THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE STUDENT SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this correlational, quasi-experimental study is to explore the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on the persistence and completion rates of African American males in a mentorship program at a Midwestern community college. Academic data, enrollment data, membership data, and dates of membership for each student in two different groups were evaluated and compared. One group includes African American male students who met the criteria of membership in a campus mentorship program while enrolled at the college before the pandemic. The second group of African American males includes students in the same campus organization while enrolled at the college during the COVID-19 pandemic with a start date of Spring 2020 or later. The results of the analyzed data indicate that there are statistically significant differences between the pre-COVID and post-COVID groups in term-to-term retention.

KEY WORDS: African American Males, Completion, Persistence, Retention, Student Success, COVID-19

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my sons, Deontae Brown and Deandre' Brown. These two intelligent and talented African American young men in my life have the whole world ahead of them, and I am so proud of them. Continue to follow your hearts, dreams, and goals. I love you and wish only the best for you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Completion and persistence among diverse populations have been challenging issues for community colleges for years. This is evident by a report prepared by Shapiro et al. (2017) that provides a comprehensive analysis of college access and the completion rates for students who began at 2-year institutions in the year 2010 by race and ethnicity over a 6-year period. According to the report, access has steadily increased in all ethnic minority groups, but the rates for African Americans have had the slowest growth. College enrollment for African Americans was at 11.9%, with 48.5% of this population beginning in community colleges. The community college total includes 58.9% of African American women and 41.2% of African American men (Shapiro et al., 2017). The literature supports the fact that increasing numbers of African American students are attending institutions of higher education over time. The concerns in the literature, however, reveal that majority of the African American students who attend these institutions do not persist from year to year, and an even smaller number complete with graduating credentials. There are several challenges that impede on college graduation for these students that are of major concern to higher education leaders and government officials.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Great strides have been made in enrolling African American students throughout history. Despite these efforts, there are wide equity gaps between ethnic and racial groups. African American students are not persisting from year to year and are not attaining college degrees in

comparison to White students and other racial minority groups (Shapiro et al., 2017). Shapiro et al. (2017) found African American students to have the lowest completion rate among all students in higher education institutions at 25.8% within a 6-year period beginning in 2010, with African American males having the lowest rate at 16.9%. There are a plethora of challenges and barriers that impact persistence and completion among African Americans in the literature. The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of African American community college males to offer better support services to help them persist and complete.

The literature reveals that majority of the African American students who attend institutions of higher education do not persist from year to year, and an even smaller number complete with graduating credentials. There are several challenges that impede on college graduation for these students that are of major concern to higher education leaders and government officials. The challenges found in the literature include financial resources, developmental education, academic preparedness for college, institutional cultural climate, institutional fit, sense of belonging, and student engagement. The works of several researchers have evaluated many great aspects that challenge African American students, but none of the studies reviewed specifically looked at how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted African American male community college students. This study will focus on the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the persistence and completion rates of African American males in a community college.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided this quantitative study, which focuses on the impact of student engagement on persistence rates in African American males enrolled in a community college.

RQ1: What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the completion rates of African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H1: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease completion rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO1: The COVID-19 pandemic will not impact completion rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

RQ2: What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on term-to-term retention for African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H2: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease the term-to-term retention rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO2: The COVID-19 pandemic will not have an impact on term-to-term retention rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

RQ3: What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on GPAs of African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H3: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease GPAs of African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO3: The COVID-19 pandemic will not have an impact on GPAs of African American males in a Midwestern community college.

These questions were chosen to investigate the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on African American community college men who also have the largest noncompletion rate.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design in this study used a correlational, quasi-experimental design to study the impact that the pandemic has had on persistence and completion rates in African American males enrolled in a community college. This design was appropriate because the study included two groups of students that were in an African American mentorship program on campus. One group included students engaged on campus in the campus organization before the pandemic, and the other group included students in the campus organization during the pandemic. The dependent variable included grade point average (GPA) and the number of terms to completion.

GPA was measured at the interval level. This is an interval level of measurement because the attributes have meaning, and the distances are equal. The number of terms at the college was measured at the ordinal level. Ordinal level data have ordered categories, but the distance between the categories is not known. The independent variable included student engagement in the African American campus organization before the pandemic or during the pandemic. This was measured at the nominal level. Nominal data were used to name categories. The two categories were "yes" or "no" for pandemic student engagement in this study. The study also examined if there was a correlation between pandemic student engagement with the number of terms to completion and GPA. This study was higher on internal validity because it used an experimental design.

Sampling

The sample used in this study came from the number of students in the African American mentoring group before the pandemic began in Spring 2020 at an urban community college in the Midwest. The group of African American male students met the criteria of membership in a campus mentorship program at any time while enrolled at the college. This was the group of students who had pre-pandemic student engagement in this study. A second group of African American males included students in the same campus organization while enrolled at the college during the pandemic with a start date of Spring 2020 or later. Generalizations to all African American males who attend community colleges are limited, but not impossible. The sample size in this study was limited to the number of African American male students and graduates in a specific student organization at an urban community college in the Midwest for convenience to save on cost and time. This impacted external validity in this study. The results of this study

were used to make suggestions and recommendations to the administrators at the urban community college in the Midwest from which the sample was taken.

Instrumentation

Once the groups were chosen for the study, the institution's Research and Analysis department assisted in collecting academic data, enrollment data, and membership data for each student in the group. The academic data included the student's GPA. The enrollment data included the number of terms that the student was enrolled while in the mentorship program. Membership data included registered membership in a specific student organization. Once the data for each group were collected and formatted in an Excel spreadsheet, the names of each student were removed and replaced with an identifier to protect the identities of the students and to keep data anonymous. The data in this study were collected from the information found in the college's student information system. A student's GPA, the number of terms the student is enrolled in toward completion, and the student's membership status is not information that is self-reported by the student. The accuracy of this information reduces the threats of validity and reliability in this study.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study included descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used and included means, modes, medians, and standard deviations. Inferential statistics were used to compare the group of students that were engaged on campus in a campus mentoring group (student engagement before the pandemic) with the group that was a member in a campus mentoring group after Spring 2020 (student engagement during the pandemic) to see if there were any significant differences between the groups. Inferential statistics were used to see if there was a correlation between pre-pandemic and pandemic student engagement with the

number of terms to completion and GPA. The *t* test was used to see if there were any significant differences between the two groups. The chi-square test was used to see if there was a correlation between pre-pandemic and pandemic student engagement and GPA and a correlation between pre-pandemic and pandemic student engagement and the number of terms to completion.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study is based on Vincent Tinto's work on student retention and persistence. Tinto's (1993) model looked at the student's attributes prior to college and how they shaped the student's college experience and impacted the student's retention. He suggested that students who are socially integrated in college have a higher commitment to college and are more likely to persist and graduate. His model included six different phases and three stages, which were aimed at understanding the longitudinal process of student persistence.

The first phase of the Student Integration Model was the pre-entry attributes that included a student's family background and school information. Phase two defined a student's aspirations and institutional goals. Phase three covered the student's experiences at the college, which included academic grades, interactions with the faculty, student activities and clubs, and interactions with other peers. Phase four was the student's academic and social integration to the college. In the fifth phase, the student's intentions and external commitments were explored. The last phase included the student's decision to leave the college, which could include graduation, transferring to another college, and/or withdrawing from the college.

Tinto's Student Integration Model linked the stages that first-year students went through to Spady's (1970, 1971) views of the student-relationship processes. Tinto (1993) developed three stages that students transition through to persist in college, which included separation, transition, and incorporation (Tinto, 1993). During separation, new college students needed to

detach themselves from their family, friends, and high school to be able to adjust to their new academic institution. Transition referred to the period where new college students disassociate from the comfort of their family, friends, and high school before adjusting to their new college environment. Integration included the successful passage of stages one and two where the students are adjusting to their new college experience. Tinto revised his original Student Integration Model over the last 40 years and branched out to include different student racial groups, students with lower socio-economic statuses, non-traditional students, and transfer student throughout the years.

Tinto's research and model lays out the foundation that many researchers have utilized in examining mentorship relationships in African American males and their impact on student success, retention, and completion. The goal of the relationship is for the mentor to help develop the mentee's goals, abilities, skills, and understanding in a variety of different experiences. The establishment of meaningful mentoring relationships can offer students a safe place to explore possibilities and discover resources that would enhance persistence and completion in college.

Peer-to-peer bonding, faculty and student relationships, safe spaces to share experiences, a sense of belonging, and student engagement were themes found in several studies exploring the impact that structured mentorship programs have had on student success in African American males (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Cuyjet, 1997; Sinanan, 2016). LaVant et al. (1997) explored formal mentoring programs for African American men in higher education institutions and constructed eight recommendations for successful and effective mentoring programs that increased college retention. Their suggestions include the following:

- Offer support and commitment from top administrators at the college.
- Allocate financial and human resources needed to ensure success of the program.

- Convene a college-wide committee to assist in the recruitment of program participants.
- Hire an experienced program manager that has close relationships with key student service departments.
- Conduct an interview process to find dedicated mentors with a passion for helping students succeed.
- Conduct extensive training for faculty and staff selected to participate in the program.
- Gather genuine support from community businesses, leaders, and educators.
- Assess all aspects of the process on a continuous basis to refine program as needed.

The combination of Tinto's Student Integration Model and LaVant et al.'s (1997) recommendations of quality formal structured mentorship programs were utilized to answer the research questions in this study in the quest to determine the impact that COVID-19 had on the student success of African American males in a mentorship program at a community college.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Access: The ability of an individual or group of individuals to gain entry or acceptance to an institution of higher education.

Completion: A term used to describe the end of a college student's academic journey, where the student's or higher education institution's goal has been attained.

COVID-19: A highly contagious coronavirus disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus originating in Wuhan, China. Symptoms may include cough, fever, sore throat, dyspnea, and fatigue. The disease can also significantly impact the upper respiratory system (Lee et al., 2021).

Credential: The certificate, degree, or diploma that a student receives upon completing all the requirements of the student's academic program.

Cultural climate: The social, academic, intellectual, and environmental atmosphere of the majority students, faculty, staff, and administration at a college.

Cultural fit: How comfortable a student feels about their race, ethnicity, religion, or cultural differences in the academic and social setting of a college.

Formal mentoring: A process that allows a student the opportunity to grow and develop under the guidance of a faculty or college staff member that serves as a positive role model in a structured format, often appointed by the college with guidelines, expectations, and training for the mentor.

Informal mentoring. A process that allows a student the opportunity to grow and develop under the guidance of a faculty or college staff member that serves as a positive role model in a casual relationship between the student and college professional.

Mentorship program: A structured formal mentoring opportunity with a group of mentees receiving the benefits of peer-to-peer bonding, faculty and student relationships, safe spaces to share experiences, a sense of belonging, and student engagement activities.

Persistence: Often used interchangeably with *retention* in higher education. Refers to a student's motivation, drive, and ability to continue to make progress toward his or her completion goal.

