FORCES TO BE RECKONED:
THE NARRATIVES OF THREE SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS AT A
HISTORICALLY BLACK UNIVERSITY

A thesis presented
by
Nuriyah Clark

to
The School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

In the field of
Education

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
October 1, 2014
DEDICATION

To the Ones planted in my heart

“In the embrace of my friend, your love completes me, and renders me…”

~ Hazrat Samia Abdul-Haqq
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cannot begin to thank anyone without first acknowledging the Creator for only through You all things are possible. I must give thanks to my “Jasmine Flower” for your infinite guidance which continues to be a source of solace amidst this maze called life. To Abi, Ummi and Momzy, I am here because of who I came from. To my “ROCK”, you are a constant reminder of that very moment when I knew His glance was upon me. To my three princes Abdurrahim, Noorullah, and Khalil, you give me purpose. I know I have been “absent” during this journey and I can’t wait to meet you again. To Azza, Dr. Neemz, and Tahirah Esq., thank you for inspiring me. To Lubbie, if ever I felt like giving up I would think of you. If I could have just an ounce of your strength I would be so lucky. To Sadiq, and the rest of my family AKA Abdul-Haqq worldwide, thank you for being you and helping me maintain that connection.

This has been a remarkable journey. Along the way, there were individuals whose friendship, advice and support kept me focused and motivated. Thank you to my mentors Dr. Cynthia Sedgwick, Dr. Michelle Foster and Dr. Brenda James. Thank you to my Northeastern team, my advisor Dr. Corliss Thompson, and my girls Dr. Tashika Griffith and Syidah Abdullah, I don’t believe in coincidences so I know that you all were chosen to go through this journey with me for a reason. To Dr. Tiffany Fountaine-Boiykin who always made time for me in her crazy schedule. To my “sister girlfriend” Netta, no mushy gushy words are necessary. Thank you to Rhonda Battle for being a sounding board and helping things to make sense. I promise to send you pictures from the finish line of my first race.

Finally, I would like to thank all of my nieces and nephews. Your carefree attitudes and beautiful smiles make me remember to stop and enjoy every moment. You all possess a potential that knows no bounds. I hope that my journey inspires you to embrace it.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................6
   Purpose of the Study ..................................................................................................7
   Justification ...............................................................................................................9
   Significance .............................................................................................................10
   Positionality Statement .........................................................................................13
   Research Question ..................................................................................................17
   Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................17
       Component 1: Confidence (Self-Efficacy) ..........................................................21
       Component 2: Coordination (Planning) ...............................................................21
       Component 3: Commitment (Persistence) ...........................................................21
       Component 4: Control .........................................................................................22
       Component 5: Composure (Low Anxiety) ...........................................................22

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ..............................................................................24
    African Americans and Access to Higher Education ...........................................24
        Historically Black Colleges and Universities ..................................................26
    College Readiness .................................................................................................27
        Defining College Readiness ..............................................................................28
        Measuring College Readiness .........................................................................29
        College Readiness and College Admission .......................................................30
    Summer Bridge Programs .....................................................................................32
        Overview of Bridge Programs ...........................................................................33
    Retention of College Students .............................................................................38
        Theories of Student Retention ..........................................................................39
        Institutional Characteristics and Student Retention .........................................41
        Institutional Behaviors and Student Retention ...............................................45
    Summary ...............................................................................................................51

III. METHODOLOGY .....................................................................................................54
    Research Design .....................................................................................................55
        Study Site ............................................................................................................55
        Participants .........................................................................................................56
        Data Collection ..................................................................................................58
        Data Analysis ......................................................................................................60
        Validity and Trustworthiness .............................................................................61
        Researcher Bias ..................................................................................................61
        Protection of Human Subjects ...........................................................................62

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS ............................................................................................63
Participants Profiles ................................................................. 63
Diamond .................................................................................. 63
Ruby ......................................................................................... 74
Jade ......................................................................................... 84
Summary ................................................................................ 91

V. INTERPRETATIONS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS .......................... 93

Interpretations ........................................................................... 93
Confidence ................................................................................ 94
Coordination (Planning) and Commitment (Persistence) ................. 96
Control and Composure (Low Anxiety) ........................................ 100
Discussion ................................................................................. 103
Precollage Experiences .............................................................. 103
Summer Bridge Program .......................................................... 105
College Experiences .................................................................. 106
Preparing Strong Students in spite of Underprepared Label .......... 108
Supportive Families outside of College ......................................... 109
Programming that is Individualized to meet Students’ Needs .......... 109
Student Support to Foster the Development of Academic Resilience .. 110
Implications in Practice .............................................................. 110
Secondary Schools ..................................................................... 111
Higher Education Institutions .................................................... 111
Education Practitioners ............................................................ 112
Study Limitations and Implications in Research ......................... 112
Plan of Action .......................................................................... 113
Summer Bridge Program .......................................................... 105
College Experiences .................................................................. 106

REFERENCES ............................................................................ 115

APPENDICES .............................................................................. 134

Appendix A: Recruitment Letter ................................................. 134
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form .......................................... 135
Appendix C: Interview Protocol .................................................. 136
ABSTRACT

Initiatives to increase access to higher education for underrepresented students have seen success over the years. However, in some cases, this means that more students are requiring remediation prior to enrolling in college-level coursework. The existing research related to the retention and persistence of underprepared students suggests that these students are less likely to graduate. However, there are a number of underprepared students who have completed remediation and have managed to successfully persist to graduation. Using Martin and Marsh’s (2006) 5-C model of academic resilience as a framework, this qualitative study used in depth interviews to explore the experiences of three such students who required remediation prior to enrolling at a four year historically black university, and managed to defy the odds and achieve academic success. The findings suggest that an individual’s upbringing played the most significant role in their development of academic resilience. Summer bridge programs were found to be useful in reinforcing behaviors learned at home. Faculty interaction and guidance, and recognition for academic achievements were also positively linked to the development of academic resilience. However, the participants did not believe that remediation contributed to their success which suggests that some students may be mis-assigned to remediation.

Keywords: underprepared, at-risk, college readiness, developmental, remediation, summer bridge program, academic resilience
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Despite measures to improve access to educational opportunities for underrepresented populations, the struggle for college degree attainment amongst African Americans in the United States continues to be a cause for concern. This is evident in the existing data which suggest that there are disproportionate numbers of African Americans graduating from high school underprepared for college. For example, in 2002, of the 56% of African Americans who graduated with an actual high school diploma, only 23% were eligible for college admission, compared to 78% of white students graduating with a high school diploma of which 40% were eligible for college admission (Greene & Winters, 2005). When students enroll in college, their lack of preparedness lingers and translates into challenges completing school. Brock (2010) described this problem succinctly, “student success in college as measured by persistence and degree attainment has not improved at all” (p. 109), with only 20.4% of African Americans earning a bachelor’s degree compared to 37.1% of whites (O’Hara, Gibbons, Weng, Gerrard, & Simons, 2012). Given the fact that historically, African Americans have been severely underrepresented on college campuses nationwide, these statistics bring attention to a crisis within our nation calling for policymakers and educational leaders to take a more proactive role in ensuring that African Americans are graduating high school eligible for college admission, and subsequently, receiving the necessary support to successfully matriculate and obtain a college degree.

Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have played a major role in granting access to educational opportunities for African Americans beginning in the 1800s with the implementation of the Morrill Land Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890 and the establishment of over one hundred HBCUs (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009). In fact, an overwhelming majority,
greater than 90% of African-American students attended HBCUs up until the 1950s (Kim & Conrad, 2006). Although this number has drastically decreased as a result of desegregation in higher education, Allen (1992) asserted that HBCUs admit students with high school grade point averages (GPAs) and SAT or ACT scores that are below that of African American students being admitted into predominately white institutions (PWIs) which is a testament to HBCUs sustained mission of granting access to educational opportunities for African Americans.

Other institutions have adopted affirmative action policies or race-based preferences to increase the accessibility of educational opportunities for minority populations (Woo, 1997). Even still, according to the American Council on Education’s twenty fourth status report, the number of whites enrolled in college rose from 32% in 1990 to 46% in 2009, as compared to African Americans who realized minimal gains going from 23% in 1990 to 35% in 2009, just barely reaching the enrollment numbers that whites experienced twenty years before (Kim, 2011). These statistics reflect the number of students in low socioeconomic communities who are disproportionately students of color and devastatingly underprepared for college (Fryer & Levitt, 2004). Whether African Americans are enrolled in HBCUs or Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), the fact that large proportions enter college underprepared for college study has led to many colleges and universities adopting strategies such as summer bridge programs to help foster the success of underprepared students.

**Purpose of the Study**

Summer Bridge Programs (SBPs) are utilized on college campuses nationwide to grant access to education to high school graduates considered underprepared for college and have been positively linked to the national goal of increasing access to a college education (Ackermann 1991; Maggio, White, Molstad, & Kher, 2005; Walpole, Simmerman, Mack, Mills, Scales, &
Albano, 2008). For example, Ackerman (1991) stated that “University summer bridge programs or transitional programs for low-income and minority transfer students are becoming an established part of the effort to recruit, retain, and graduate a population of students underrepresented in higher education” (p. 201). However, for some institutions, admitting underprepared students has had a negative impact on the time toward degree completion rates, as well as the retention and graduation rates (Brock, 2010).

