus. Extensive research (Astin, 1975, 1975, 1984, 1993; Ishitani, 2006; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1987, 1993, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2003 & 2006) suggests that student retention in institutions of higher education is consistently hampered by poor academic preparation, notably inadequate English language skills; inadequate college counseling and transitional preparation; high school and college counselors’ insufficient information about available financial aid options for deaf and minority students; and the availability or absence of a strong social support network. These issues are present, in varying degrees, for all students who enter colleges and universities but are exacerbated and magnified for Black deaf students.

Attrition is a particularly intractable problem for deaf Black students. In addition to the adaptation all freshman students face, Black deaf student experiences are further mediated by hearing ability and ethnic culture. Despite the multiplier effects that being Black and deaf may have on college attrition, there is scant research about the retention of that group. It is the purpose of this study to add to the body of knowledge explaining why Black deaf students persist in college, and to suggest specific gaps which can be filled by future research.
Black deaf participants said repeatedly that the principal keys their academic success included the support they got from home, finding comfortable and positive peer support; being academically ready for college; learning to deal with unexpected situations, and meeting parental and institutional expectations (Hausmann et al., 2007).

Several second and third year participants repeatedly commented that they continued regular contact with their parents and siblings for support. The connection with their parents continued throughout the years of higher education for many Black deaf college students, even as they maintained strong connections with their peers as well (Johnson et al., 2007). This study’s findings conclude that Black deaf participants’ prior academic standing, high school GPA, and their parents’ involvement in their education demonstrate that education is important to them (Hausmann, et al., 2007; Myers, Clark, et al., 2010; Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Salinas & Lianes, 2003; Schwartz & Washington, 2007).

Several Black deaf participants reported struggling to understand the faculty, staff, and students whose communication styles in and outside of the classroom were different from their own. They had difficulty keeping up with the fast pace in class, and several reported receiving inconsistent information about Vocational Rehabilitation resources, financial aid/scholarships, and loans (Cuculick & Kelly, 2003; Foster & Kinuthic, 2003; Hopper, 2011). Overall, they experienced considerable stress dealing with many unanticipated administrative issues in addition to keeping up with academics and conducting a social life. The latter components all happened at the same time.

In this study Black deaf participants saw the benefit of retaining strong bonds with their families, making connections with new peers as a way of building bridges to get to know the campus environment, the importance of discovering their own identities
and understanding the identities of others, and the value of using individual success
strategies to make themselves solid members of their campus communities (Rendon, et
References


I am conducting research on Black deaf students’ first-year experiences at college and I want to hear about your academic and social experiences during your first-year of college.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN THIS FOCUS GROUP STUDY:

- Black deaf first & second-year students
- Age 18-22
- Must be in a major during first-year of college
- Full-time status
- 2.5 or higher GPA

As a voluntarily participant in this study, you would be asked to attend one focus group interview session. The focus group interview session will be held here on campus in a meeting room. The length of the interview session is about one hour and a half.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY: The experiences you share will help me and the community to become more aware and understand about your first year experiences as a college student.

Participants’ information will be kept confidential.

To learn more about this research, call or email:
Mary Karol Matchett, 585-286-2189 (VP);
MM00425@SJFC.EDU

St. John Fisher College/XXXX IRB validation stamp
Appendix B

St. John Fisher College
Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
February 1, 2012

Dear Counseling Department Chair:

This letter is a request for XXXX Counseling Services assistance with a project I am conducting as part of my Education Doctorate at St. John Fisher College of Rochester, New York, under the supervision of Dr. Dingus-Eason. The title of my research project is “Black Deaf Students’ Experiences during their First-Year of College”. I would like to provide you with more information about this project that explores and identifies the experiences Black deaf students have during their first year of college.

The purpose of this study is to understand Black deaf students’ experiences during their first-year of college. Knowledge and information generated from this study may help the administrators, faculty, staff, academic advisors, students, stakeholders, and community members.