Retention: Often used interchangeably with *persistence* in higher education. Refers to a student's motivation, drive, and ability to continue to make progress toward his or her completion goal.

Sense of belonging: A term used in higher education to measure how connected a college student feels to the college he or she is attending.

Student engagement: The activities and events that students are involved in at a college with other students, faculty, and staff that match their interests, abilities, and skills.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The hypothesis in this study was that the COVID-19 pandemic would decrease persistence rates for African American males in a community college. Even though generalizations to all African American males who attend community colleges are not possible because the sample size in this study was limited to the number of African American males who are in the African American male mentorship program at an urban community college in the Midwest, the results of this study can be used to make suggestions and recommendations to the administrators at the urban community college in the Midwest from which the sample is taken. Intentional efforts could be made by the college to support African American males early in their college journey and make known the importance of student engagement in an educational experience. Student engagement opportunities could be introduced in orientations, advising sessions, and in first-year courses. These efforts are not typically acknowledged in a community college setting with commuters, as they are at 4-year colleges and universities with more traditional students that live on campus.

Future research can be done to include a larger sample of students or to include more community colleges to increase external validity by other researchers who are not limited in resources associated with time and money. Completion and persistence rates are an issue for many different groups of students in community colleges. Further research studies can also include students of other races, sexes, socioeconomic statuses, and other variables within the same study or separately to investigate the impacts of student engagement. Student engagement was limited to membership in a campus organization or mentoring group in this study, but other forms of student engagement could also be evaluated in African American males or other groups of interest. For example, Strayhorn (2008) evaluated student-faculty interactions, peer interaction, and active learning while looking at student engagement.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Several concepts were identified to thoroughly investigate the literature surrounding the research topic in this study: the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the student success of African American men in community colleges. The mission of community colleges was reviewed to get an in-depth understanding of the community college setting in which the study takes place. It was important to explore the role that access, persistence, and completion played in the history of education for African Americans. The major student retention and persistence theories were examined to provide a conceptual framework for the study. The barriers that impeded African American male success and the impact of quality mentoring relationships are also discussed to gain deeper insights on college persistence and completion.

THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Community colleges play an integral role in higher education in the United States of America by providing access, affordability, remedial education, occupational education, and other education services to students: “Community colleges, an American invention, are one of the greatest assets of this nation in the task of creating a better future” (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2012, p. 5). Community colleges have responded to American workforce training needs, displaced workers, and helping develop new industries. Community colleges serve more diverse student populations than any other higher education institutions in

the United States and are responsible for helping to bring them into the middle class (AACC, 2012).

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) is a national organization known as the "voice of America's community colleges" and includes the membership of 1,200 community colleges and over 12 million students (AACC, 2012). The purpose of this organization is to advance the role of community colleges through advocacy and leadership. It is committed to guiding community colleges into the 21st century with a goal to be student-centered and increase credential completion (AACC, 2012). Another national organization promoting positive images for community colleges is the League for Innovation in the Community College. This organization includes over 500 colleges and 12 Vanguard Learning Colleges. The mission of this organization is to enhance community colleges through transformation and innovation. In recent years, the focus on increasing the number of Americans with a college credential by 2020 (AACC, 2014) has put a lot of attention on community colleges. In 2011, the AACC challenged community colleges nationwide to graduate 5 million students with a college credential by 2020. They also provide six strategies to guide and assist community colleges, which include to publicly commit to college completion, to create pathways, to expand prior learning assessments, to devise completion strategies for students upon entry and through completion, to establish guarantees for transfer, and to implement automatic graduation and reverse transfer. Several states have taken on this challenge and are recognized for designing innovative completion commitments. Texas Partner Community Colleges created College Credit for Heroes, where they utilize prior learning assessments to award college credit for military experience (AACC, 2014). The State Board of Community Colleges in North Carolina created SuccessNC. This is a statewide commitment and goal to

increase the number of completions. The City University of New York Community Colleges created the Accelerated Student in Associate Programs initiative. This is a cohort program that has doubled the number of completions (AACC, 2014).

Guided transfer pathways and partnerships with 4-year universities have also helped to increase the credibility and reputation of community colleges at both the state and local levels. According to Wyner et al. (2016), only 14% of the 720,000 students who entered community colleges in Fall 2007 earned a bachelor's degree within 6 years. This trend is changing as more partnerships are formed between community colleges and their local universities. Wyner et al. also observed three strategies in successful partnerships nationwide that have increased completion rates in the associate and bachelor degrees. These strategies include making transfer students a priority, creating clear pathways, and providing transfer students with resources (Wyner et al., 2016). Tennessee's statewide transfer pathways are highlighted in the AACC's Implementation Guide (AACC, 2014). Students who complete all of the courses in their designated pathway earn an associate degree at the community college and are guaranteed that all the pathway courses will be accepted at the university in the student's major. Community colleges that have strong partnerships and relationships with local businesses and have responded to training needs in their community and economic development strategy based on student success in community colleges and promoting regional progress through partnerships can ensure a stable supply of skilled workers for area employers. Collaborative partnerships with local community colleges and businesses also tend to bring innovative and creative programming in response to a crisis in the community, as was seen in the rise of the Alamo Academies after the closing of Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. The creation of the Alamo Academies brought programming in aerospace, information technology, and advanced manufacturing to aid

in closing “the workforce skill gap, promote student success, and change community bias against CTE programs” (Hu & Bowman, 2016, p. 632). Community colleges have made great strides in credential attainment, successful university transfer, and increasing the workforce skill gap.

The key to advancing community colleges in the 21st century is to follow the recommendations of the American Association of Community Colleges. The AACC recommends that community colleges follow the “Three Rs” to redesign students’ educational experiences, to reinvent institutional roles, and to reset the system to create incentives for students and institutional success. Redesigning students’ educational experiences includes increasing completion rates, improving college readiness, and closing the skills gap. Reinventing institutional roles includes refocusing the college mission and investing in support structures through collaboration and partners. Resetting the system includes targeting public and private investments to create new incentives and implementing policies and practices that promote rigor, transparency, and accountability.

The fiscal and financial health of most community colleges has had a negative outlook due to drastic changes over the years. The recent recession, state budget cuts, the wide use of performance-based funding models, and the COVID-19 pandemic have all played a role in the financial health of community colleges. Most community college funding sources come from a combination of state and tuition funds (Morris, 2017). Many community colleges rely heavily on state funding, and many states have made significant cuts and changes to how higher education is funded. According to Hillman (2016), colleges now receive less per student, and this has caused colleges to raise tuition rates.

Performance-based funding is utilized in several states. Hillman (2016) shared viewpoints on how performance-based funding is not effective in colleges that lack financial

resources for student support, which also enroll many low-income students and ethnic minorities. He pointed out that some colleges are now becoming more selective and less diverse by recruiting enrollees who help increase and improve college completion. Unfortunately, these financial challenges have led to decreased funding per student and a decrease in resources to support these students. According to the AACC (2012), "These conditions hinder middle class students and have a devastating effect on low-income students and students of color often in the greatest need of what community colleges have to offer" (p. 9). AACC also notes that community college students face additional challengies include arriving to the community college unprepared for college-level work, dysfunctional developmental education practices, barriers to transfer that inhibit student progress, low degree and certificate completion rates, wide attainment gaps across groups of students, and inadequate academic support.

HISTORY OF EDUCATION FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS

It is impossible to discuss access to higher education for African Americans without showing how influential periods of American history shaped education for African Americans. The Emancipation of Slavery, the Morrill Act, the Civil Rights Act, the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., and *Brown v. Board of Education* played a central role in access for African Americans in higher education in the United States. Even though slavery ended in 1865, "It was not until the 1960s that the nation finally broke through barriers that had efficiently separated race, religion, and genders into separate colleges" (Duster, 2009, p. 99). Early access to higher education began with the emergence of Black colleges after the passage of the Morrill Act of 1890. Before the passage of the Morrill Act, the Southern states were reluctant to support Black college efforts. The Morrill Act "required that federal funds would only go to states that did not discriminate" (Duster, 2009, p. 103). Support for Black colleges in the South began shortly after Booker T.

Washington's push that higher education for African Americans should be in vocational education that included trades, manual labor, and other fields that did not compete with White college curriculum and the passage of the Morrill Act (Duster, 2009).

The shift of African Americans attending predominantly White colleges and universities changed drastically after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, and the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. with only 2% of African American students attending Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) in 1967. After King's death in 1968, there were more African American students attending PWIs than Black colleges by 1975 (Duster, 2009). According to Janosky (2017), "Previously overt policies that excluded racial minorities from many flagship state universities were largely dismantled in the 1960s beginning with the passage of the Civil Rights Acts and strengthened by student, faculty, and citizen protests throughout the nation" (p. 2). The passage of the Civil Rights Acts in 1964 and community rallies and marches led by Martin Luther King, Jr. were also prominent in promoting access for African Americans to higher education. Cabrera et al. (2017) pointed out how social activism on college campuses "has been central to increasing campus-based diversity" (p. 3) and how "agitation is a key component to student activism" (p. 10). The diverse nature of these controversial issues is what caused the nation to take an objective stance that has led to change and an increase in social justice in our society. Student activism on PWI campuses also helped to provide access for African Americans in higher education.

Over the last 45 years, access to education opportunities has changed drastically for African Americans. Shapiro et al. (2017) provided an analysis of college access to higher education for students who began at 2-year institutions in the year 2010 by race and ethnicity within a 6-year period. The authors found that access has steadily increased in all ethnic minority

groups (Shapiro et al., 2017). College enrollment for African Americans was at 11.9%, with 48.5% of this population beginning in community colleges. The community college total included 58.9% of African American women and 41.2% of African American men.

STUDENT RETENTION AND PERSISTENCE THEORIES

Student retention models emerged in the literature around 1970 and were developed by theorists to explain the phenomenon of students withdrawing from college. Earlier research efforts in this area were centered around student attrition and heavily focused on individual student characteristics, attributes, and shortcomings. Research in the 1970s investigated the student interactions that happened within the college environment. While there are several student retention theoretical models in the literature, there are four models that have been commonly cited and used in many research studies as the conceptual framework. These models include Spady's Undergraduate Dropout Process Model, Tinto's Student Integration Model, Bean and Metzner's Non-Traditional Undergraduate Student Attrition Model, and Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda's Student Retention Integrated Model (Aljohani, 2016; Burkholder et al., 2013; Ceglie & Settlage, 2016).

William Spady was credited in the literature as having the first student retention model from his works "Dropouts from Higher Education: An Interdisciplinary Review and Synthesis" (1970) and "Dropouts from Higher Education: Toward an Empirical Model" (1971) (Aljobani, 2016). He studied the academic and social systems in colleges and how they shaped a student's decision to drop out of college, and he was one of the first theorists to link the impact of student-college relationships with student retention. In the academic system, he focused on the student's grades and progress in the college courses. The social system included the student's support systems and relationships. These assumptions were tested with new students at the University of

Chicago and the results framed Spady's Undergraduate Dropout Process Model. According to Aljobani (2016), the term *retention* was introduced and adopted by several higher education institutions around the time of Spady's work to describe their "shared responsibility in influencing students' decisions regarding dropping out" (p. 2).