Parsad Lewis and Greene (2003) define postsecondary remedial education, also referred to as developmental education, as “courses in reading, writing, or mathematics for college-level students lacking those skills necessary to perform college-level work at the level required by the institution” (p. 1). There is evidence that many of the students who enter college requiring remedial courses do not attain degree completion (Tierney & Garcia, 2008). In fact, an evaluation of SBPs found that only one-half of the participants persisted through their first year compared to nearly 80% for those not participating in a remediation program (Gardner, 2010). Furthermore, an analysis of bridge programs within the University System of Maryland found that in the fall of 2008 and 2009 participants of bridge programs were less successful in completing their math requirements and accumulated less credits than nonparticipants (Maryland Executive Budget, 2011).

Since higher education institutions thrive on statistics that are synonymous with academic quality, SBPs that result in negative student outcomes threaten the longevity of these much needed programs. The dismal retention and graduation rates of this population, who have participated in SBPs, is indicative of a need for institutions to not only focus their efforts on providing access to these students, but to also direct resources toward targeted strategies of support that will directly impact the academic success of underprepared undergraduate students
(Bueschel, 2009; Chen, 2011). Failure to do so is essentially providing access without an opportunity for success, and as such, severely limits this population’s chance of degree attainment and hinders their potential to be contributing members of society.

**Justification**

The existing research pertaining to SBPs is primarily focused on the benefits of participation. For example students who participate in SBPs experience an increase in their self-confidence, sense of belonging, and are more acclimated to the university environment (Ackerman 1991; Rita & Bacote, 1996; Stolle-McAllister, 2011). Other studies offer comparisons between participants and nonparticipants academic outcomes such as grade point average (GPA) (Maggio et al., 2005; Walpole et. al, 2008). As it relates to the academic resilience of underprepared students, the existing research is heavily concentrated on students at the tertiary levels (Catterall, 1998; Nota, Soresi, & Zimmerman, 2004). Conversely, the research that offers an in-depth understanding of the academic resilience of SBP participants at an HBCU is scarce (Garibaldi, 1991). As such, the knowledge that can be gained from hearing the storied experiences of underprepared SBP participants at an HBCU who managed to excel academically and become above average students would be a contribution to the field.

Each summer, the study institution’s summer bridge program accepts up to 300 high school graduates who do not meet the requirements for regular admission based on SAT/ACTs and a high school grade point average (GPA) that falls below the university’s standards for admission. These students participate in six weeks of remediation, and upon successful completion of the program, are offered admission into the university for the subsequent fall semester. Unfortunately, six weeks in the summer is not enough time to make up for the plethora of issues faced in secondary school that resulted in the students being underprepared in
the first place. This study is needed to help universities determine what factors help students excel in spite of being underprepared.

Furthermore, the university does not offer a structured first year program to SBP graduates once they are admitted. As such, some of these students struggle to adjust to the workload and have a low rate of persistence, low GPAs, and greater time to degree completion. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experiences of three college seniors who were admitted to the university after successfully completing a SBP for underprepared high school graduates at an HBCU that accepts up to 300 SBP students each year. Education administrators who are working to provide effective support systems to increase the retention of underprepared students may use the results of this study to create programs that are specifically designed to meet the needs of this population of students.

Significance

This study is significant for educators who work with underprepared students. For example, the study institution is a public urban HBCU which accepts up to 300 SBP graduates each year. However, a structured first year program to support these underprepared students does not exist. Many of the students that participate in the SBP appreciate the structure it provides and often complain that the lack of structure after the six weeks makes it difficult to stay focused on academics and not succumb to distractions. According to Criscito (2008), a 3.5 GPA is considered to be competitive by hiring managers. Yet the average semester GPA of SBP graduates is 2.1--well below the competitive mark and just shy of the University’s 2.0 GPA requirement for graduation. However, a very small group of SBP graduates have managed to reach their senior year with GPAs of honor based on the following ranges approved by the University’s governing body, the Board of Regents:
Understanding the experiences that led to academic resilience can be used to establish new and innovative ways to structure the support services targeting underprepared students to maximize their academic achievements.

This study may be helpful for four year universities because there is limited research on supporting underprepared students within this context since community college experiences have been the primary focus of research related to developmental education and underprepared students (Bahr, 2012; Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). This may be due to the overrepresentation of at-risk college students in community colleges (Jackson, 1988). However now that four year institutions have become more accessible as a result of alternative admission programs like SBPs, more must be known about the students who are able to excel academically despite their lack of preparation for college level work.

In addition, the current research related to students in need of remediation is heavily focused on developmental course sequence completion and does not offer narratives of students who began college in need of remediation but managed to become academically resilient. For example, Bailey et al. (2010) examined the progression of community college students through developmental courses and into regular credit bearing coursework. The results of the study suggest that most students who are referred to developmental courses fail to complete the appropriate sequence, and as such, the time toward degree completion is longer and the college completion rates are staggeringly low.
The proposed study is beneficial for society given the change in the global economy. Jobs requiring college degrees are showing significant signs of growth (Lockard & Wolf, 2012) while Dohm and Shniper (2007) reported that 73% of the fastest growing professions require a degree. However in a global economy, the competition for these jobs has increased drastically. This means that universities must find ways to not only help students obtain degrees, but obtain skills that will help them be competitive on the job market. In other words, just receiving the degree is not enough. Universities need an understanding of how to help students learn as much as possible so that they will be ready to compete with peers who were well prepared for college. This study will help give universities a sense of the transformation that takes place in students who begin as at-risk for not completing school and finish school prepared for post-baccalaureate options within the global economy.

Human capital, such as education and professional experience is considered to be the main drivers of economic growth (http://www.poverties.org): therefore, failure to obtain a degree will have a negative impact on poverty rates in the United States. This is because people that do not receive a college degree have more difficulty finding gainful employment (Fajnzlber, Lederman, & Loayza, 2002). With the United States placing 14th out of the 26 industrialized nations in the percentage of adults with college degrees (The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2007), the need to formulate solutions to address the retention and success of underprepared college students’ and prepare them to compete globally needs to be a national priority. Horace Mann, considered to be the father of American Education puts it succinctly: “Education…beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men--the balance-wheel of the social machinery” (Messerli, 1972). With education attainment being the key to improving one’s quality of life, any reduction in the number of
underprepared students failing to complete college has major implications on the correlations between race and poverty issues in our society (Karst, 2004). Thus, “equal access and retention of minority students are serious problems with very serious consequences for the welfare and tranquility of our nation” (Lang, 1992, p. 521), an issue which this study seeks to address.

**Positionality Statement**

I was considered an at risk undergraduate student when I enrolled in college. I graduated from a high school that was severely under-resourced and did not have a viable system in place to ensure that high school seniors were college ready upon graduation. As a result, I was underprepared for college and required to complete two semesters of developmental mathematics, one semester of developmental English, and was not allowed to register for more than twelve credit hours in the first and second semesters of college.

While I was in college, there were a limited number of resources available to support my academic success. I was assigned an academic advisor whose role was limited to ensuring that I registered for the proper course sequence to complete my degree. The proactive style of advising that is practiced on many campuses today was absent and not one member of the college staff seemed concerned with my academic success. In fact, I felt inadequate and invisible amongst the crowd of students with no one to go to for support and guidance. This in many ways debilitated my success and instead of becoming more confident, I studied alone and learned to just get by. I graduated with a cumulative GPA of 2.7. As a result, I struggled to find employment and was rejected from every graduate school I applied to. Ultimately, these personal experiences led me to want to work in higher education and be the voice for other students like me helping them to not only graduate, but to do so with excellence so that ensuing opportunities are limitless.
My current position at the study institution is to help manage the Center for Academic Success and Achievement. In my role as Assistant Director, I help to deliver support services that are grounded in research and have been found to positively impact student success and retention. For example, supplemental instruction, proactive advising, peer mentoring and faculty support are aligned with the academic success of underprepared students (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010; Museus, & Ravello, 2010; Noel & Levitz, 1982; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2004) and are all resources that are made available to students. The students who participate in the program are considered at-risk. Students are considered at-risk for any one or a combination of the following:

1. A low high school GPA
2. A combined reading a math score of less than 850 on the SAT
3. A score of 15 or 16 on the ACT
4. A member of an underrepresented group

Part of my responsibilities is to coordinate a SBP for recent high school graduates that applied to the university but are required to successfully complete the SBP in order to gain admission for the subsequent fall semester. The six-week residential program offers remediation in math, English and reading as well as an orientation seminar to help make the students’ transition to college more seamless. Students are assigned to Strengths Leaders who are current upperclassmen responsible for mentoring and tutoring the program participants. At the end of the program, the students who have earned a grade of C or better in the remedial courses are registered for college level courses for the fall semester.