It is my hope to connect with Black deaf students who are engaged in the services of the XXXX Counseling Services to invite them to participate in this research project. I believe that the participants of your department have unique understandings and stories relating to social experiences and academics. During the course of this study, I will be conducting focus group interviews with participants to gather their stories of academic and social experiences. At the end of this study the publication of this thesis will share the knowledge from this study with other researchers, administrators, faculty, staff, academic advisors, students, and community members.

To respect the privacy and rights of the participants at XXXX, I will not be contacting the students directly. What I intend to do, is provide the academic advisors at XXXX Counseling Services with information flyers to be distributed at their discretion. Contact information for me and my advisor will be contained on the flyers. If a student is interested in participating they will be invited to contact me, Mary Karol Matchett, e-mail, MM00425@SJFC.edu; 585-286-2189 to discuss participation in this study in further detail.

Participation of any student is completely voluntary. Each student will make their own independent decision as to whether or not they would like to be involved. All participants will be informed and reminded of their rights to participate or withdraw before any interview, or at any time in the study.

To support the findings of this study, quotations and excerpts from the stories will be labeled with pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. Names of participants will not appear in the thesis or reports resulting from this study. Participants will not be identifiable, and only described by gender and the year level.
The identity of the organization, XXXX will remain confidential; a pseudonym will be given to the organization. All paper field notes collected will be retained locked in my office and in a secure cabinet in the Career Exploration Studies program at XXXX. All paper notes will be confidentially destroyed after three years. Further, all electronic data will be stored indefinitely on a CD with no personal identifiers. Finally, only myself and my advisor, Dr. Dingus-Eason in the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education at St. John Fisher College will have access to these materials. There may be minimal or anticipated risks to participants in this study.

I would like to assure you that this study will be reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics, St. John Fisher College and XXXX. However, the final decision about participation belongs to Black deaf students. If you have any comments or concerns with this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Jeannine Dingus-Eason at (585)-385-8002 or by email JDINGUS@SJFC.EDU.

I hope that the results of my study will be beneficial to Black deaf students, the members of XXXX and to the communities. I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Karol Matchett
Researcher
Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College

Dr. Jeannine Dingus-Eason
Associate Professor
Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College
Appendix C
Letter of Introduction and Participant Consent Form
St. John Fisher College

**Title of study:** Black Deaf Students’ Experiences During their First-Year of College.

**Name of researcher:** Mary Karol Matchett 585-286-2189

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Jeannine Dingus-Eason 585-385-8002

Before agreeing to participate in this research, we strongly encourage you to read the following explanation of this study. This statement describes the purpose and procedures of the study. Also described is your right to withdraw from the study at any time. This study will be reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of St. John Fisher College and XXXX.

**Purpose of study:** This study is to examine Black deaf students’ perceptions of their first-year academic and social experiences in a Predominately White/Deaf University. The research focuses on the factors that contribute to Black deaf students’ persistence.

**Approval of study:** This study has not been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board and XXXX Institutional Review Board (IRB) at XXXX.

**Place of study:** XXXX.

**Length of participation:** You will participate in a focus group interview session one time with other Black deaf students. The length of the focus group interview session will be about one hour and a half. Your discussion in the focus group interview session will be videotaped and transcribed from American Sign Language to English text. You will be asked to see the notes for feedback. This process will take several months from March through June of 2012.
**Potential risks:** There will be a minimal risk for participating in this study. During the focus group interview session, you may experience discomforts include possible emotional feelings when asked questions during the interview. To reduce these minimal risks, you will be informed right away that you can stop anytime you wish and go see a counselor right away for help.

**Potential benefits:** Your participation in this study will add the opportunity to discuss feelings, perceptions, and concerns related to the experience during the first year of college. Also, the results of this study may provide the administrators, faculty/staff, parents, and students with a better understanding of Black deaf students’ ‘lived experiences’ during their first-year and how they navigate through to succeed in academics and social.

**Method of protecting confidentiality/privacy:** The information gathered during this study will remain confidential in secure premises during this study. Participant confidentiality and anonymity will be reinforced and maintained at all times. All the videotapes, field notes, and other information gathered during this study will be kept in the researcher’s locked file cabinet. The tapes will be destroyed at the completion of the study.