Vincent Tinto expanded on Spady's work on the undergraduate dropout process and developed the Student Integration Model. Tinto's (1993) model looked at the student's attributes prior to college and how they shaped the student's college experience and impacted the student's retention. He suggested that students who are socially integrated in college have a higher commitment to college and are more likely to persist and graduate. Tinto's model is one of the most widely used student retention models "investigating the attrition problem in which the constructs, hypotheses and postulations of the model were empirically used, tested and critiqued" (Aljobani, 2016, p. 6). His model included six different phases and three stages that were aimed at understanding the longitudinal process of student persistence and the impact that these behaviors have on student persistence (Metz, 2004).

There are six phases in Tinto's Student Integration Model. The pre-entry attributes phase included a student's family background and school information. Phase two defined a student's aspirations and institutional goals. Phase three covered the student's formal and informal college experiences. These included academic grades, interactions with the faculty, student activities and clubs, and interactions with other peers. The student's academic and social integration to the college was found in phase four. In the fifth phase, the student's intentions and external commitments were explored. The last stage referred to the student's decision to leave the college, such as graduation, transferring to another college, and/or withdrawing from the college (Metz, 2004).

Tinto's Student Integration Model also linked the stages that first-year students went through to Spady's views of the student-relationship processes. Tinto (1993) developed three stages that students transitioned through to persist in college. The concept for the three stages was adapted from Van Gennep's "rites of passage" and included separation, transition, and incorporation (Tinto, 1993). During separation, new college students needed to detach themselves from their family, friends, and high school to be able to adjust to their new academic institution. Transition referred to the period in which new college students disassociate from the comfort of their family, friends, and high school before adjusting to their new college environment. Incorporation included the successful passage of stages one and two, where the students are adjusting to their new college experience.

Tinto revised his original Student Integration Model over the last 40 years. According to Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011), "Tinto has described the decision-making process concerning student goal commitment and dropout, the need to match student expectations to institutional mission, and the transitions of students moving through the college process" (p. 4). Tinto's (1993) work also branched out to include different student racial groups, students with lower socio-economic statuses, non-traditional students, and transfer student throughout the years.

Bean and Metzner (1985) developed the Non-Traditional Undergraduate Student Attrition Model. The focus of this model was on the environmental factors that impacted commuter students, which traditional students commonly do not have. The model encompassed the environmental pressures that non-traditional students face and emphasized that institutional socialization factors are less important for these students. The conceptual framework of this model had four domains, which include academic performance, intent to leave, background, and

environmental variables. The research pointed out that students impacted by finances, work hours, outside commitments, and family responsibilities were more likely to withdraw from college (Bean & Metzner, 1993). Their findings suggested that colleges should offer stronger support for non-traditional students and that this support can compensate for low academic preparation (Burkholder et al., 2013). Bean was one of the first theorists to point out that men and women leave college for different reasons (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011).

The final student retention model reviewed in the literature was the Student Retention Integrated Model (Cabrera et al., 1993). This model combined the variables of Tinto's and Bean and Metzner's models to form an integrated model. Cabrera et al. (1993) tested all the variables from both theories and excluded the variables that were not validated in their study. They found that the integrated model provided a better understanding of the student attrition process. The integrated model included the "courses" and "institutional fit and quality" concepts from Bean and Metzner's model and the "academic integration" and "institutional commitments" concepts from Tinto's model. Cabrera et al. suggested that colleges should focus on the factors that encourage persistence in college to assist in minimizing withdrawals.

Most studies reviewed in the literature about persistence and retention in African Americans focused on the barriers and challenges that these students face. However, there were a few studies that took a different approach in exploring persistence and retention in these students. These studies investigated the strengths and talents of African Americans and the impact positive traits have on college success. Banks and Dohy (2019) conducted a review of the efforts found in the literature to improve student success in African American students in higher education. They pointed out the differences between deficit and strengths-based approaches that examine student retention in African Americans and the impact of each approach. They argued

that a strengths-based model is more beneficial for educators to use because "a deficit-remedial approach can be demoralizing and stigmatizing to students, reducing motivation, increasing stereotypes, and lowering faculty and staff expectations" (Banks & Dohy. 2019, p. 124).

PERSISTENCE AND COMPLETION CHALLENGES IN AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN

Even though great strides have been made in enrolling African American students throughout history, there are wide equity gaps between ethnic and racial groups. African American students are not persisting from year to year and are not attaining college degrees in comparison to White students and other racial minority groups (Shapiro et al., 2017). Shapiro et al. (2017) argued that "the inequalities in postsecondary college completion rates highlight the need for higher education stakeholders to design initiatives aimed at increasing participation and ameliorating racial disparities" (p. 4). The authors found African American students to have the lowest completion rate among all students in higher education institutions at 25.8% within a 6-year period beginning in 2010, with African American males having the lowest rate at 16.9%. Salaman (2016) challenged community colleges to explore "which students they can serve, and how they can hold on to them" (p. 2). There are a plethora of challenges and barriers that impact persistence and completion among African Americans in the literature. The challenges that will be explored include financial resources, developmental education, academic preparedness for college, and institutional fit.

Financial resources were a top challenge in the literature that impede on persistence and completion rates among African Americans. The majority of the African American students attending higher education begin at a community college (Shapiro et al., 2017). The recent recession, state budget cuts, and the wide use of performance-based funding models have all played a role in the declining financial health of community colleges. According to Morris

(2017), community colleges around the nation were in a financial crisis and are experiencing significant state budget cuts. Many community colleges relied heavily on state funding, and many states made significant cuts and changes to how higher education was funded. Hillman (2016) pointed out that "campus resources are insufficient in many of the public institutions that low-income, working-class, and racial/ethnic minority students attend" (p. 9). He argued that this is largely due to a lack of financial resources for student support in these colleges that have also been impacted by performance-based funding. Community colleges were receiving less money from the state per student and "funding per student is one of the strongest predictors of college graduation" (Hillman, 2016, p. 9). A lack of funding, college support, and student resources challenged the academic success of African American students at community colleges and challenged degree attainment.

Another challenge for African Americans that impacted persistence and completion was developmental education (DE): 56% of African American students in higher education were placed in DE (Preston, 2017). According to Preston (2017), "Enrolling in DE can delay or disrupt college completion, which, given the high percentage of Black and Latino students enrolled in DE, contributes to racial gaps in college completion" (p. 8). Placement into DE courses often consisted of standardized tests and college placement tests, which African American students have historically performed low in. Low tests scores were widely due to cultural differences and the large number of African American students that were not academically ready to enter college. Academic weaknesses also stemmed from the K-12 educational experiences: "In predominantly Black K-12 school settings, present-day problems include weak college preparatory, low advanced placement exam passing rates, ineffective and insufficient guidance counselor services, unqualified teachers, minimal and outdated school

materials, and inadequate school facilities" (Preston, 2017, p. 7). There were a variety of factors that contribute to poor academic success among African Americans. The majority of the African American students that attended community colleges are first-generation college students from low-income families that live in impoverished areas. The K-12 schools in these areas lacked the financial resources to offer the support that these students needed to be academically prepared for college.

In community colleges, African American completion rates on the first college-level English and math courses after a series of DE courses were only 7%. These rates were a little higher for students who took DE courses in just one area, at 22% for English and 14% for math (Preston, 2017, p. 18). Preston (2017) also argued that community colleges needed effective DE instructors and that inexperienced adjunct faculty impacted persistence. Adjunct instructors tended to have lower wages, had limited access to resources, and did not get as much support as full-time, tenure-track faculty. They also did not receive any benefits and often had high turnover rates: "As the United States strives to raise these groups' college graduation rates, more attention must focus on DE and its impact on the experiences and educational outcomes of students of color" (Preston, 2017, p. 8).

Other challenges that impeded on completion and persistence in African Americans included cultural climate, institutional fit of the college, and sense of belonging. Higher education institutions were serving more diverse students and there was a growing need to address the educational climate, manage cultural institution challenges, and provide suggestions on how educators could increase cultural inclusiveness. Society had made great strides in bringing access and awareness, but equity and inclusion still needed a lot of work (Samuels, 2014). There were wide gaps with completion and student success for minority populations in

comparison to Caucasian students. Hausmann et al. (2007) found that institutional fit in a college impacted persistence rates among first-year African Americans in the areas of finances, student engagement, faculty involvement, social involvement, parental support, and college commitment in full-time, first-year students attending a predominantly White college. Janosky (2017) discussed cultural climate and the impacts that interfered with the success of minority degree attainment. Colleges and universities were under scrutiny to address, actively review, and revise their college policies and procedures to ensure equity. She indicated diversity must be a process and the focus should be on several opportunities to change the climate and culture. This can be done by diversifying education practices, procedures, and policies to be more equitable for all. Cabrera et al. (2017) discussed how social activism on college campuses "has been central to increasing campus-based diversity" (p. 3) and how "agitation is a key component to student activism" (p. 10). They pointed out that the diverse nature of controversial issues could cause a large group of individuals to take an objective stance that could lead to change and an increase in social justice.

The staff, faculty, and administration at colleges and universities impacted diverse learning. Janosky (2017) pointed out that microaggressions had a negative impact on academic success and that cultural awareness should be looked at as a requirement for students, faculty, and staff to assist campuses in being more inclusive. Samuels (2014) pointed out that "most educators are given no training on how to handle issues of race, gender, class, sexuality, and so on that arise in the classroom" (p. 9). There has not been a lot of research in equity and inclusion, and it is difficult to assess and evaluate diversity training programs, comprehensive plans, and implementation. Samuels (2014) argued that a lifelong process with self-reflection is the best

approach for equity and inclusion training. Some educators and institutions were not comfortable with self-reflection and want assessable training.

Morse et al. (2016) argued that an intentional effort to change job descriptions, search committees, and interview questions must be made to find culturally sensitive faculty and staff. Preston (2017) pointed out that full-time tenure-track faculty tend to be more vested in meeting student needs and have more support and resources from the college. Faculty and staff that were encouraging and understood the diverse needs of African American students could also help increase persistence and degree completion among these students. Morse et al. suggested that hiring committees add several diversity questions and offer professional development opportunities to support the new faculty after being hired. Colleges should not focus on trying to hire faculty that look like the student body, but instead should hire the most qualified applicant that is culturally sensitive and understands diversity (Morse et al., 2016). Preston had a different view on hiring faculty to meet the needs of African Americans. He argued "faculty of color offer a broader range of pedagogical techniques and have more frequent interactions with students than their White counterparts" and "diversity among faculty can lead to an increased use of effective educational practices, such as utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy" (Preston, 2017, p. 16). Samuels (2014) found "multicultural competence correlated with individual job performance, promotion, and overall leadership assessment" by using a 360-degree feedback instrument.