Despite using best practices in this program, SBP participants continue to struggle academically in their first year and beyond. Participants often have low GPAs and accumulate
fewer credits which results in an increase in their time toward degree completion. For example, the average first year cumulative GPA of the 2009 cohort was 2.1 and the four year graduation rate was only 9%. While this illustrates that some students who were admitted to the university after participating in the SBP continue to struggle academically, there are still some who achieve in spite of the challenges by maintaining a GPA of 3.4 or higher and are on track to graduate in four years.

My personal experiences as a student and my professional experience working with at-risk students, points me to the need for this study. My attunement with the notion of being academically resilient is cultivated from my own personal struggles as an at-risk college student. I often wonder what I could have done differently to overcome my underpreparedness and achieve academic success. Morales and Trotmen (2004) referred to academic resilience as “the process and results that are part of the life story of an individual who has been successful despite obstacles that prevent the majority of others with the same background from succeeding” (p. 8). Martin and Marsh (2006) refer to the idea of being able to achieve academic success despite being at risk for low academic performance or non-completion as academic resilience. In fact, Martin & Marsh (2006) posited that there are five factors that predict academic resilience: confidence, coordination, commitment, control and composure. As I reflect on my experiences as an undergraduate student and consider the qualities that result in academic resiliency, I must admit that as a freshman, I was lacking in all of the aforementioned categories. For example, placing into developmental courses did very little for my confidence and it made me feel inferior. Instead on feeling excited about embarking on this new journey I felt defeated at the starting line.

The second factor, coordination, refers to the ability to set goals and map out the steps required to achieve them; a feat which requires effective time management skills. While I did
have a primary goal which was to complete college, as a first generation college student, I did not have prior knowledge of what steps it would take to achieve this. Although my siblings were all enrolled in college by the time I began my first semester, they had not shared any of their experiences with me. In addition, I had never received assistance in learning to manage my time or create a realistic plan for assignment completion from student support staff. By the time I realized just how important developing this skill was, I had been earning less than stellar grades. Furthermore, the third factor of commitment, which is the ability to remain focused even in the face of hardship, proved to be quite difficult given the fact that I was not realizing success. In fact, there were times when I felt defeated and wanted to give up. However, it was my desire to stay the course like my older siblings that prevented me from dropping out.

The fourth and fifth factors control and composure refers to understanding the relationship between input and output, and the ability to manage stress. While I did understand that I would have to work hard to be academically successful, I was unaware of what that actually entailed; I did not know how to study effectively. So I may have spent hours reading the textbook and looking over my notes, but I did it in a manner that did not produce results. This actually caused me to experience anxiety to such an extent that my inability to focus during exams inhibited my success.

What saved me from the unfortunate fate of so many students in a similar circumstance is a burning desire to be successful so that I could improve my quality of life. I truly believed college was my only chance at bettering me and my family’s lives. Eventually I picked up on cues from my peers who were excelling. I noticed that they always sat in the front of the classroom and participated in class discussions. I was always afraid to speak up until I noticed how the professors would interact much more with the students who showed interest in the topic
and who engaged in class discussions. I made a concerted effort to mirror their behavior. I began to speak up in class and felt more comfortable interacting with my peers. Gradually, I began to notice a change. For example, I began to receive positive feedback from my professors, and I began to believe that I could do the work. In short, it was my ability over a period of time to adapt to my circumstances that helped me to become academically resilient. As a scholar-practitioner my goal in conducting this study is twofold: I want to give a voice to undergraduate students who began their collegiate journey underprepared but managed to achieve excellence, and use their experiences to understand how to better support this population of students; and to further explore the development of academic resilience in underprepared students.

**Research Question**

The research question is as follows: *What experiences contribute to the academic resilience of college seniors who were admitted to a HBCU through a SBP, and have a cumulative GPA of 3.4 or higher?*

**Theoretical Framework**

This study seeks to go beyond the common studies that evaluate the characteristics of retention programs (Maggio et al., 2005; Pan, Guo, Alikonis & Bai, 2008; Stolle-McAllister, 2011) and their effects on persistence (McEvoy 2012; Murphy, Gaughan, Hume & Moore, 2010; Purdie & Rosser, 2011; Roconni 2010; Strayhorn, 2011) and instead seeks to understand the experiences that support their ability to overcome adversity and be academically successful.

This notion of adapting to adversity to achieve success is referred to as resiliency. Resilience theory is quite mature and very broad covering a wide array of disciplines with the more mature theories being from areas of human development and child psychology, and going on to include “psychoneuroimmunology, philosophy, physics, psychology, Eastern medicine,
and neuroscience and others” (Richardson, 2002, p. 314). The theory can be further split by its focus on the individual, the family, and the community. Aaron Antonovsky, a medical sociologist wrote about the ability of individuals to adapt and cope in the midst of adversity (1996). Lavee, McCubbin, and Patterson (1985) extended Rueben Hill’s popular ABCX model used to study parental stress and coping, and expanded it to include how parents adapt after a crisis in their study of resilience within families. Finally, Chaskin (2008) focuses on community resilience and posited that communities can “promote or inhibit…resilience and well-being…among the individuals, families, children and youth who are part of them” (p. 66).

Academic resilience is an extension of the more commonly studied resilience theory. It refers to the ability to achieve academic excellence despite being at-risk for low academic performance and non-completion (Martin & Marsh, 2006). It has been conceptualized by Morales and Trotman (2004) as “the process and results that are part of the life story of an individual who has been academically successful, despite obstacles that prevent the majority of others with the same background from succeeding” (p. 8). However, few studies examine the interrelatedness of academic resilience and the persistence of underprepared students (Martin & Marsh, 2006). Unlike popular models of student retention that assume students are operating from a deficit and then interventions are developed to help increase students’ level of understanding, academic resilience is a strengths based theory and instead “explores personal and interpersonal gifts and strengths that can be accessed to grow through adversity” (Richardson, 2002, p. 307).

One of the goals of this study is to offer practitioners new and innovative methods of supporting underprepared students at postsecondary institutions. Therefore, I have selected Martin and Marsh’s (2006) academic resilience construct because of its use of a cross discipline
approach and a specific set of variables to “explore the links between academic resilience and a more expansive number of psychological and engagement dimensions” (p. 268). According to Masten (2001) the variable focused approach to studying resilience “maximizes statistical power and is well suited to searching for specific and differential links between predictors and outcomes that have implications for intervention” (p. 229). Although the 5-C model (Martin & Marsh, 2006) is a quantitative framework, connecting the variables to behavior using qualitative methods will enrich the results of the study since the participants’ narratives may capture the patterns of behavior that emerge from the data, and offer a deeper perspective into the experiences that help to develop academic resilience.

Mohrman and Lawler’s III (2012) stated that in order for research to be “useful and impactful” (p. 42) researchers must collaborate across disciplines “to fully understand complex problems and contribute to solutions” (p. 42). Martin and Marsh (2006) developed their 5-C model of academic resilience by examining the in-network (academic resilience) and between network (relationships between educational and psychological constructs) variables that impact academic resilience. The study found that the following five variables statistically predict academic resilience: confidence, coordination, commitment, control and composure (see figure 1). More recently, Martin, Colmar, Davey, and Marsh, (2010) conducted a longitudinal study of high school students, testing the validity of the 5-C model over a longer period of time, and determined that the model remains an effective means for predicting the academic resilience of students.
Figure 1: 5-C Model of Academic Resilience (Martin & Marsh, 2006)
**Component 1: Confidence (Self-Efficacy)**

Martin and Marsh (2006) state that self-efficacy or “confidence” significantly contributes to an individual’s academic resilience. Self-efficacy is defined as “a course of action based upon having the tools to be successful” (Rodgers & Summers, 2008, p. 177), or, “an individual's judgments of his or her capabilities to perform given actions” (Schunk, 1991, p. 207). Bandura’s (1977) seminal theory of self-efficacy posited that individuals who have high confidence in their ability to complete a task are more successful and motivated to accomplish their goals even if the situation is challenging. Previous research has also found that students who are able to develop their self-efficacy experience higher levels of academic success (Locke & Latham, 2002).

**Component 2: Coordination (Planning)**

The ability to effectively set goals and become skilled in developing the steps required to achieve personal goals is what Martin and Marsh (2006) refers to as “coordination”. According to Locke and Latham (2006) effective goal setting has the ability to foster motivation and confidence within an individual. Understanding the importance of time management, knowing what assignments are required for each class and what is needed to complete the assignments on time are elements that support the planning component of the 5-C model.

**Component 3: Commitment (Persistence)**

Academic resilience is further developed when students are able to effectively plan out their path toward academic success. Martin and Marsh (2006) posited that not only must students be skilled in the area of goal setting, but they must develop strategies to be persistent in order to remain on the path that they have outlined for themselves. This notion of persistence is what the authors refer to as “commitment” or the ability to remain focused even when met with difficult situations. Commitment is nurtured in students by developing self-regulating behaviors
which includes the ability to prioritize tasks and see them through to completion (Zimmerman, 2002).