**Your rights:**

As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.
I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

Print name (Participant)  Signature  Date

Print name (Investigator)  Signature  Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above.
Appendix D

Demographic Data Survey for the Participants

Name: ___________________________ Date: ______________

Pseudonym: _______________ Date of Birth: __________ Age: ________

Gender: Male ___ Female ___

Hearing Status: Deaf_______ Hard of Hearing____

Place of Residence (HOMETOWN): ______________________ City ________ State ________

High school graduation date: ______________ GPA average in high school: ______

School Setting: Mainstreamed (deaf & hearing)____
Deaf residential (deaf only)____
Day program (deaf only)____
Homeschooled ______

ACT scores: ______
Communication used at academics:

ASL ______
Signing with some speaking and lipreading ______
Oral and no signing at all ______

Communication used at social:

ASL ______
Signing with some speaking and lipreading ______
Oral and no signing at all ______

Communication used at home:

ASL ______
Signing with some speaking and lipreading ______
Oral and no signing at all ______

Major in college: __________

Parent education (circle highest level achieved)

Father:  High School    College    Graduate School
Mother:  High School    College    Graduate School
Appendix E

To lead phenomenological interviews, with a guiding question of this study, “What are the particularities of the experiences of Black deaf college students who remain enrolled beyond the first year and what do they identify as factors in their own retention?”, which is to understand Black deaf students’ lived experiences during their first academic year of college, the following interview guide were used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Describe your academic experiences during classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Describe your academic experiences outside classes (tutoring services, homework/assignments)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Describe your interactions with faculty/staff*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Describe your interactions with classmates*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Describe your social experiences during free time (lunch/dinner/evening/weekends)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Describe your experience during social activities on campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Describe your interactions with peers* during your social activities or free time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*ask them to elaborate if they mentioned about hearing/deaf/White/Black individuals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Topic</th>
<th>Possible Prompts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Can you explain more what you mean about_____?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help me understand more about_____?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tell me more about_____?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give me an example of what you can share that will help me understand about your experiences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Interpreter Code of Conduct: Confidentiality
American Sign Language interpreters adhere to the following conduct with regard to confidentiality.

CODE OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Tenets
1. Interpreters adhere to standards of confidential communication.
2. Interpreters possess the professional skills and knowledge required for the specific interpreting situation.
3. Interpreters conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to the specific interpreting situation.
4. Interpreters demonstrate respect for consumers.
5. Interpreters demonstrate respect for colleagues, interns, and students of the profession.
6. Interpreters maintain ethical business practices.
7. Interpreters engage in professional development.

Applicability
A. This Code of Professional Conduct applies to certified and associate members of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc., certified members of the National Association of the Deaf, interns, and students of the profession.
B. Federal, state or other statutes or regulations may supersede this Code of Professional Conduct. When there is a conflict between this code and local, state, or federal laws and regulations, the interpreter obeys the rule of law.
C. This Code of Professional Conduct applies to interpreted situations that are performed either face-to-face or remotely.

Definitions
For the purpose of this document, the following terms are used:

Colleagues: Other interpreters.

Conflict of Interest: A conflict between the private interests (personal, financial, or professional) and the official or professional responsibilities of an interpreter in a position of trust, whether actual or perceived, deriving from a specific interpreting situation.

Consumers: Individuals and entities who are part of the interpreted situation. This includes individuals who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, and hearing.

1.0 CONFIDENTIALITY

Tenet: Interpreters adhere to standards of confidential communication.

Guiding Principle: Interpreters hold a position of trust in their role as linguistic and cultural facilitators of communication. Confidentiality is highly valued by consumers and is essential to protecting all involved.

Each interpreting situation (e.g., elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education, legal, medical, mental health) has a standard of confidentiality. Under the reasonable interpreter standard, professional interpreters are expected to know the general requirements and applicability of various levels of confidentiality. Exceptions to confidentiality include, for example, federal and state laws requiring mandatory reporting of abuse or threats of suicide, or responding to subpoenas.

Illustrative Behavior - Interpreters:
1.1 Share assignment-related information only on a confidential and "as-needed" basis (e.g., supervisors, interpreter team members, members of the educational team, hiring entities).