Strayhorn (2008) studied the impact of student engagement on personal and social learning outcomes. He found that faculty interactions, peer interactions, and active learning were moderately and positively correlated with students' personal and social gains (Strayhorn, 2008). He also found that females had higher levels of personal and social gains than males and that

Asian and African Americans had higher personal and social gains than White students. Gardenshire-Crooks et al. (2010) conducted extensive and in-depth interviews on African American male students' life experiences and the factors that impact their ability to socially and academically engage on campus. They found that many of these students had great welcoming experiences as they began their college journey but had several negative experiences with faculty or staff during their college experience. Even fewer African American community college men felt as if they had developed any close relationships with faculty and staff. A number of these students also indicated that they did not make any close friends with peers on campus (Gardenshire-Crooks et al., 2010).

MENTORING AND PROGRAMMING FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

Mentoring is an impactful experience that several researchers in higher education have found to be effective in increasing the retention and academic success of African American males in college (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Cuyjet, 1997; LaVant et al., 1997; Sinanan, 2016; Tinto, 1993). According to LaVant et al. (1997), the "application of mentoring proves to be an effective tool in providing the support necessary to overcome the barriers that prevent many African American men from successfully completing college" (p. 52). Mentoring is a process that allows a student the opportunity to grow and develop under the guidance of a faculty or college staff member that serves as a positive role model. The goal of the relationship is for the mentor to help develop the mentee's goals, abilities, skills, and understanding in a variety of different experiences. The establishment of meaningful mentoring relationships can offer students a safe place to explore possibilities and discover resources that would enhance persistence and completion in college. Brooms and Davis (2017) conducted a study to explore how African American males find meaning from their college experiences and efforts toward

academic success. They focused on the factors that assisted African American males to successfully graduate from college and found two components that stood out in their college experiences. These factors were peer-to-peer bonding and mentoring from African American faculty members. Sinanan (2016) studied the value of mentoring African American students at predominantly White institutions (PWI) and the importance of assisting them navigate complex college processes. She stated that their success "strongly depended on their integration into the academic and social systems of institutions of higher education, and one way to accomplish this task was via mentoring" (Sinanan, 2016, p. 159). She also discussed the two types of mentoring that exist in higher education—informal and formal mentoring. Informal mentoring was a casual relationship between the student and faculty member. Formal mentoring was structured and appointed by the college with guidelines, expectations, and training for the mentor.

LaVant et al. (1997) explored formal mentoring programs for African American men in higher education institutions and constructed eight recommendations for successful and effective mentoring programs that increased college retention. Their suggestions included:

- Offer support and commitment from top administrators at the college.
- Allocate financial and human resources needed to ensure success of the program.
- Convene a college-wide committee to assist in the recruitment of program participants.
- Hire an experienced program manager that has close relationships with key student service departments.
- Conduct an interview process to find dedicated mentors with a passion for helping students succeed.
- Conduct extensive training for faculty and staff selected to participate in the program.
- Gather genuine support from community businesses, leaders, and educators.
- Assess all aspects of the process on a continuous basis to refine program as needed.

LaVant et al. argued that these are the components found in quality mentoring programs that successfully help African American men succeed in college settings. Formal mentorship programs should also provide mentees with clear goals and outcomes (Sinanan, 2016). A safe space to bond and share experiences is also an important aspect of formal mentorship programs (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Cuyjet, 1997; Sinanan, 2016). Peer networks and social engagement activities with other African American male students give students a sense of belonging that also strengthens their confidence to succeed in college (Strayhorn, 2008).

LaVant et al. (1997) reviewed examples of quality mentorship programs in their study. The Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) is a national mentorship program that was founded at Georgia Southwestern University by Tyrone Bledsoe in 1990. The focus of the organization is to address the social and academic challenges African American men have on college campuses through mentorship and support. SAAB has chapters on more than 300 college campuses in over 40 states and has provided services to thousands of men. SAAB's goal is "for all men of color on secondary and postsecondary campuses to take advantage of their academic careers and to gain the skills they need to be strong, empathetic, and altruistic members of their communities" (SAAB, 2020). The program offers leadership development, cultural activities, scholarships, tutoring, career advising, and community service (LaVant et al., 1997; SAAB, 2020).

Another quality mentorship program discussed to increase retention and completion includes The Black Man's Think Tank that was created in 1993 by Eric Abercrombie at the University of Cincinnati. This organization provided a forum for African American college professionals to discuss and address concerns that challenged African American men on college campuses. These discussions led to a robust mentoring and leadership program that matched

African American male students with African American male college professionals. LaVant et al. (1997) described program participants as "being committed to 'our people' and giving back and serving as peers and mentors to younger brothers" (p. 47). The Meyerhoff Program at the University of Maryland in Baltimore County was designed to mentor doctoral African American men in STEM fields in 1988. However, the program was under scrutiny in the 1990s and began to include women and other ethnic minority groups in 1996. The Bridge Program at Georgia State University mentored African American men early in their freshman year. The message of this program was that "education is not something that happens, but something each individual must create for himself" (LaVant et al., 1997). It was also pointed out that most of the mentors in this program were White and played a huge role in graduating mentees in the program.

My Brother's Keeper (MBK) is a nationally known mentorship program that started in 2014 by President Barack Obama. The mission of this organization is to build supportive networks for African American men where they can gain the confidence needed to achieve goals (White House Archives, n.d.). The goals of the organization include building a national movement, promoting effective mentorship programming, and supporting communities nationwide to develop plans that deliver solutions to close the educational attainment and labor force gap of African American men. The organization started with a community challenge in Chicago and extended into over 240 communities in all 50 states. The organization has six milestones:

- Entering school physically, socially, and emotional ready to learn
- Reading at grade level by the third grade
- Graduating from high school ready for college or a career
- Completing postsecondary education or training
- Successfully entering the workforce

- Staying on track and getting second chances.

The government, public and private organizations, and communities rallied to provide resources, support, and mentorship to help young black men succeed (White House Archives, n.d.).

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PERSISTENCE AND COMPLETION

In early 2020, the United States was struck by a highly contagious coronavirus disease (COVID-19) caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. According to Lee et al. (2021), the disease originated in Wuhan, China, and "directly targets the respiratory system in humans with characteristic symptoms of cough, fever, sore throat, dyspnea, and fatigue" (p. 1). COVID-19 brought new challenges impacting completion and persistence to college students nationwide. Most colleges were abruptly closed and rapidly transitioned to remote learning to protect students and prevent the spread of disease. Other challenges included declining enrollment, decreases in academic success, and declining mental health.

Bird et al. (2020) reported that college attendance dropped 5%, or 727,000 students, in Spring 2020 in comparison to 2019. Community colleges had the largest declines when compared to 4-year colleges and universities. In a survey of about 250,000 students, community college students were more likely to stop out of college due to having COVID-19 and/or caring for someone who had COVID-19. They also found that the abrupt shift from face-to-face to online instruction during the beginning of the pandemic led to many academic and technology challenges for students, which resulted in 6.7% decreases in course completion. This decrease was found to be caused by an increase in student withdrawals and failures. Of the students surveyed, low-income students reported being the most concerned about their finances. They were also found more likely to lose their jobs. Black and Hispanic students were found to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. These students reported seeing COVID deaths at a

rate that was double that of White American students (Bird et al., 2020). In a study done at a hospital in northern California of COVID-19 patients, African Americans were found to be 2.7 times more likely to be hospitalized compared to non-Hispanic White patients (Azar et al., 2020).

Jones et al. (2021) investigated the impact the coronavirus disease had on students' health and financial stability in New York public colleges by surveying almost 3,000 students. Most of the students (81%) reported loss of household income, and half (49.8%) reported worries about losing housing. Food insecurity and household and personal experiences with possible COVID-19 symptoms were also associated with anxiety/depression. Jones et al. emphasized the importance of having college resources available to help address student needs that may have long-term consequences on their health and well-being.

Molock and Parchem (2021) assessed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on daily living, mental well-being, and experiences of racial discrimination among college students from communities of color. The students reported that COVID-19 caused changes in their finances, living situations, academic performance, educational plans, and career goals. Their primary mental health challenges included stress, anxiety, and depression. Students also noted challenges managing racial injustice during the COVID-19 pandemic. Molock and Parchem suggested that colleges seek out to "financially and emotionally support students of color during the COVID-19 pandemic and growing visibility of systemic racism" (p. 1).

In the spring of 2021, men represented 40.5% of undergraduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mangan, 2022). This is the lowest rate of men in colleges in 40 years. One of the most noticeable trends of declining male enrollment was at public 2-year colleges, where overall enrollments went down 14.8%. Much of the enrollment decline at community

colleges was among men in technical programs like manufacturing engineering, robotics, automotive, and welding that were more challenging to move to online (Mangan, 2022). African American men had the lowest enrollment in community colleges at 21.5% in the Spring 2021. Mangan (2022) also found that more African American men reported having unreliable internet service and tended to attend schools that had challenges offering students support and resources that kept them engaged virtually.

CONCLUSION

Access to higher education has evolved slowly for African Americans since the emancipation from slavery. Much progress still needs to be made in the areas of persistence and completion for African Americans in higher education. An abundance of barriers and challenges impede this progress. Many African Americans attend community colleges, which will continue to have a decline in state funding. A lack of funding sources limits the campus resources and support that students need to increase persistence and completion. African American students tend to lack college academic preparedness due to poor K-12 education experiences, have low scores on standardized tests, and are often placed in developmental education courses, which also impact persistence and completion. The racial and cultural climate of a college and the extent to which African American students feel comfortable on their campuses also play a role in completion and persistence. The Black Lives Matter movement following George Floyd's death in 2020 caused the nation to take a serious look at the racial climate and injustice. Many institutions strengthened their goals of diversity and are actively involved in making their colleges feel safe. Quality formal mentoring programs and informal mentoring have also played an integral role in student success for African American males. However, the newest challenge plaguing African American males' efforts to complete credentials and persist in higher education

is the COVID-19 pandemic that struck the nation in early 2020. College leaders and government officials are becoming more aware of these challenges and a conscious effort to address these challenges is beginning to take shape in higher education.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to focus on the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on the persistence and completion of African American males in a Midwestern community college. Academic data, enrollment data, membership data, and dates of membership for each student in two different groups were evaluated and compared. One group included African American males that met the criteria of membership in a campus mentorship program while enrolled at the college before the pandemic. The second group of African American males included students in the same campus organization while enrolled at the college during the COVID-19 pandemic with a start date of Spring 2020 or later. This chapter details the methodology used to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the completion rates of African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H1: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease completion rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO1: The COVID-19 pandemic will not impact completion rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

RQ2: What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on term-to-term retention for African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H2: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease the term-to-term retention rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO2: The COVID-19 pandemic will not have an impact on term-to-term retention rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

RQ3: What impact did COVID-19 have on the GPAs of African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H3: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease GPAs of African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO3: The COVID-19 pandemic will not have an impact on GPAs of African American males in a Midwestern community college.