**Component 4: Control**

According to Martin and Marsh (2006) the fourth component “control” is heightened by developing strong study skills, understanding how effort impacts achievement, and by receiving consistent and useful feedback from professors. Thompson (1994) found that students who did not receive feedback in the classroom partook in self-handicapping behaviors which led to underachievement. This is because when students are uncertain about the outcomes of their academics, they display low levels of control and are less resilient. However, students who display high levels of control have a better understanding of the connection between the effort they put in and the resulting outcomes which supports the development of academic resilience.

**Component 5: Composure (Low-Anxiety)**

Anxiety in students is often related to the individual’s fear of failure and negatively impacts academic resilience (Martin & Marsh, 2006). Similar to uncertain control, anxiety causes self-handicapping behaviors in students which results in disengagement and negative academic outcomes (Thompson, 1994). Environments such as classrooms may be perceived as competitive by students and can lead to an increase in anxiety. Qin, Johnson, and Johnson (1995) examined the effects of competitive classroom environments and cooperative classroom environments on academic achievement and found that students in the cooperative cohort performed better academically than students in the competitive cohort. Therefore, academic resilience is nurtured in students that are less anxious, and who exhibit “composure” which is the final component of the 5-C model.
Since more students are entering college underprepared and lacking the skills necessary to overcome, it will be useful to understand the experiences that have led to academic resilience, as defined by Martin and Marsh (2006), for this population of students. As such, Martin and Marsh’s (2006) 5-C Model of Academic Resilience will serve as the conceptual framework for this study, which explores the experiences of three college seniors who were admitted to the university after successfully completing a SBP for underprepared high school graduates at an HBCU.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experiences of three college seniors who were admitted to the university after successfully completing a SBP for underprepared high school graduates at an HBCU that accepts up to 300 SBP students each year. Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca (2009) reported that “over the past several decades, high school students’ college aspirations have increased markedly, and gaps in educational aspirations across race and ethnicity have fallen dramatically. But significant, and in some cases widening, gaps remain in college readiness, access, and success across these groups” (p. 186).

This chapter provides an overview of the historical struggle for African Americans to achieve equal access to education and the role that HBCUs play in achieving this goal, followed by a review of the literature pertaining to college readiness and the use of summer bridge programs as a means for increasing access to educational opportunities for this population. The review concludes with a review of the literature related to the persistence and retention of underprepared students in higher education making the case for the need for colleges and universities to not merely open the doors of access, but to develop programs that help underprepared students to account for their lack of college readiness with innovative programs that develop the resilient student as one way to address this troubling issue.

African Americans and Access to Higher Education

Historically African Americans have always struggled for equal access to educational opportunity. Consider for example that the first record of an African American college graduate came in the 1820s nearly two centuries after America’s first higher education institution, Harvard University, opened its doors in 1636 (Slater, 1994). Even still, very few African Americans were able to enroll in college in the pre-civil rights era as a result of slavery in the south and the
existence of Jim Crow laws which legalized segregation in the Southern states and municipalities between 1877 and 1965, making educational attainment for African Americans a nearly impossible feat (Brown II, 2013; Brown & Davis, 2001).

Then there was the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decision which coined the term “separate but equal” when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a railroad company could keep the white passengers separate from the black passengers, but the accommodations should be equal (Moreno, 2003). This meant that African Americans could no longer be excluded from pursuing education as long as it was not in White schools so that like in many instances in today’s society, the better resourced and prestigious schools were not accessible to African Americans. However, it was the monumental ruling of *Brown v. The Board of Education* (1954) which outlawed segregation over half a century after the “separate but equal” decision, and thus began the fight to have equality in education for more than four million African Americans (Gasman, Lundy Wagner, Ransom, & Bowman, 2010).

Although African Americans were no longer excluded from educational pursuits, only minimal gains were made toward educational equality since the racial discrimination that remained prevalent in society made it difficult to benefit from full participation in Americas colleges and universities. Such educational achievement divides are one of the major issues that led to the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and subsequently affirmative action laws (Brown II, 2013; Lang, 1992; Moreno, 2003). While these historical regulations have helped provide access to opportunity for underserved populations, arguably the most notable contribution to the educational attainment of African Americans to date is the establishment of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).
Historically Black Colleges and Universities

According to the Higher Education Act (1965) an HBCU is defined as a college or university founded before 1964, whose primary purpose is the educational attainment of African Americans (Brown II, 2013; Exkano, 2012) and there are 103 HBCUs that took on the mission of educating African American’s at a time when segregation and racial inequality remained visible in America’s educational institutions. These institutions can be credited with paving the way toward equality in education since they are accountable for the majority of degrees awarded to African Americans. For example, there are nearly 300,000, which amounts to about 20% of African American undergraduates, enrolled at HBCUs; which is substantive considering the fact that HBCUs make up only 3% of America's post-secondary institutions (Brown II, 2013; Gasman & McMickens, 2010); enrolling 14% and graduating 28% of the African American undergraduate student population in the United States (McMickens, 2012). Brown II (2013) reported:

Historically Black colleges also produce more than one-third of all African American bachelor degrees in mathematics, more than two-fifths of African American degrees in natural science, produced more than 50% of all African American public educators, 70% of the nation’s African American dentists and nearly 50% of all African Americans who pursue graduate or professional education (p. 11).

Furthermore, Roebuck and Murty (1993) asserted that the overwhelming majority of all African American PhD recipients, African American army officers, African American federal judges and African American doctors received their undergraduate degrees from HBCUs. HBCUs are also responsible for giving rise to the nations African American middle class (Brown II, 2013; Brown & Davis, 2001; Exkano, 2012; Gasman et. al, 2010; Gasman & McMickens,
2010); a significant factor since students attending HBCUs are most often low-income students (Gasman & McMickens, 2010). For example, “in 2007 62% of the students attending public black institution received Pell grants, as compared to 32% at historically white institutions” (Gasman & McMickens, 2010, p. 293).

Despite the empirical evidence that suggests that HBCUs are the driving force behind African American educational attainment (Brown, Donahoo, Bertrand, 2001; Brown, Ricard, Donahoo, Brown, & Freeman, 2004; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002), the achievement gap between African Americans and Whites remains prevalent in our nation (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Miller, 1995; Perna, 2007). For example, African Americans are still underrepresented on college campuses nationwide which may be a reflection of the large number of African American students attending under-resourced and noncompetitive urban high schools, and as a result continue to experience difficulty in gaining admission into colleges and universities due to low scores on college admission tests and lack of college readiness (Hacker, 1992; Kozol, 2005; Rushing, 2003).

**College Readiness**

There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that the precursor to low college enrollment and subsequently, high college attrition of African Americans and underrepresented population in general is the fact there is a significant number of graduating high school seniors who are not considered to be “college ready”, and as such, either does not meet the criteria for admission into college, or are unable to be successful in college upon admission. In fact, researchers have found that a significant number of first year students report that their college courses are noticeably different than what they had come to expect in high school (Conley, Aspengren, Stout, & Veach, 2006). This disconnect can be attributed to the limited coordination
of the K-12 and college systems which has resulted in many students lacking the skills necessary to successfully manage the transition to college impeding their opportunity for educational attainment (Cohen, 2008; Kirst & Venezia, 2001), and ultimately limiting their chance of benefiting from the social and economic gains that are attributed to a college education (Perna, 2007).

Moore et al. (2010) examined the college-ready rates of graduating seniors in Texas for the 2006 – 2007 academic year and found that less than one-fifth of African American students were considered college ready in the areas of reading and mathematics. The lack of college readiness presents yet another barrier to accessing educational opportunities especially for African Americans since many have attended some of the most substandard high schools in America, and are more likely to fall short of meeting the standards of college readiness (Rushing, 2003).

**Defining College Readiness**

In order to better understand the origin of the fundamental issue affecting underprepared college students, it is important to explore what the term “college readiness” means. Olson (2006) stated that there are multiple perspectives on the issue, and as such, no clear definition has been established. For example, some scholars focus on the nonacademic aspects, i.e. motivation and behaviors (Duggan & Pickering, 2007; Pickering, Calliotte, & McAuliffe, 1992), while much of the existing literature highlights academic aspects, i.e. performance on state assessments, and other definitions are much more general defining college readiness as college acceptance or college success (Porter & Polikoff, 2012). ACT (2007) defines college readiness as “the level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed – without remediation – in a credit-bearing general education course at a 2-year or 4-year institution, trade school, or
technical school” (p. 5). Conley (2008) offers a similar definition but only includes bachelor degree programs stating college readiness is “the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in a credit-bearing general education course at a post-secondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program” (p. 4). Thus, high school completion makes a person eligible to apply to college but it does not guarantee college readiness since there are considerable differences between the expectations placed upon high school students when compared to college course requirements, college course delivery and college expectations (Conley, 2008).

