The Terms of Engagement:
African American College Student Engagement at a PWI

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Purpose of Study

- Explore additional means by which engagement can be examined
  - Surveys
  - Interviews

- Provide a more comprehensive view of African American college student engagement
  - Racial identity
  - Background measures
Literature Review

- Student Involvement Theory (Astin, 1977, 1993)
  - I-E-O Model
- Student Engagement (Kuh, 2001)
- African American Racial Identity (Cross, 1971, 1995; Cross & Vandiver, 2001)
Research Design

- Pilot study for dissertation
- Method: Semi-structured interviews and surveys
  - National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
  - Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS)
- Analysis: Constant comparative method
  - Member checks and journaling
  - Peer debriefer with opposing view
- Site: Large research extensive, public, predominantly White institution
- Participants: Twenty (20) self-identifying African American undergraduate students
  - Ages 18-34
  - Fourteen (14) women; six men
  - Seven first-year students, three sophomores, three juniors, and seven seniors
  - Nineteen (19) of the 20 students from within the state
Research Findings

Access
Access: Financial Aid

- Predictor of entry and persistence in higher education
  - Parental contribution
    - “...for all the colleges I applied to I was basically depending on financial aid because my mom does not make money at all. She doesn’t make a lot of money, so it was either loans, scholarships, or financial aid.”
  - Negative perception of loans
    - “I have Pell grants, state grants, [a state] scholarship... No loans, thank God... If I had to come here and like take out loans, God knows how at the end of my schooling, how much schooling I will be taking, the loans that it would be to ummm...how much I would have to pay back so, I’m just thanking God that you know, it’s like OK now, we don’t have to pay [any] loans this time. I’m not saying I would never take out a loan but you know just this year I don’t have to take out any.”
Access: Academic Preparation

- Availability and completion of advanced courses in high school
  - Discrepancies in resources
    - “Science, I think was better because we did good with labs just like regular [predominantly White] schools...Cause I think about the White schools they just have so much stuff. Like, OK, one girl [in my class] was like I dissected a frog in high school. I’m like, GURL, I didn’t dissect a frog, but we did the little lab stuff...”
  - Advisement differences
    - “Yeah...what did they call it? It was advanced placement kind of stuff. Going from middle school to high school they come in and they ask you ....what did they call that. A standard diploma and then [an] academic diploma or something like that...I don’t remember the teacher’s name, but... I remember she called me in or whatever to discuss...what kind of diploma do you want in high school you know. Back then, I didn’t know anything about it....So, I’ll do academic...that sounds great...you know, why not? And, uh, I remember asking her what's the difference between, you know, standard and academic you know. She, I remember she tried to say you might not be able to achieve you know that level and maybe you should go just for a standard...”
Research Findings

Choice
Choice: Expectations and Supportive Campus Environment

- Role of outreach programs in attendance to PWI
  - “Since MU does not represent a majority of minorities, [the campus outreach program] brings in a lot of minorities to help the minorities here at MU. And it’s a summer program...I thought for me that would be good for me because it would get me used to the campus and I’m a very hands on person…”

- Transitioning to a PWI
  - “OH, MY GOSH! A 360 [in coming to MU from a predominantly African American environment]. You know how in [the campus outreach program] it’s just all of us you know, the minority students, and there’s a couple of White people in [the campus outreach program] too, it was just us [other African American students]. So you know that’s all we [saw] everyday for the whole summer. And then when I walked out of [the residence hall] or wherever I was staying freshman year and I was just like, “Wow”, where did all these [White] people come from. I was just so in shock... They didn’t mention what the makeup was or NOTHING [Emphasis].”
Research Findings

Background
Background: Racial Identity and Foundations

- **Salience of race on a PWI and in home community**
  - “…we wanted to live where more minorities worked and stayed…it was ok for the most part. Sometimes, well by me being biracial it didn’t always…I didn’t like it because I didn’t like being picked on because of my background. The fact that my mom is Black and my dad is Puerto Rican and the other African American kids didn’t like that. So they picked on me for the most part but as I got older things got better.”

- **Parental involvement in education**
  - “My mom was very involved in our education. Even though we didn’t have a lot of the things that she wanted us to have, she wanted us to work hard so that we wouldn’t...when we get older we would have the things that we never had. So she’s very involved in our education. Making sure that our grades are where they are supposed to be and she helped us with our homework...she makes sure that if we have problems with something she [takes care of it].”
Emergent Constructs

Emergent Constructs Across Measures

Number of Instances

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<tr>
<th>Access</th>
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<tr>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
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Emergent Constructs
Discussion & Implications

- Need to address relevant background factors, or inputs, for African American students
- Creation of measures that will better attend to African American college student engagement
- Best practices for recruitment and orientation programs geared toward underrepresented minority students
Future Research

- Supporting a model of African American College student engagement

**Background**
- Family Income (High, Medium, Low)
- Parental Education
- Parental Involvement in Education
- Academic Preparation
- Financial Aid Makeup

**Racial Identity Level**
- CRIS
- Nigrescence Theory

**Engagement**
- NSSE
- Involvement Type (cultural/campus wide)
Questions?

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