These questions were chosen to investigate the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on African American community college men who also had the largest noncompletion rate. The research design, sample, instrumentation, and data analysis utilized in the study are described in detail in Chapter Three.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Quantitative research designs use data and statistics to look at relationships between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These designs include experimental, non-experimental, quasi-experimental, and longitudinal. Experimental designs in education can be traced back to 1923 (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Campbell and Stanley (1963) acknowledged the work of W. A. McCall, who pointed out that the experiments in education at that time focused on statistical manipulation of data, but the documentation on the methods used were rare. Experimental research investigates the outcome of a treatment in one group and the absence of the treatment in another group. True experiments randomly assign participants to the treatment, and quasi-experiments use nonrandomized assignments (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research design in this study was quantitative and used a correlational, quasi-experimental design to study the impact that the pandemic had on persistence and completion rates in African American males enrolled in a Midwestern community college. This design was chosen because the study included two groups of students that were in an African American campus organization on campus. One group included students engaged on campus in the campus organization before

the pandemic, and the other group included students in the campus organization during the pandemic.

The dependent variable in the study included grade point average (GPA) and the number of terms to completion. GPA was measured at the interval level. This was an interval level of measurement because the attributes have meaning, and the distances are equal (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The number of terms at the college was measured at the ordinal level. Ordinal level data have ordered categories, but the distance between the categories is not known. The independent variable included student engagement in the African American mentoring organization before the pandemic or during the pandemic. This was measured at the nominal level. Nominal data are used to name categories (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The two categories were "yes" or "no" for pandemic student engagement in this study. The study also examined whether there was a correlation between pandemic student engagement with the number of terms to completion and GPA. This study was high on internal validity because it used an experimental design.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The target population of this quantitative study was African American students at a large urban, Midwestern community college. The accessible population was one single, urban Midwestern college with 22,000 students. This setting was selected because the researcher was currently employed at the college. The chosen college was ideal for the study because an African American male mentoring program was already in place at the college and had been in operation since Fall 2016. The data collection for the pre-pandemic group included students who attended from Fall 2016 to Spring 2020. The data collection for the pandemic group was from Spring B-term 2020 to Spring 2022. The State of Ohio Stay-at-Home order for COVID-19 was issued by

the governor of Ohio on March 5, 2020, and the Spring B-term at the Midwestern community college began on March 16, 2020.

The African American mentoring program at the target institution stemmed from a focus group that was conducted in 2015 with a group of African American men on the college campus who stated that they felt there was no place for them at the college. After reviewing the data, the college pledged $1,000,000 to be used over the course of 5 years to start the mentorship program. The program officially launched in October 2016 with two dedicated full-time staff members and a dedicated office space. The requirement for membership in the program included being a high school graduate, being age 18 or older, and completing a signed agreement. Members received assistance with navigating the college-going process. The program coordinator was a "guide on the side" to students, serving as a mentor and advocate. The program provided financial aid education and FAFSA completion. Coordinators also worked very closely with academic advisors to monitor student progress. Any student who had courses to finish would be contacted at each enrollment cycle to register for classes; the goal was to make sure they were enrolled consistently until graduation. Students worked with the program to be connected to tutors, mentors, and service-learning opportunities. Pre-pandemic, program staff would travel with students to leadership conferences specifically devoted to Black men in college. It was customary to take one to two trips per academic year. Students were required to "earn their seat" by maintaining a C average or higher. Pre-pandemic, there would be an office full of students asking for help, doing their homework, eating lunch, and connecting to other students. Program staff returned to campus in June 2021 during the pandemic in hopes that students would come back to the campus after restrictions began to lift. A former coordinator

reported that she spent three days a week in the office and no more than two students stopped by each week after June 2021 (Yamini, 2021).

All students in the African American mentoring program were selected, except for students who were enrolled in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class at any time they were at the Midwestern community college and students who were under the age of 18 during the time that the data were collected in Spring 2022 semester. These students were excluded from the study to comply with the Institutional Research Board process of Ferris State University and the Midwestern community college where the study was conducted.

The sample was divided into two groups of African American male students in the mentoring program. The first group included the number of students in the African American mentoring group before the pandemic began in Spring 2020 at the urban community college in the Midwest. The group of African American male students met the criteria of membership in a campus mentorship program any time while enrolled at the college. This was the group of students that had pre-pandemic student engagement in the study. A second group of African American males included students in the same campus organization while enrolled at the college during the pandemic with a start date of Spring 2020 or later.

INSTRUMENTATION

The study began with the researcher submitting a research proposal to the Institutional Research Board process of Ferris State University and the Midwestern community college where the study was conducted. The study used institutional data only and students were not asked to provide consent for access to student data. The data collected included student membership in the African American mentorship program and information from the fields found in Table 1 from the Midwestern community college's data warehouse.

The data were provided by the research institution in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and thoroughly evaluated by the researcher to ensure the eligible criteria were met for the research study. The academic data included the student's GPA at the time of graduation. The enrollment data included the number of terms that the student was enrolled during the time of attendance at the institution. Membership data included registered membership in the specific African American mentorship organization. Once the data had been collected and formatted in the Excel spreadsheet, the names of each student were removed and replaced with an identifier to protect the identities of the students and to keep data anonymous. The data in this study were collected from the information found in the college's data warehouse. Each student's GPA, the number of terms the student was enrolled in toward completion, and the student's membership status was not information that was self-reported by the student. The accuracy of this information reduced the threats of validity and reliability in this study.

Table 1: Data Warehouse Fields #1

DATA WAREHOUSE FIELD	DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA WAREHOUSE FIELD	HOW DATA WILL BE UTILIZED TO PROTECT THE IDENTITY OF THE STUDENT
Service_Group_Name	Student Organization	n/a
Service_Group_Description	African American Mentorship Program	n/a
Tartan_ID	Student ID Number	Replaced with random letters & numbers
First_Name	First Name	Replaced with random letters & numbers
Last_Name	Last Name	Replaced with random letters & numbers
Gender	Gender	Evaluated to ensure that only students who identified as Male were included

Ethnicity	Ethnicity	Evaluated to ensure that only students who identified as African American are included
Birthdate	Birthdate	Evaluated to ensure that only students who were 18 or older were included
Course History	List of all attempted and completed courses taken at the college	Evaluated to ensure that students who had an English as a Second Language (ESL) course on their record were not included
Program_Start_Term	Term student began in the student organization	n/a
Program_Start_Date	Date student began in the student organization	n/a
Earliest_STC (End_Dt)	Date student earned first short-term certificate	n/a
Earlierst_CRT (End_Dt)	Date student earned first long-term certificate	n/a
Earliest_ASSOCIATE (End_Dt)	Date student earned first associate degree	n/a
Term_GPA_First_Term_	Student's GPA during first term	n/a
Term_GPA_Second_Term_	Student's GPA during second term	n/a

An institution's data warehouse is the collection of student data and records that are stored at the Midwestern community college. Santoso and Yulia (2017) described the development of data warehouse as a "way to extract the important information from the scattered data in some information systems into a centralized integrated storage and support the need for data history" (p. 94). SAS Enterprise Guide was used to access and analyze the data. SAS is a nationwide company that assists different industries with organizing data and using analytics to provide useful insights. There are three goals for SAS education analytics in higher education. The first goal is to "improve the quality and reliability of data by connecting disparate sources across the higher education ecosystems" (SAS Institute, 2022a). The second goal is to find

enrollment trend data for key segments of student populations to attract prospective students, maximize retention, and increase graduation. Lastly, SAS analytics are used to find insights and respond to the changing trends in higher education.

The Midwestern community college's Research, Analytics and Reporting department is responsible for the college's database administration, institutional research, report development, and data quality. It uses SAS Visual Analytics and SAS Enterprise Guide to assist college employees in accessing and analyzing the information in college's data warehouse (SAS Institute, 2022b). The Enrollment Segments Dashboard was designed to provide historical and current enrollment data for key segments of the institution's student population. The tool generates reports that include segment enrollment tables, segment enrollment charts, and segment enrollment proportions for key target enrollment segments. The segment enrollment tables provide head count, full-time equivalents (FTE), and annual FTE for selected segments by fiscal year in a series of crosstabs of students who belong to an enrollment segment and include demographic information. The segment enrollment charts provide head count, FTE, and annual FTE for selected segments by fiscal year in a series of bar charts of students who belong to an enrollment segment and include demographic information. The segment enrollment proportions provide the proportion of total enrollment (head count, FTE, and annual FTE) comprised of students in each enrollment segment by fiscal year in tables and bar charts. The demographic information collected for each of these key segments includes several different characteristics such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, financial status, reported income, reported county or state of residence, and program of study.

The last step of the instrumentation phase of the study included dividing the students in the two groups of African American male students in the mentoring program. The first group

included the number of students in the African American mentoring group before the pandemic began in Spring 2020 at the urban community college in the Midwest. The group of African American male students met the criteria of membership in a campus mentorship program any time while enrolled at the college. This was the group of students that had pre-pandemic student engagement in the study. A second group of African American males included students in the same campus organization while enrolled at the college during the pandemic with a start date of Spring 2020 or later. The data were stored exclusively on the researcher's computer issued by the institution and were password protected. All student records were securely archived upon the conclusion of the study.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis for this study included descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used for all independent and dependent variables in the study. This analysis included means, modes, medians, standard deviations, and range of scores for each variable. Inferential statistics were used to compare the group of students that were engaged on campus in a campus mentoring group before the pandemic with the group that were members in the mentorship program group after Spring 2020 during the pandemic and Stay at Home order to see if there were any significant differences between the groups.

Inferential statistics were used to see if there was a correlation between pre-pandemic and pandemic student engagement in the program with the number of terms to completion and GPA. The *t* test was used to see if there were any significant differences between the two groups. There are several different types of *t* tests. The most common tests are the single sample *t* test, independent *t* test, and the dependent *t* test (Illowsky & Dean, 2018). The independent sample

t test was used in this study because the Pre-COVID and the Post-COVID groups are two independent different groups.

The SAS (2022b) manual strongly encourages researchers to conduct an exploratory data analysis and assumption check before running the independent sample *t* test. The data in an independent *t* test must meet a set of assumptions. These requirements include:

- A continuous dependent variable
- An independent variable that has two categories
- Values on both the dependent and independent variables
- Two independent groups with different subjects
- Random sample of data from the population
- Normal distribution of the dependent variable for each group
- Variances that are equal between each group
- No outliers.

It is suggested to run nonparametric tests if one or more of the assumptions for the independent sample test are not met (SAS, 2022b). SAS (2022b) uses two different *t* tests for the test statistic and degrees of freedom. The pooled *t* test is used when variances are equal, and the Satterthwaite *t* test is used when the variances are not equal. SAS (2022b) also includes the *F* folded test, which is used to assist researchers in determining whether the variances are equal. Lastly, it is recommended that researchers use at least six subjects and have approximately the same number of subjects in each group.