**Measuring College Readiness**

Of concern is the fact that there remains a significant achievement gap between African Americans and Whites, with Whites consistently outperforming African Americans in various measures of college readiness. The most commonly used measures of college readiness are cumulative grade point average of subject courses, performance on state assessments, and college admission test scores (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009). Of all of the aforementioned measures of college readiness, high school grades are the most accurate predictor of college readiness (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009; Burton & Ramist, 2001; Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2001).

Although many K-12 systems use standardized assessments to measure learning and as a prerequisite for graduation and then college entry, some researchers have hypothesized that the results provide a false sense of a student’s readiness for college (Brown & Conley, 2007; Kirst & Bracco, 2004). This is primarily due to the lack of alignment between the assessments and predetermined college readiness criteria which Conley (2007; 2008) says includes having command of the following: a) key cognitive strategies b) key content knowledge c) academic behaviors and d) contextual skills and awareness. Achieve, Inc. (2007a) posited that even in the
presence of set academic standards, the lack of challenging curriculums makes it difficult for some students to transition to college level coursework. Moreover, an analysis of the state assessments used in twenty states found that the existing standards were only moderately aligned to predetermined college readiness criteria (Brown & Conley, 2007) which may be due to the assertion that most state assessments were not designed to assess college readiness (D’ Agostino & Bonner, 2009).

However, in recent years, many states have elected to implement the Common Core State Standards developed by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), “to establish consensus on expectations for student knowledge and skills that should be developed in Grades K–12” (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011) and designed to ensure that all students are college ready by the twelfth grade. It is still too soon to determine whether or not using the Common Core Standards positively impacts college readiness for African Americans and high school students in general. In the meantime, the issue of low college enrollment for African Americans still needs to be addressed.

**College Readiness and College Admission**

Although considerable efforts have been made to increase access to education for underrepresented populations, African Americans still trail their White counterparts in relation to college enrollment (Perna, 2007), and some argue that any increase in enrollment is more likely due to an increase in the population of African Americans in the United States and not necessarily a result of such efforts (Renner, 1998). Nevertheless, college readiness has major implications for this population and plays a significant role in a student being accepted into college since college entrance exams such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), ACT,
Advanced Placement (AP) exams and various state assessments are used as part of the selection criteria, and have been considered a source of impediment for minorities and college access leading many to question the equity of their use in college admission decisions (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009). Mathison (2013) stated that “there is every reason to believe that access and quality of schooling is differentiated in this country…along race and class lines. Standardized testing plays a substantial role in maintaining this differentiation beginning in Kindergarten on through school and into access to professions and jobs” (p. 40).

Similarly, Alon and Tienda (2007) has substantiated the claim that the admissions criteria of colleges and universities, which generally consider high school grade point average (GPA) and the applicant’s college admission test scores to make a determination (Davis, 2012; Fu, 2006), work against African Americans mainly due to the fact that African Americans do not perform as well as Whites on these exams. For example, Alon and Tienda’s (2007) analysis of college enrollment data over a ten year period found significant disparities between the SAT scores of African Americans and Whites with one and three African Americans testing into the lowest percentile as opposed to less than 10% for Whites. As such, the college admissions process itself presents can be an obstacle to college admission for this population (Hedges & Nowell, 1998). This is especially the case when applying to institutions that are highly selective (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2010).

The rising number of high school graduates considered to be underprepared for college study makes it an important issue for educational advocates and policymakers with many calling for better alignment of high school assessments and the skills required to successfully complete entry level college courses (Brown & Conley, 2007; D’Agostino & Bonner, 2009; Kirst & Venezia, 2001; Porter & Polikoff, 2012). For example, the National Education Longitudinal
Study of 1988 found that an astonishing 61% of African American college students required remedial courses, compared to 35% of Whites; an observation that suggests African Americans are more often at a disadvantage in terms of adequate preparation for college (Curtin, Ingles, Wu, & Heuer, 2002). Kao & Thompson (2003) reported that “numerous studies have shown that poor children and racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately placed in low-ability groups early in their educational careers and in non-college-bound groupings in junior high and high school” (p. 423). Similarly, Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez (2001) and Knudson, Zitzer-Comfort, and Alexander (2008) stated that underrepresented students are likely to attend schools that do not offer challenging courses in important areas such as mathematics, consequently leading to low scores on college entrance exams and subsequently, low college enrollment and persistence; factors which are exacerbated by a history of the exclusion of African Americans from educational pursuits (Rushing, 2003). The next sections offers a review of the literature pertaining to summer bridge programs which have been used as a means for increasing access to higher education for African Americans and underprepared students in general.

**Summer Bridge Programs**

In the past, underprepared high school graduates were only able to attend community colleges as a result of the open admissions policy as stated within their mission statements as well as the necessary offerings in developmental education designed to help bring underprepared students to the proper level of readiness before they begin their degree course sequence. Moreover, four year institutions customarily consider developmental programs and the admittance of underprepared students as having a negative impact on the schools rankings and therefore have not been very supportive of remedial education (Lang, 1992). In regard to HBCUs, Davis (1998) asserted that “the compensatory and remediation model focuses on the
role of HBCUs effectiveness of African-American students who have relatively poor high school backgrounds and college preparation” (p. 147). In fact, Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand (2001) agreed stating that HBCUs have always been aligned with an open admission policy admitting anyone who sought access. In an effort to address the inequalities in college readiness and to better prepare students that are not college ready for success in college, HBCUs as well as other institutions have addressed the issue of college readiness by offering students the opportunity to participate in remediation prior to enrolling in college by participating in alternative admissions programs often termed precollege or summer bridge programs (SBPs) (Strayhorn, 2011).

Overview of Bridge Programs

For decades, colleges and universities have used transitional programs like SBPs to assist in the recruitment and retention of at-risk student populations (Ackerman, 1991; McCurrie, 2009; Pretlow, 2011; Walpole et al., 2008). Research has found that these programs are considered to be very useful in helping students make a smooth transition to college life, and in some cases, improve their academic performance and positively impact persistence rates (Ackerman, 1991; Stolle-McAllister, 2011; Walpole et al., 2008). By taking developmental courses in the summer, freshmen needing remediation are able to lessen the amount of developmental courses they have to complete during the academic year, and as a result, can remain on track to graduation.

Pertlow, (2011) described SBPs as “an often used but rarely evaluated program” (p. 5). A large part of the current literature pertaining to SBPs focuses on the effectiveness of these programs as a means of early intervention for at-risk students (Ackerman, 1991; Rita & Bacote, 1996; Strayhorn, 2011). However, there is minimal research related to the programmatic factors that have the greatest effect on the retention of participants (Perna, 2007) as well as the
effectiveness of remedial programs that serve as a pipeline to an undergraduate education for this population of students (Garcia & Paz, 2009; Kezar, 2001; Maggio et al., 2005; Perna, 2007).

**Bridge programs and college readiness.** There is evidence that bridge programs offer a multitude of benefits to its participants that assist in preparing at risk students for the transition to college. Ackerman (1991) and Rita and Bacote (1996) asserted that the benefits are rather extensive, helping students to be better acclimated to university life, be successful academically and socially, and persist to the next year. One of the most significant benefits of SBP participation is the ability to complete developmental courses prior to the first semester of college helping students to stay on track to graduation. Researchers have found that students who complete their developmental courses in a timely fashion are more likely to be retained and graduate (Bailey et al., 2010; Webb-Sunderhaus, 2010).

In addition, the college transitional component of bridge programs, which often accompanies the required remedial coursework, has been found to positively impact the academic preparedness and academic self-efficacy of students (Murphy et al., 2010; Strayhorn, 2011). Self-efficacy is defined as “a course of action based upon having the tools to be successful” (Rodgers & Summers, 2008, p. 177). These transitional workshops or seminars offer students useful information including but not limited to what to expect in college, goal setting, time management, how to study in college, and utilizing institutional resources, all of which help students to be better informed and equipped with the knowledge necessary to successfully transition to college.

Further evidence in support of how SBPs impact college readiness is the findings that support the theory that program participants are better prepared to participate in classroom discussions, become more familiar with the use of technology, and acquire new and useful skills
such as the ability to understand a syllabus (Rita & Bacote, 1996; Strayhorn, 2011). There are also social benefits realized by SBP participants who have attributed an increase in self-confidence, having a sense of belonging, and being acclimated to the university environment prior to the start of their first semester in college with program participation (Ackerman 1991; Rita & Bacote, 1996; Stolle-McAllister, 2011).

In regard to underserved populations interested in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, SBPs have been found to have a positive effect on the retention and graduation of its participants by fostering parental involvement and promoting the use of academic and social peer networks during their first year of undergraduate study (Murphy et al., 2010). Although the types of parental involvement may vary between programs, a few ways that research has found that practitioners can cultivate parental involvement is by offering workshops to parents on important college issues such as financial aid, on campus housing and student support services, as well as inviting family members to recognition ceremonies and other events (Murphy et al., 2010). All of these factors are indicative of the way in which bridge programs can optimize the number of at risk students successfully transitioning to college.