The chi-square was used to see if there was a correlation between pre-pandemic and pandemic student engagement and GPA and a correlation between pre-pandemic and pandemic student engagement and the number of terms to completion. There are three different types of chi-square distributions that can be used to test hypotheses. The goodness of fit test is used to

determine how well data fit in a distribution. The test of independence is used to analyze if an event is independent. Lastly, the test of a single variance examines variability (Illowsky & Dean, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Chapter Three discussed the research design and methodology of this study on the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on African American male student success in an urban Midwestern community college. African American male students in a campus mentorship program while enrolled at the college before the pandemic were analyzed and compared to African American male students in the same campus organization while enrolled at the college during the COVID-19 pandemic with a start date of Spring 2020 or later. The students' academic data, enrollment data, and student engagement status were evaluated and compared using descriptive and inferential statistics in the quantitative study. Chapter Four details the statistical outcomes of the quantitative analysis for both groups of students.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

The literature reveals that the majority of the African American students attending institutions of higher education do not persist from year to year, and an even smaller number complete with graduating credentials (Shapiro et al. 2017). There are several challenges impeding on college graduation for these students of major concern to higher education leaders and government officials. The literature includes financial resources (AACC, 2012; Hillman, 2016; Morris, 2017), developmental education (Preston, 2017), academic preparedness for college, institutional cultural climate (Janosky, 2017), institutional fit (Morse et al., 2016; Samuels, 2014), sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2008), and student engagement (Gardenshire-Crooks, 2010). The works of several researchers evaluated many aspects challenging African American students; however, none specifically looked at how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted African American male community college students. This study aimed to explore the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on African American male students at a Midwestern community college.

Chapter Three discussed the approach used in this quantitative correlational, quasi-experimental study and the descriptive and inferential statistics used to perform data analysis. Chapter Four presents the results of the quantitative analysis and addresses the research questions and hypotheses in the study. The following research questions guided this quantitative

study, which focused on the impact of student engagement on persistence rates in African American males enrolled in a community college.

RQ1: What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the completion rates of African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H1: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease completion rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO1: The COVID-19 pandemic will not impact completion rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

RQ2: What impact did COVID-19 have on term-to-term retention for African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H2: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease the term-to-term retention rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO2: The COVID-19 pandemic will not have an impact on term-to-term retention rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

RQ3: What impact did COVID-19 have on the GPA status for African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H3: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease GPAs for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO3: The COVID-19 pandemic will not have an impact on GPAs for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

These questions were chosen to investigate the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on African American community college men who also have the largest noncompletion rate.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The data collected in this study included student membership in the African American mentorship program and the fields listed in Table 2 in the Midwestern community college's data warehouse.

Table 2: Data Warehouse Fields #2

DATA WAREHOUSE FIELD NAME	DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA WAREHOUSE FIELD
Service_Group_Name	Student Organization
Service_Group_Description	African American Mentorship Program
Tartan_ID	Student ID Number
First_Name	First Name
Last_Name	Last Name
Gender	Gender
Ethnicity	Ethnicity
Birthdate	Birthdate
Course History	List of all attempted and completed courses taken at the college
Program_Start_Term	Term student began in the student organization
Program_Start_Date	Date student began in the student organization
Program_Start_Term_Id	Identifier assigned to the term in the data warehouse.
Earliest_STC (End_Dt)	Date student earned first short-term certificate
Earlierst_CRT (End_Dt)	Date student earned first long-term certificate
Earliest_ASSOCIATE (End_Dt)	Date student earned first associate degree
Term_GPA_Enrolled_1_Term_later	Student's GPA the first term
Term_GPA_Enrolled_2_Terms_later	Student's GPA the next term

The initial spreadsheet from the data warehouse using the chosen fields identified 145 participants who started between Fall 2016 and Summer 2020. The mentorship program coordinator vetted the list for discrepancies and determined 12 students did not appear on the list starting after Spring 2020. Those students had to be added manually to the data set from Spring 2020 (1), Fall 2020 (1), and Fall 2021 (10). They were not in the data warehouse due to a

disruption in data entry for students participating in the program during the pandemic. The need for this adjustment was necessary because the mentorship program staff did not have the access needed to enter the information in the student database during the pandemic while they worked from home. College staff worked from home for over a year and returned to campus three days a week and worked from home two days of week in June 2021.

The 12 participants who started in the program after the pandemic began were not coded in the data warehouse as program participants and the program headcount were not accurate. Another group of program participants identified were those who signed up for the program but never enrolled at the college. These were most likely prospective students who started the enrollment process and/or may have attended during the first seven days of the term but withdrew without record or were purged due to non-payment and were thus removed from the research sample. They did not have any academic data and did not meet the parameters of the research study. A third group of students removed from the sample included two with English as a Second Language (ESL) courses on their academic record. All students in the sample were 18 years of age or older.

After removing students who signed up for the program but never enrolled at the college and those identified as ESL, 137 students remained for analysis. Of that sample, 103 had enrolled in the program prior to Spring 2020 and were designated as the "Pre-COVID" group, and 34 were enrolled Spring 2020 or later and were designated as the "Post-COVID" group.

The following data points were collected for each of the students included in the study to answer the research questions.

- Completion of a credential (short-term certificate, one-year certificate, and/or associate degree)
- Retention in the term following their first term in the program

- GPA information for each term they were in the program.

Descriptive statistics were used for the independent and dependent variables in the study. This analysis included means, modes, medians, standard deviations, and range of scores. The dependent variable in the study included grade point average (GPA) and the number of terms to completion. GPA was measured at the interval level. The number of terms at the college was measured at the ordinal level. The independent variable included student engagement in the African American mentoring organization before the pandemic or during the pandemic. This was measured at the nominal level. The two categories were "yes" or "no" for pandemic student engagement in this study.

Inferential statistics were used to compare the group of students that were engaged on campus in a campus mentoring group before the pandemic with the group that were members in the mentorship program group after Spring 2020 during the pandemic and Stay at Home order to see if there were any significant differences between the groups. Inferential statistics were also used to see if there was a correlation between pre-pandemic and pandemic student engagement in the program with the number of terms to completion and GPA. The independent sample *t* test was used to see if there were any significant differences between the two groups. This was used because the data values were independent, and the two independent variables had equal variances. The chi-square test was used to see if there was a correlation between pre-pandemic and pandemic student engagement and GPA and a correlation between pre-pandemic and pandemic student engagement and the number of terms to completion. The chi-square test was used to determine if a sample in a research study is representative of the population. The test requires one variable and a hypothesis.

The first variable analyzed to answer RQ1 was the completion of a credential.

RQ1: What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the completion rates of African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H1: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease completion rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO1: The COVID-19 pandemic will not impact completion rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

Credential completion was not a viable outcome and measure in this study due to the small number of students that completed a credential in the Post-COVID group and the limited number of terms that the Post-COVID students had to complete credentials in the research study.

As shown in Table 3, 43 students in the Pre-COVID group completed a total of 67 credentials, which included 23 (34%) STCs (Short-Term Certificates), 13 (19%) CRTs (Long-term Certificates), and 33 (49%) AAS (Associate of Applied Science) degrees. There were two students that started in the program in Fall 2016, one of which received all three credentials and the other completed a CRT. Out of the 34 students in the Post-COVID group, 22 students started the program in Spring 2020, two in Fall 2020, and 10 in Fall 2021. Three students completed a total of four credentials in the Post-COVID group, which included 1 (25%) STC, 1 (25%) CRT, and 2 (50%) AAS degrees, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Number of Credentials Completed

	SHORT-TERM CERTIFICATE (STC)	LONG-TERM CERTIFICATE (CRT)	ASSOCIATE DEGREE (AAS)	*N*
Pre-COVID	34%	19%	49%	67
Post-COVID	25%	25%	50%	4

The Post-COVID group was not enrolled in enough academic terms to complete an STC, CRT, or associate degree before the conclusion of the research study. The Pre-COVID group was enrolled in more academic terms than the Post-COVID group to complete credentials during the time that the research study was conducted, as shown in Table 4. Credential completion was not

a viable outcome and measure in the study due to the small number of students that completed a credential in the Post-COVID group and the limited number of terms that the Post-COVID students had to complete credentials in the research study. The descriptive statistics are shown in Table 5.

Table 4: Number of Academic Terms to Complete the AAS Degree in the Mentoring Program

	ACADEMIC TERM								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	*N*
Pre-COVID	3%	16%	19%	29%	13%	13%	0	6%	31
Post-COVID	50%		50%						2

Table 5: Pre-COVID Number of Academic Terms and Post-COVID Number of Academic Terms

	PRE-COVID	POST-COVID
Minimum	1	1
Maximum	8	3
Range	7	2
Size	31	2
Sum	125	4
Mean	4.03225806	2
Median	4	2
Mode	4	1, 3
Standard deviation	1.7026229	1.41421356
Variance	2.89892473	2
Mid range	4.5	2

The second variable that was analyzed in RQ2 was retention in the terms following the students' first term in the program.

> **RQ2:** What impact did COVID-19 have on term-to-term retention for African American males in a Midwestern community college?
>
> > **H2:** The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease the term-to-term retention rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.
> >
> > **HO2:** The COVID-19 pandemic will not have an impact on term-to-term retention rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

Retention in this study included students who returned to the college one term later and two terms later. Of the 103 participants in the Pre-COVID group, 76 (74%) students returned the following term and 27 (26%) students did not. Of the 34 students in the Post-COVID group, 16 (47%) students returned the following term and 18 (52%) students did not, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Pre- or Post-COVID by Enrolled 1 Term Later (*N* = 137)

	POST-COVID		PRE-COVID		TOTAL
	Frequency	Row Pct	Frequency	Row Pct	
Enrolled	16	47.06	76	73.79	92
Not enrolled	18	52.94	27	26.21	45
Total	34		103		137

STATISTIC	*DF*	VALUE	PROBABILITY
Chi-square	1	8.2786	0.0040
Likelihood ration chi-square	1	7.9422	0.0048
Continuity Adj. chi-square	1	7.1112	0.0077
Mantel-Haenszel chi-square	1	8.2182	0.0041
Phi coefficient		–0.2458	
Contingency coefficient		0.2387	
Cramer's V		–0.2458	
Fisher's Exact Test			
Cell (1,1) Frequency (*F*)	16		
Left-sided Pr <= *F*	0.0044		
Right-sided Pr >= *F*	0.9988		
Table probability (*P*)	0.0032		
Two-sided Pr <= *P*	0.0060		

Retention after two terms for both groups of students decreased significantly. The Pre-COVID group had 54 students return to the college the second term, while only seven of the Post-COVID students returned in their second term, as shown in Table 7. Retention data were collected for up to four terms in the study; however, retention beyond two terms could not be determined because as of Spring semester 2022, the Post-COVID group did not have enough consecutive terms to measure retention and make comparisons appropriately for retention after more than two terms. Of the 34 students in the Post-COVID group, only seven (20%) of them were enrolled two terms later.

Table 7: Pre- or Post-COVID by Enrolled 2 Terms Later (N = 137)

	POST-COVID		PRE-COVID		TOTAL
	FREQUENCY	ROW PCT	FREQUENCY	ROW PCT	
Enrolled	7	20.59	54	52.43	61
Not enrolled	27	79.41	49	47.57	76
Total	34		103		137

DF	VALUE
1	10.4909
1	11.1566
1	9.2414
1	10.4143
	–0.2767
	0.2667
	–0.2767
Fisher's Exact Test	
Cell (1,1) Frequency (*F*)	7
Left-sided Pr <= *F*	0.0009
Right-sided Pr >= *F*	0.9998
Table probability (*P*)	0.0007
Two-sided Pr <= *P*	0.0013

Chi-square analyses were performed to assess the relationship between term-to-term retention and the Pre-COVID and Post-COVID groups of African American male students. Statistically significant differences were found at the $p < .01$ level. There were significant differences between both groups and retention one term after they started the program, X^2 (1, N = 137) = 10.249, p= .0012. The Pre-COVID group was more likely to enroll in college one term after beginning the program, as shown in Table 6. There were also significant differences in retention two terms after each group started the mentoring program. The Pre-COVID group was more likely than the Post-COVID group to enroll in college two terms after beginning the program, X^2 (1, N = 137) = 8.28, p = .004, as shown in Table 7.

The third variable analyzed to answer RQ3 in this study was each participant's GPA for each term they were in the program.

RQ3: What impact did COVID-19 have on the GPA status for African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H3: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease GPAs for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO3: The COVID-19 pandemic will not have an impact on GPAs for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

The term GPA and the cumulative GPA of each participant were analyzed and compared for both groups of students using the SAS software. The mean term GPA for the Post-COVID group was 1.72. The mean term GPA for the Pre-COVID group was 2.05. Other descriptive statistics that were analyzed in the study are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Term Pre-COVID GPA and Term Post-COVID GPA

	PRE-COVID	POST-COVID
Minimum	0	0
Maximum	4	3.6240
Range	4	3.624

	PRE-COVID	POST-COVID
Size	103	34
Sum	211.4706	58.5676
Mean	2.05311262	1.72257647
Median	2.0463	1.6356
Mode	0	0
Standard deviation	0.89439523	1.17115729
Variance	0.799942828	1.3716094
Mid range	2	1.812

The term GPA of each participant was analyzed and compared for both groups of students. The results of the *F* folded test, as shown in Table 9, confirmed that the two groups had equal variances. The Pooled test results were used to find significant differences because the variances between both groups were found to be equal, $p = .0428$. The Pooled confidence interval at the 95% level for GPA between the groups was (–.7097, .0487). However, there were no statistically significant differences found using *t* tests at $p < .05$ level between the Pre-COVID and Post-COVID groups despite Pre-COVID students ($M = 2.05$, $SD = .89$) having a higher GPA than Post-COVID students ($M = 1.72$, $SD = 1.17$), $t\ (135) = 1.7$, $p = .08$.

Table 9: t Test Results for Mean Term GPA in Program for Pre- and Post-COVID

	N	MEAN	95% LOWER CL MEAN	95% UPPER CL MEAN	*SD*	95% LOWER CL *SD*	95% UPPER CL *SD*	STD. ERROR	MIN	MAX
Post-COVID	34	1.7226	1.3139	2.1312	1.1712	0.9446	1.5416	0.2009	0	3.6240
Pre-COVID	103	2.0531	1.8783	2.2279	0.8944	0.7867	1.0365	0.0881	0	4.0000
Diff (1-2) Pooled		–0.3305	–0.7097	0.0487	0.9694	0.8662	1.1006	0.1917		
Diff (1-2) Satterth-waite		–0.3305	–0.7719	0.1109				0.2193		

METHOD	VARIANCES	*DF*	*t* VALUE	Pr [*t*]
Pooled	Equal	135	–1.72	0.0870
Satterthwaite	Unequal	46.373	–1.51	0.1386
EQUALITY OF VARIANCES				
METHOD	NUM *DF*	DEN *DF*	*F* VALUE	Pr > *F*
Folded *F*	33	102	1.71	0.0428

The mean cumulative GPA for the Post-COVID and Pre-COVID groups is shown in Table 10. The average cumulative GPA for the Post-COVID group was 1.80. The minimum GPA was as low as 0 with a maximum GPA of 3.62. The Pre-COVID group had an average cumulative GPA of 2.17. The highest GPA for this group was 4.0 and the lowest was 0. Other descriptive statistics are shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Cumulative Pre-COVID GPA and Cumulative Post-COVID GPA

	PRE-COVID	POST-COVID
Minimum	0	0
Maximum	4	3.6238
Range	4	3.638
Size	103	34
Sum	223.0876	61.2831
Mean	2.16589903	1.80244412
Median	2.2895	1.95
Mode	0	0
Standard deviation	0.892999592	1.16864869
Variance	0.797448271	1.36573975
Mid range	2	1.8119

The mean cumulative GPA of each participant was analyzed and compared for both groups of students. The results of the *F* folded test, as shown in Table 11, confirmed that the two groups

had equal variances. The Pooled test results were used to find significant differences because the variances between both groups were found to be equal, $p = .0433$. The Pooled confidence interval at the 95% level for GPA between the groups was (–.7420, .0151). However, there were no statistically significant differences found using t tests at $p < .05$ level between the Pre-COVID and Post-COVID groups. The cumulative GPA was also found to have no significant impact on both groups despite Pre-COVID students ($M = 2.17$, $SD = .89$) having a higher GPA than Post-COVID students ($M = 1.8$, $SD = 1.17$), $t(135) = 1.9$, $p = .06$, as shown in Table 11.

Table 11: *t* Test Results for Mean Cumulative GPA in Program for Pre- and Post-COVID

	N	Mean	95% Lower CL Mean	95% Upper CL Mean	*SD*	95% Lower CL *SD*	95% Upper CL *SD*	Std. Error	Min	Max
Post-COVID	34	1.8024	1.3947	2.2102	1.1686	0.9426	1.5383	0.2004	0	3.6238
Pre-COVID	103	2.1659	1.9914	2.3404	0.8930	0.7855	1.0349	0.0880	0	4.0000
Diff (1-2) Pooled		–0.3635	–0.7420	0.0151	0.9677	0.8647	1.0986	0.1914		
Diff (1-2) Satterthwaite		–0.3635	–0.8040	0.0770				0.2189		

Method	Variances	*DF*	*t* value	Pr [*t*]
Pooled	Equal	135	–1.90	0.0597
Satterthwaite	Unequal	46.389	–1.66	0.1036
Equality of Variances				
Method	Num *DF*	Den *DF*	*F* value	Pr > *F*
Folded *F*	33	102	1.71	0.0433

CONCLUSION

Chapter Four reviewed the results of the quantitative analysis and addressed the following the research questions, which focused on the impact of student engagement on persistence rates in African American males enrolled in a community college.

RQ1: What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the completion rates of African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H1: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease completion rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO1: The COVID-19 pandemic will not impact completion rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

RQ2: What impact did COVID-19 have on term-to-term retention for African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H2: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease the term-to-term retention rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO2: The COVID-19 pandemic will not have an impact on term-to-term retention rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

RQ3: What impact did COVID-19 have on GPAs for African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H3: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease GPAs for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO3: The COVID-19 pandemic will not have an impact on GPAs for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

These questions were chosen to investigate the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on African American community college men who also have the largest noncompletion rate.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study demonstrated that there were statistically significant differences between the Pre-COVID and Post-COVID groups in terms of retention to one term after their start in the program and two terms after their start in the program. Chi-square analyses were statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level for retention both one term after the term in which they began the mentorship program and two terms after they began the program. In addition, when student mean cumulative GPA was calculated as of each term they were enrolled in the program and when mean term GPA was calculated for each term they were enrolled in the

mentoring program, there were no statistically significant differences found using *t* tests at the $p < .05$ level between the Pre-COVID and Post-COVID groups.

Credential completion was determined to be an outcome measure that could not be used in the study, in that many of the students in the post-COVID group did not have time to complete an STC, CRT, or associate degree program during the duration of the study. Credential completion was not a viable outcome measure in the study for this reason.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The literature revealed that majority of the African American students who attend institutions of higher education do not persist from year to year, and an even smaller number complete with graduating credentials. The works of several researchers have evaluated the challenges that impede on college graduation for these students that are of major concern to higher education leaders and government officials. The challenges found in the literature include financial resources, developmental education, academic preparedness for college, institutional cultural climate, institutional fit, sense of belonging, and student engagement. In early 2020, the United States was struck by the highly contagious coronavirus disease (COVID-19), caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. According to Lee et al. (2021), the disease originated in Wuhan, China, and "directly targets the respiratory system in humans with characteristic symptoms of cough, fever, sore throat, dyspnea, and fatigue" (p. 1). COVID-19 brought new challenges impacting completion and persistence for college students nationwide. Most colleges were abruptly closed and rapidly transitioned to remote learning to protect students and prevent the spread of disease. Other challenges included declining enrollment, decreases in academic success, and declining mental health. None of the studies reviewed specifically looked at how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted African American male community college students.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the student success of African American males in a mentoring program at a community

college. Chapter Four reviewed the results of the quantitative analysis and addressed the research questions and hypotheses in the study. Chapter Five will summarize the study, review the research questions and hypotheses that were investigated in the study, and discuss the major quantitative findings of the study. The major implications and limitations of the study will also be discussed.

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study aimed to explore the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on completion, term-to-term persistence, and the grade point averages of African American males in a mentoring program at a community college. A correlational, quasi-experimental design was used to investigate three research questions and to test three hypotheses. This design was appropriate because the study included two groups of students that were in an African American campus organization on campus. One group included the students engaged on campus in the campus organization before the pandemic, and the other group included students in the campus organization during the pandemic.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Three research questions were identified to investigate the impact COVID-19 had on student success of African American males.

RQ1: What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the completion rates of African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H1: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease completion rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO1: The COVID-19 pandemic will not impact completion rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

RQ2: What impact did COVID-19 have on term-to-term retention for African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H2: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease the term-to-term retention rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO2: The COVID-19 pandemic will not have an impact on term-to-term retention rates for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

RQ3: What impact did COVID-19 have on GPAs for African American males in a Midwestern community college?

H3: The COVID-19 pandemic will decrease GPAs for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

HO3: The COVID-19 pandemic will not have an impact on GPAs for African American males in a Midwestern community college.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

RQ1: *What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the completion rates of African American males in a Midwestern community college?* Credential completion was not found to be a viable outcome and measure in this study due to the small number of students who completed a credential in the Post-COVID group and the limited number of terms that the Post-COVID students had to complete credentials in the research study.

RQ2: *What impact did COVID-19 have on term-to-term retention for African American males in a Midwestern community college?* Retention in this study included students who returned to the college one term later and two terms later. Statistically significant differences were found between the Pre-COVID and Post-COVID groups in terms of retention to one term after their start in the program and two terms after their start in the program. Chi-square analyses were statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level for retention both one term after the term in which they began the mentorship program and two terms after they began the program.