**Bridge programs and first year outcomes.** There are a few programmatic components that have been found to directly affect the first year academic outcomes of SBP participants. For example, program size and program length of the SBP have been found to have a direct effect on academic achievement and not always a positive one. Maggio et al. (2005) found that the more weeks students spent in a summer program, the lower the first year GPA and the greater the likelihood of student departure. In contrast, students who participated in programs of a shorter length and with fewer students maintained a higher first year GPA and were more likely to stay enrolled in college.
The majority of the studies that have examined the effectiveness of bridge programs for at risk students have found a positive correlation between participation and first year persistence (Ackerman, 1991; Rita & Bacote, 1996; Walpole et. al, 2008). For example, Walpole et al. (2008) found that SBP participants have a higher first year retention rate than their peers who had similar SAT scores but had not participated in a bridge program. This finding is important and similar to other studies which state that students who persist to their sophomore year have a greater rate of retention and a positive effect on institutional graduation rates (Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup, & Kuh, 2008).

Ackerman (1991), Rita and Bacote (1996), and Walpole et al. (2008) conducted similar studies which examined the effects of underrepresented students’ participation in summer bridge programs and found significant differences in the first year outcomes of SBP participants and nonparticipants. For example, Walpole et al. (2008) found that SBP participants were more academically and socially engaged than the control group which consisted of non-SBP participants with similar SAT scores, although the control group did earn more credits at the end of their first year as compared to SBP participants. However, the researchers noted that the control group had a higher percentage of White students as a result of the limited number of underrepresented students not participating in the SBP.

SBPs, and similar programs, increase access to higher education for underprepared high school graduates. Webb-Sunderhaus (2010) contends that it is incumbent upon educational institutions to ensure that any efforts to increase access be accompanied by support programs that are necessary to retain these students. Kezar (2001) posited that SBPs focus on a student’s transition to college and not the retention of these students. This factor is supported by the results of a study which found that students from underserved populations who performed low on
college entrance exams are more successful when they are able to take advantage of academic support programs during their first year (Kinzie et al., 2008).

According to Kinzie et al. (2008), “increasing evidence suggests that a small number of programs and activities engage students at high levels and increase educational gains and student persistence” (p. 24). In fact, students who are more engaged in programs such as SBPs have a higher rate of persistence in their first year of college (Kinzie et al., 2008). One such mechanism that fosters student engagement is commonly referred to in the literature as a learning community. Research has found that students who participate in learning communities are more likely to succeed and graduate (Heaney & Fisher, 2011). Specifically, the network of support that learning communities provide has consistently been found to be effective in assisting in the retention of first-year students (Tinto, 2000).

**Bridge programs and college retention.** The benefits of summer bridge participation have been found to extend beyond a student’s first year of college. Murphy et al. (2010) found that students who participated in the program had a higher likelihood of graduating than non-participants with similar variables such as race, mean high school GPA, and mean SAT score. This was attributed to the program’s success in helping students prepare for their transition to college through the provision of academic preparedness tools, fostering parental involvement and promoting academic social networks. These outcomes are comparable to similar studies that found bridge programs to be an effective method of increasing retention rates (Ackerman, 1991; Stolle-McAllister, 2011; Walpole et al., 2008).

At-risk students participating in SBPs a few weeks before entering their first semester in college may have learned some useful strategies that have been found to support student success, however, the short timespan does not lend itself to ensuring students understand how to apply the
strategies in a way that generates the most positive academic outcomes. According to McCabe (2000) an astounding 29% of all first year students need at least one remedial course, however, students having completed remedial coursework does not necessarily translate into being college ready (Hoyt, 1999). As such, “college persistence remains one of the major challenges facing higher education, as many students graduating from high school and entering higher education arrive ill-prepared for the rigor and challenges of a college education” (Duggan, 2009, p. 26).

While SBPs have paved the way for many underprepared African American college hopefuls to be admitted to college and transition to university life the studies specifically related to degree attainment for these students are limited.

**Retention of College Students**

While there has been significant improvement in the policies that make college more accessible to a greater number of individuals from underrepresented populations and in need of remediation, the dismal retention and graduation rates of this population is indicative of failure on the part of the institution to focus their efforts on developing policies, shaping practices, and directing resources to afford these students the additional support needed to achieve success in college (Bueschel, 2009; Chen, 2011). As such, there is a greater need for targeted support services that work to improve their chances of degree attainment. Lang (1992) stated that a matter of greater concern than assisting African American students with the high school to college transition is the retention of this population to graduation. This is due to the existing research which suggests that the majority of students requiring remediation in college are from underrepresented populations and never persists to degree attainment (Attewell, Lavin, Domina & Levey, 2006; Moore et al., 2010).
According to Reed (1978) a lack of college readiness is one of the most common reason for college departure amongst underrepresented populations and many studies have already linked under-preparedness with college attrition in general (Reid & Moore, 2008; Adelman, 1999; Adelman, 2004). In addition, the Education Trust (2009) reports that the six year graduation rate of African American women is a mere 47% while the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (2007) reported that African American males are faring a lot worse with only 36% graduating in six years (as cited in Gray, 2013). Roderick et al. (2009) conducted an analysis of college enrollment and degree attainment data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics from 1980 to 2005, and found that while college enrollment in general increased amongst all groups with African American enrollment rising from 32.2% to 50.3%, the four-year college completion rate rose by less than 6% with only 17.8% of African Americans earning a bachelor’s degree in a four year period. According to Lang (1992) the high dropout rate for African American college students has a lot to do with various structures within an institution. Therefore this section will focus on the literature pertaining to the institutional characteristics and behaviors that have been found to impact student retention. The terms institution and organization are used interchangeably. Where possible, the selected studies will focus on African American students since based on the literature that suggests this population is more often considered underprepared and at-risk then other groups.

Theories of Student Retention

There are a number of existing theories that apply an organizational approach to empirically study student outcomes in higher education by considering the relationship between organizational structures, student retention and graduation rates. Minimal studies have focused on organizational theory and students’ level of learning. This may be in part due to the fact that
data pertaining to retention and graduation rates are more accessible and easily interpreted.

Organizational theories are often grouped into three main categories: organizational characteristics (Bean, 1983; Astin & Scherrei, 1980, as cited in Berger, 2002; Berger, 2000; Berger & Braxton, 1998; Tinto, 1982; Titus, 2004, 2006); organizational behavior (Astin & Scherrei, 1980, as cited in Berger, 2002; Birnbaum, 1988; Bolman & Deal; 1991); and organizational environment (Clark, Heist, McCommell, Trow & Yonge, 1972; as cited in Berger, 2002).

By far, Tinto (1982) is one of the most highly cited authors in the retention literature. Tinto’s (1982) seminal model of student departure correlates student retention with a student’s ability to integrate into the academic and social aspects of an institution. This particular model was revised several times by Tinto in response to researchers’ critique of the model (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Bean’s (1980) model of student attrition, also widely cited in the retention literature, relates student retention to organizational theory involving employee turnover. Both Tinto and Bean’s models call for institutional leadership to better align practices to support the success of students through activities that engage students academically and socially.

According to Hurtado and Carter (1997), Tinto’s model (1982) only vaguely referred to institutional characteristics which are considered to be important variables affecting student departure. Braxton, Sullivan and Johnson (1997) were also critical of Tinto’s model finding fault for its failure to take into account the unique variables often associated with minority populations who are often from disadvantaged backgrounds and as such face different challenges in college environments. Berger and Braxton (1998) expanded Tinto’s model to include aspects of organizational characteristics that influenced retention. Titus (2004) also altered Tinto’s (1982) model by considering the relationship between specific institutional characteristics and student
outcomes, while Berger (2000) correlated organizational behaviors with student persistence. Overall, most of the theories suggest that student retention may be affected by the various characteristics and behaviors of an institution. The next sections offer a review of the literature pertaining to institutional characteristics and institutional behaviors as it relates to student retention.

**Institutional Characteristics and Student Retention**

The characteristics of higher education institutions dictate the organizational structures or internal operations that directly affect student outcomes. In general, student outcome refers to the persistence, level of learning, and graduation of students. Understanding which institutional characteristics affect student outcomes is important for administrators tasked with ensuring that measures that are controllable are aligned with the successful student outcomes. A review of the literature unveiled various factors within educational systems that were labeled as organizational characteristics of colleges and universities. Berger and Braxton (1998) describes organizational characteristics as “the structural demographics of an institution…size, selectivity, control etc.” (p. 105). Titus (2004) categorized institutional characteristics as follows: “measure of student peer characteristics, structural –demographic characteristics and aggregate measures of selected student characteristics, experiences, and environmental pull variables” (p. 681). Lau (2003) placed institutional characteristics that affect student retention into three groups. First is leadership which includes funding, academic support, diversity and facilities. Second is faculty which considers experience, focus on teaching and learning, practical application and advising. Third category is the student who must be accountable for his/her own learning, stay motivated, utilize resources such as tutoring and mentoring programs. While Calcagno et al. (2007) description of institutional characteristics included the following variables:
``college size; tuition levels; the use of part-time faculty; overall expenditures per student; the distribution of those expenditures among possible functions such as instruction, administration, and student services, the extent to which the college focuses on certificates as opposed to associate’s degrees; and the level of financial aid’’ (p. 633).

Since most of the literature on organizational characteristics and student outcomes focuses on demographic characteristics such as type, size, admission selectivity, control, makeup of the faculty and student body, and then financial characteristics such as tuition, financial aid, expenditures, and resource distribution, the review will divided into two parts: first demographic characteristics and student outcomes, and then financial characteristics and student outcomes.

**Demographics.** Whether or not an institution is public or private, which is considered to be institutional control, and the institutional type, for example research university versus a liberal arts college, is highly researched. Both institutional control and institutional type have been found to be a predictor of student outcomes (Pascarella & Terenizi, 1991, as cited in Chen & DesJardins, 2008; Hu & Kuh, 2002). However, this review concentrates on the relationship between variables that can be readily controlled or changed, and therefore, institutional control and type will not be addressed because it is considered to be absolute (Hu & Kuh, 2002).

Larger institutions are found to be associated with negative student outcomes (Calcagno et al., 2007; Chen, 2011; Goble, Rosenbaum & Stephan, 2008; Toutkoushian & Smart, 2001), as is institutions with a large minority student population (Calcagno et al., 2007; Chen, 2011; Goble et al., 2008), although not all studies support this finding (Toutkoushian & Smart, 2001). The number of part-time or adjunct faculty also led to lower rates of persistence (Calcagno et al., 2007; Chen, 2011; Goble et al., 2008). The findings related to the number of students per faculty member offers mixed results with one study finding no significant relationship between the
faculty per student ratio and learning outcomes (Toutkoushian & Smart, 2001), and another finding evidence of a positive impact on student outcomes (Webster & Showers, 2011).

Goble et al. (2008) examined the institutional factors likely to predict student success at two-year colleges. This study differs from other studies since the researchers examined institutional variables while taking into consideration the varying levels of college readiness. The institutional variables used were labeled compositional, which consisted of student demographics and enrollment patterns; institutional, whether the college is public, private, urban etc.; and organizational, which refers to the policies and processes of the college related to admissions, faculty, instruction, facilities, and resources. The most significant finding was the larger the number of minority students at an institution, the lower the retention rate. Also, larger schools saw lower rates of retention for mid to low high school achievers, and there was a negative relationship between institutional graduation rates and the number of part-time faculty.

Chen (2011) used a multilevel approach to examine which institutional characteristics influence the dropout rate of students over a six year period. The study incorporated a multitude of independent and dependent variables and examined the correlation between socioeconomic status, ethnicity, financial aid and student retention, and then also between socioeconomic status, ethnicity, faculty, financial resources and student retention. The major findings of the study were similar to Goble et al. (2008) in that institutions with a larger proportion of minority students enrolled and a large number of part-time faculty had lower retention rates. The results also showed that public and low selective institutions have a higher dropout rate when compared with the rate of dropout at private and highly selective institutions. In addition, a larger number of part-time students and fewer resources being delegated towards faculty instruction and student support services were indicative of higher levels of student departure.
Financial. Gaining access to college does not secure a student’s ability to pay for the costs associated with attending. Colleges and university offer financial assistance through scholarships, loans, work study, state assistance and federal student aid such as the Pell grant. However, this funding can be limited and students may have to work or find additional ways to cover the cost of school. Research has found that the inability to afford college and the amount of financial assistance awarded to students does impact the dropout rate at some institutions (Webster & Showers, 2011), although the significance is seen more in lower income students, than mid to high income students. There was no real difference in outcomes and the type of aid awarded (Chen & DesJardins, 2008;), except as it relates to scholarships based on merit, which were found to be related to higher GPA and persistence (Curs & Harper, 2012). It is possible that low income students may not have the financial support of family members, and also have difficulty juggling school and employment, while merit scholarship recipients may feel motivated to work harder as a result of their award.

Educational leaders are responsible for making financial decisions that dictate how resources will be allocated. Toutkoushian and Smart (2011) categorized expenditures as administrative, instructional and academic/student support, and conducted a study using survey data related to students’ experiences in college and expenditures. The sample included 2,269 students and spanned across 315 colleges and universities between 1985 and 1986. The data was analyzed using multiple regression analysis. The findings suggest that the more an institution spends per student, the higher the level of learning as determined by GPA. The data did not show a significant relationship between large academic/student support expenditures and student outcomes, as was the same with instruction expenditures and student outcomes. However, in a similar study, higher tuition rates was found to positively impact student learning (Webster &
Showers 2011), as was expenditures on instructional and academic/student support (Ryan, 2004; Webber & Ehrenberg, 2010). Conversely, Ryan (2005) found a negative correlation between administrative expenditures and student outcomes.

Titus (2006) utilized resource dependency theory to determine if student persistence is influenced by the internal expenditures of colleges and universities. Data was pulled from the commonly used databases NCES and IPEDS. The most significant findings are as follows: The more revenue generated from tuition, the higher the rate of persistence; higher expenditures per student by administrative functions led to a higher rate of persistence; conversely, when the expenditure to support administration is higher, the rate of persistence is lower. Titus (2006) explained the possible link between high levels of tuition and student retention as motivation by administration to protect the institutions source of revenue by making a more concerted effort at retaining students.

According to Toutkoushian and Smart (2001), “an institution’s characteristics should have influence on different aspects of student gains” (p. 40). However, Pike, Kuh and Gonyea (2003) stated that while institutional characteristics may appear to influence student outcomes, there is a lack of strong empirical evidence confirming this relationship because results will always vary based on the individual student variables included in the study. Even still, educational leaders can utilize what research has found to have an impact on student outcomes as a guide for policy and program development.

Institutional Behaviors and Student Retention

Berger (2002) ascribes to the philosophy “that organizations do not behave; however, the people in those organizations do behave while acting in the service of collective organizational interest” (p.4). This means that institutional behaviors are dictated by policies which are then
translated into the practices and processes enacted by administrators, faculty and staff of institutions. Berger (2002) conducted an analysis of the existing organizational research that is linked to undergraduate student retention to determine which components of an organization have the greatest effect on student outcomes. The findings suggest improvements to pedagogy, improved access to student services and financial aid, and better tracking of student progress for assessment purposes are all measures that are supportive of positive outcomes and would benefit from tighter cooperation between units to truly promote student success.

**Instruction.** It is the responsibility of institutional leadership to set specific standards by which faculty should be held to in regard to faculty and student relations. According to Kobrak (1992) “decisions on who will be taught and how thus remain largely decentralized and essentially the prerogative of faculty” (p. 512). Not only are administrators responsible for holding faculty accountable for what and how they teach, but they must provide faculty with the proper resources and technology to promote innovation and support positive student outcomes. However, educational administrators sometimes make decisions about instruction without receiving input from faculty, a problem of practice that can negatively impact academic success.

Another problem impeding academic success is the divide in the relationship between leadership and faculty which is apparent in leadership’s continual reliance on faculty for more than just teaching. According to Arum and Roksa (2011), the faculty are expected to serve on committees, conduct research, and publish their work. Often times, they are encouraged to pursue their individual interest but the cost is a reduction in time spent with students. Students experience gains in knowledge when the institution is heavily focused on the student, and student effort is directly linked to their relationship with their professors through positive interactions (Arum & Roksa, 2011). These interactions are found to be positively related to student
persistence especially for underrepresented students as well as students that begin college in need of remediation (Bueschel, 2009).

Significant variation is seen from one institution to the next in terms of how the remedial process works and as a result, the effect it has on persistence is varied as well. Davis and Palmer (2010) conducted a review of the literature concerning minority students and the role of remediation in postsecondary education and surmised that “researchers need to engage in empirical investigations that decipher what approaches in postsecondary remediation work, under what conditions and contexts, and for whom, to arrive at informed policy decisions” (p. 508). Calcagno and Long (2008) conducted an empirical study to investigate the effects of remediation on student outcomes. The study sample was large and included 100,000 college students requiring remediation. The researchers found that while completing remedial courses resulted in an increase in freshmen persistence to sophomore year, there was no significant impact on progress toward degree completion.

Other studies have found remediation to be a mechanism for student persistence (Attewell et al., 2006; Bahr, 2007, 2008a, 2010; as cited in Davis & Palmer, 2010). However, some four year institutions fail to offer a substantive selection of developmental courses which limits underprepared students to attending community colleges with the intention of transferring to a four year institution later because of the larger number of developmental courses being offered. Consequently, institutions must be structured in a way that caters to the needs of not only first year and current students, but the transfer student population as well.

Tobolowsky and Cox (2012) studied institutional policies and practices in relation to the success of transfer students and the structures that lend themselves to positive student outcomes. There were 17 participants who were either faculty or staff members at a single university. The
authors note that the study is limited because of its use of only one institution and did not consider individual student variables which prior researchers has shown affects persistence. Nevertheless policies related to admissions and majors and the misinterpretation of transfer students needs by administrative staff is indicative of the need for institutions to better orient staff to better service specific student populations.