Retention after two terms for both groups of students decreased significantly. There were significant differences between both groups and retention one term after they started the program, $X^2 (1, N = 137) = 10.249, p = .0012$. The Pre-COVID group was more likely to enroll

in college one term after beginning the program. There were also significant differences in retention two terms after each group started the mentoring program. The Pre-COVID group was more likely than the Post-COVID group to enroll in college two terms after beginning the program, X^2 (1, N = 137) = 8.28, p = .004. Retention data were collected for up to four terms in the study; however, retention beyond two terms could not be determined because as of Spring semester 2022, the Post-COVID group did not have enough consecutive terms to measure retention and make comparisons appropriately.

RQ3: *What impact did COVID-19 have on GPAs for African American males in a Midwestern community college?* The term GPA and the cumulative GPA of each participant were analyzed and compared for both groups of students. When student mean term GPA was calculated as of each term they were enrolled in the mentoring group and when mean cumulative GPA was calculated for each term they were enrolled in the mentoring group, there were no statistically significant differences found using t tests at the $p < .05$ level between the Pre-COVID and Post-COVID groups. There was no significant impact in the term GPA despite Pre-COVID students (M = 2.05, SD = .89) having a higher GPA than Post-COVID students (M = 1.72, SD = 1.17), t(135) = 1.7, p = .08. The cumulative GPA was also found to have no significant impact on both groups despite Pre-COVID students (M = 2.17, SD = .89) having a higher GPA than Post-COVID students (M = 1.8, SD = 1.17), t(135) = 1.9, p = .06.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The hypotheses that the COVID-19 pandemic would decrease student success rates for African American males in a community college were found to be significant in one of the three areas investigated. Significant differences were found in term-to-term retention between the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic groups. These significant differences support the recommendations

of Tinto's (1993) work on student retention and persistence and LaVant et al.'s (1997) recommendations of quality formal structured mentorship programs.

Tinto's (1993) model looked at the student's attributes prior to college and how they shaped the student's college experience and impacted the student's retention. He suggested that students who are socially integrated in college have a higher commitment to college and are more likely to persist and graduate across six different phases and three stages. Each phase and stage of his model aimed at understanding the longitudinal process of student persistence. Tinto's research and model laid the foundation that many researchers have utilized in examining mentorship relationships in African American males and their impact on student success, retention, and completion. The goal of the relationship is for the mentor to help develop the mentee's goals, abilities, skills, and understanding in a variety of different experiences. The establishment of meaningful mentoring relationships can offer students a safe place to explore possibilities and discover resources that would enhance persistence and completion in college.

LaVant et al. (1997) explored formal mentoring programs for African American men in higher education institutions and constructed eight recommendations for successful and effective mentoring programs that increased college retention.

The combination of Tinto's model and LaVant et al.'s recommendations of quality formal structured mentorship programs was found to support the term-to-term retention research question in this study. Prior to the Stay-at-Home order for COVID-19, the mentoring program included in-person assistance with navigating the college-going process. The program coordinator was a "guide on the side" to students, serving as a mentor and advocate. The program provided financial aid education and FAFSA completion. Coordinators also worked very closely with academic advisors to monitor student progress. Any student who had courses

to finish was contacted at each enrollment cycle to register for classes; the goal was to make sure they were enrolled consistently until graduation. Students worked with the program to be connected to tutors, mentors, and service-learning opportunities. Program staff also traveled with students to leadership conferences specifically devoted to Black men in college. Students took one to two trips per academic year. Students were required to "earn their seat" by maintaining a C average or higher. There was an office full of students—asking for help, doing their homework, eating lunch, and connecting to other students—prior to March 5, 2020. Program staff returned to campus in June 2021 during the pandemic in hopes that students would come back to the campus after restrictions began to lift. A former coordinator reported that she spent three days a week in the office and no more than two students stopped by each week after June 2021. Program participants did not receive the same level of support and resources as those who were in the program before March 2020 (Yamini, 2021).

The research question regarding credential completion was determined to be an outcome measure that could not be used in the study. Many of the students in the Post-COVID group did not have time to complete an STC, CRT, or associate degree program during the duration of the study. This group was in the mentoring program between Fall 2016 and Spring 2020 with the possibility of up to 10 terms to complete a credential. The Post-COVID group included participants from Spring 2020 to Spring 2022, which had the possibility of up to only four terms to complete a credential. Studying the Post-COVID group for up to six additional terms could potentially increase the number of students with a credential to be able to make reliable comparisons between both groups.

Another limitation of this analysis was that the mentorship program started in 2016, but in the study, the researcher did not include the term in which any of the students started at the

community college. Thus, there were students who completed successful terms before they started in the mentorship program. Two students in the study completed an associate degree within one term of participating in the mentorship program. Students could have also been transfer students or returning college students and may have stopped out during any term of their college journey. All of these would have an impact on the completion data.

The research question regarding GPA was not found to have any statistically significant differences between the two groups. The results of the independent sample *t* test indicated there were no significant differences in the term GPA and cumulative GPA of both groups of students at the $p < .05$ level, despite Pre-COVID students having a higher GPA than Post-COVID students. The mean term GPA for Pre-COVID students was 2.05, and the mean term GPA for Post-COVID students was 1.72. The mean cumulative GPA for Pre-COVID students was 2.17 and the mean cumulative GPA for Post-COVID students was 1.8. The differences here would impact a student's probationary status and ability to graduate from the Midwestern community college (Sinclair Community College, 2022). Students need a 2.0 GPA or higher to be in good standing. Three consecutive terms of a GPA under 2.0 would get them dismissed from the college. A 2.0 or higher is required as well for students to complete a credential at the college. Other consequences that impact a GPA under 2.0 at the college include not being able to take classes online, not being able to register or add classes without an academic advisor's signature and being at risk of losing federal financial aid (Sinclair Community College, 2022).

Another limitation of this analysis could be the assumptions that must be taken into consideration to run the independent sample *t* test. The SAS manual strongly encourages researchers to conduct an exploratory data analysis and assumption check before running the independent sample *t* test (SAS Institute, 2022b). According to SAS (2022b), the data in an

independent *t* test must meet a set of assumptions. It was also recommended to have at least six subjects in each group and a balanced design with the same number of subjects in each group. The two groups of students were widely uneven. There were 103 students in the Pre-COVID group and 34 students in the Post-COVID group. Even though the variances were equal for GPA between both groups, this may have violated the validity of the independent sample *t* test. This study may yield more significant differences if there were more Post-COVID students to analyze. As with the completion analysis, studying the Post-COVID group for up to six additional terms could potentially increase the number of students in this group to be able to make reliable comparisons between both groups. Lastly, this study included all the eligible participants in each group. Increasing the length of time to investigate the eligible students in each group would allow for a true random sample. Nonparametric tests could have also increased the validity of the GPA analysis.

Even though generalizations to all African American males that attend community colleges were not possible because the sample size in this study was limited to the number of African American males that were in the African American male mentorship program at the community college in the Midwest, the results of this study can be used to make suggestions and recommendations to the administrators at the urban community college in the Midwest where the sample was taken. Other community colleges and universities can also benefit from this information. Intentional efforts could be made by the college to support African American males early in their college journey and make known the importance of student engagement in an educational experience. Student engagement opportunities could be introduced in orientations, advising sessions, and first-year courses. These efforts are not typically acknowledged in a

community college setting with commuters as they are at 4-year colleges and universities with more traditional students that live on campus.

Future research can be done to include a larger sample of students or to include more community colleges to increase external validity by other researchers who are not limited in resources associated with time and money. Completion and persistence rates are an issue for many different groups of students in community colleges. Further research studies can also include students of other races, sexes, socioeconomic statuses, and other variables within the same study or separately to investigate the impacts of student engagement. Student engagement was limited to membership in a campus organization or mentoring group in this study, but other forms of student engagement could also be evaluated in African American males or other groups of interest. For example, Strayhorn (2008) evaluated student-faculty interactions, peer interaction, and active learning while looking at student engagement. Finally, mixed-method and qualitative studies investigating the impact that COVID-19 has had on African American students could provide rich data to give more specific insights into the causes of decreased term-to-term retention, GPAs, and completion in these students. This could allow researchers to make meaningful recommendations to increase the quality of African American mentorship programs that have had to make changes to these programs since the pandemic based on the data provided by focus groups and participant interviews.

CONCLUSION

Student success in African American males actively engaged in a mentoring program at a Midwestern community college was found to be significantly higher for students before the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020 in term-to-term retention. These significant differences support the recommendations of Tinto's (1993) work on student retention and persistence and

LaVant et al.'s (1997) recommendations of quality formal structured mentorship programs. Credential completion was determined to be an outcome measure that could not be used in the study due to the small number of students that completed a credential in the Post-COVID group and the limited number of terms that the Post-COVID students had to complete credentials in the research study. The results of this study can be used to make suggestions and recommendations to the administrators at the community college in the Midwest where the sample was taken. Other community colleges and universities could benefit from this information as well. Intentional efforts could be made by colleges to support African American males early in their college journey and make known the importance of student engagement in an educational experience.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVALS

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
1010 Campus Drive FLITE 410 Big Rapids, MI 49307
www.ferris.edu/irb

Date: February 4, 2022

To: Susan DeCamillis, EdD and Latonia Peak-Brown
From: David R. White, Ph.D, IRB Chair
Re: IRB Application *IRB-FY21-22-90 Impact that the pandemic has had on the student success of African American Men at a Community College*

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application for using human subjects in the study, *Impact that the pandemic has had on the student success of African American Men at a Community College(IRB-FY21-22-90)* and approved this project under Federal Regulations Exempt Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).
Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Your protocol has been assigned project number IRB-FY21-22-90. Approval mandates that you follow all University policy and procedures, in addition to applicable governmental regulations. Approval applies only to the activities described in the protocol submission; should revisions need to be made, all materials must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation. In addition, the IRB must be made aware of any serious and unexpected and/or unanticipated adverse events as well as complaints and non-compliance issues.

This project has been granted a waiver of consent documentation; signatures of participants need not be collected.

As mandated by Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46 (45 CFR 46) the IRB requires submission of annual status reports during the life of the research project and a Final Report Form upon study completion. **The Annual Status Report for this project is due on or before February 3, 2023.** Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor. Please let us know if the IRB can be of any future assistance.

Regards,

David R. White, Ph.D, IRB Chair
Ferris State University Institutional Review Board

SINCLAIR
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Research, Analytics & Reporting

February 17, 2022

Latonia Peak-Brown
Sinclair Community College
444 West Third Street
Dayton, OH 45402

RE: Impact of the Pandemic on the Student Success of African American Men

Dear Latonia:

As chair of the Sinclair Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBOOO05624), I am writing to inform you that I have reviewed your proposal and approved the protocol as it meets the criteria for exempt status as established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under category two. Your planned research is fully compliant with Sinclair protocols.

Any serious adverse events or issues relating from this study must be reported immediately to the IRB. Additionally, any changes to protocols or informed consent documents must have IRB approval before implementation.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Chad Atkinson, Ph.D.
Manager of Research
Sinclair Community College, Research, Analytics, and Reporting
Chair, Sinclair Institutional Review Board
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