**Student Support.** Student support is an extensive category because it refers to all programs, services, and finances that are available to assist students in making progress towards degree attainment. Student resources, student services and student programs are considered to fall into the category of student support. Adelman (2007) posited that in order for institutions to address the low retention of underprepared students, there must be a significant change made to the current programs that were developed to support these students. Bueschel, (2009) recommends learning communities and supplemental instruction as forms of support that institutions can offer to help students succeed. Learning communities are becoming a commonly used by colleges and universities for the purpose of increasing the retention of at-risk students (Hotchkiss, Moore & Pitts, 2003; Jaffee, 2007; Purdie & Rosser, 2011; Tinto, 2000). This is primarily because of the empirical studies that found that students who participate in learning communities are more likely to succeed and graduate (Heaney & Fisher, 2011). Specifically, the network of support that learning communities provide has also been proven to be effective in assisting in the retention of students (Tinto, 2000).

The way an institution distributed resources dictates whether there is funding initiatives such as learning communities. Gansemer-Topf and Schuh (2006) conducted a multilevel analysis of the relationship between how institutions distribute their resources, the amount spent on specific programs, student retention and instruction. The data was extracted from NCES and
IPEDS but was limited to liberal arts institutions. The first research question “did institutional selectivity and the amount of money that was spent per student for instruction, academic support, student services, institutional support, and institutional grants significantly predict first year retention rates and 6-year graduation rates” (p. 621)? The second research question was the same as the first but instead considered the varying levels of institutional selectivity. The findings suggest a positive relationship between instruction, grants and selectivity, however surprisingly; institutional support expenditures had a negative effect on retention. Also, institutional expenditures in low selectivity institutions positively contributed to student retention, whereas high selectivity schools, instruction as well as academic support was found to positively affect retention. Again, “student services negatively contributed to retention rates” (p. 626).

The researchers covered a lot of ground in this study, and it serves as an example of how organizational behaviors are interrelated. More studies should reflect these interworking relationships since it is evident there is a significant impact on the end goal which is degree attainment. However, even more pressing is the need to conduct further research to gather information about how students support themselves academically. A search of the literature did not reveal any existing studies that offered narratives of the experiences of at-risks students who participated in SBPs, and the systems of support that aided in their ability to be academically resilient. This information would be useful for colleges and universities who are looking for innovative ways to develop at-risk students into high achievers and increase the rate of degree completion for this population.

Environment. The organizational environment on college campus refers to “activities and norms that students experience on campus…and the strength of the institution’s reputation
outside of the campus” (Berger, 2002, p. 6). It is evident that organizational structures that currently exist in higher education do not always provide an environment conducive to positive outcomes. A satisfactory environment is one that is conducive to learning and makes students feel like part of the whole as they navigate through college. The way in which students interact within their environments was a major part of Tinto’s (1982) model of student departure. However, with the number of minority students in relation to the number of White students, especially on predominantly white institutions, negative racial climates can hinder progress. In fact students from underrepresented populations that perceive a negative campus climate in terms of race are less satisfied with college and are less likely to persist (Fischer, 2007).

Oseguera and Rhee (2009) assessed peer and faculty perceptions of their own environment and its effect on student retention. Peer climate is essentially a student’s intent to remain or leave college, and faculty climate is related to the way faculty work to create a support environment for students. The authors point out that one of the limitations of the study was that faculty climate was defined by students and their perception of what that means. With this in mind, the findings showed a correlation between peer and faculty climates and student retention.

Not all of the literature supports the theory that student retention is affected by different levels of institutional factors. In fact, some researchers have found minimal to no correlation. Titus (2004), whose widely cited research examined the relationship between institutional context and student retention asserted that “policy makers may be using institutional persistence rates to make inappropriate judgments about institutional effectiveness and performance” (p. 674). Zepke and Leach (2007) stated that “accountability systems and institutions are overrated as agents for improvement” (p. 242). Karp (2011) argues that the existing theories of retention
that consider institutional factors as playing a major role in student persistence cannot be applied without a clear understanding of “the mechanisms by which student success occurs” (p.1).

Another perspective related to student outcomes takes some of the burden off of the institution and places it on the student with the philosophy that while it is the responsibility of the institution to provide an environment that is conducive to learning and supportive of student success, the student plays an even greater role in achieving success. Lau (2003) stated that “ultimately, the success of college retention depends on the students themselves” (p. 126). Titus (2004) agreed with this theory stating that “holding institutions accountable for their “unadjusted” persistence rate is inappropriate, given that such a rate is influenced by a complex set of variables largely at the student level” (p. 693). Hyun (2009) surveyed 101 academic deans and found that most considered student success to be more the responsibility of the individual student rather than the institution.

Carter (2006) stated that minority student retention is one of the most pressing issues in higher education today (p. 34). Although, based on the review of the literature, student retention is affected by a number of controllable factors, it is reasonable to assert that students have to be held accountable for their persistence in college as well. Hurtado and Carter (1997) “encourage studies that will lead to campus programs that will diminish marginalization as well as address critical periods in students’ early careers to reduce attrition in college” (p. 341).

Summary

This chapter offered a historical review of the struggle for African Americans to attain equal access to higher education, highlighting some of the critical issues from pre and post-civil rights era, the implications of which have significantly impacted the current state of college degree attainment amongst African Americans as compared to other ethnicities. In addition,
significant attention was given to the role that HBCUs and SBPs have played in combating the issue of college readiness for underprepared, degree seeking African American students. Finally, a review of the literature pertaining to the role that colleges and universities play in retaining students, specifically the characteristics and behaviors of an institution that may impact student retention, were outlined.

The research indicates that the exclusion of African Americans from educational opportunity has resulted in negative outcomes that are still affecting African American college hopefuls today (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009). For example, the large number of African American youth attending non-competitive and under-resourced schools has led to far too many graduating from high school unable to gain admission into college, or underprepared for success in college courses (Rushing, 2003). Fortunately, HBCUs have taken on the mission of granting access for this population of students by establishing SBPs with the purpose of offering underprepared students remediation and college transitional skills to support their success in college (Strayhorn, 2011).

While the existing research on SBPs provided evidence that bridge programs positively impact first year persistence, more evidence is needed on the impact of SBPs on the overall academic success of at-risk students. Although the existing research related to student retention is extensive and there is evidence that institutional characteristics and behaviors have an impact on student retention, no study explored the personal experiences of SBP participants that supported their successful matriculation to senior year. Further, this review of the literature uncovered few studies (Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Palmer & Young, 2008; Ross, 1998) that offered narratives from the students’ perspective that demonstrates their individual efforts and experiences in persisting and being academically resilient (Martin & Marsh, 2006). As such, this
study seeks to explore the experiences of three college seniors who were admitted to the university after successfully completing a SBP for underprepared high school graduates at an HBCU that accepts up to 300 SBP students each year and who have entered their senior year with GPAs of 3.4 or higher using Martin and Marsh’s (2006) 5-C model of academic resilience as a conceptual framework. The results can be used to create support systems that help students to develop an innate set of skills that foster academic resilience and leads to academic excellence and degree completion.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of three college seniors who were admitted to the university after successfully completing a Summer Bridge Program (SBP) for underprepared high school graduates at a Historically Black College University (HBCU) that accepts up to 300 SBP students each year. As a practitioner, I believe that direct input from the population being served is paramount when designing effective programs and services to support their success. Freeman (1997) posited that “the voices of students are rarely heard in the debates regarding their lives, and the voices of disempowered students are even more silent” (p. 531). Therefore, I wanted to give these students a voice, and at the same time, gain a deeper understanding of how they made meaning of their experiences that led to their academic success. In addition, I wanted to explore the phenomenon known as academic resilience using a qualitative approach since it is useful method when seeking to understand how an individual’s experiences led to a specific outcome.

Qualitative research methods are suitable for studies that are designed to explore or obtain a deeper understanding of a problem (Creswell, 2012). Clausen stated, “Indeed, there is no other way we can assess the construction of a self than by seeking to understand how relationships, circumstances, and events have been interpreted and incorporated by the individual” (as cited in Giele, & Elder, 1998, p. 194). Thus, using a qualitative approach was an appropriate method to answer this studies overarching research question which was as follows:

*What experiences contribute to the academic resilience of at-risk college seniors who were admitted to a HBCU through a SBP, and have a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.4 or higher?*
Research Design

Qualitative research offers a number of methods that researchers can use to conduct research such as ethnography, grounded theory, or life histories (Creswell, 2012). This qualitative study employed a narrative research method. According to Dhunpath (2000), narrative research represents “one of the only authentic means of understanding how motives and practices reflect the intimate intersection of institutional and individual experiences in the postmodern world” (p. 544). For this reason, I elected to use a narrative research method in order to understand the experiences that led to the phenomena that is the academic resilience of at-risk students, giving a voice to this overwhelmingly unheard and understudied group (Creswell, 2012; Maxwell, 2005).

It is also important to learn from the personal perspectives of these students about what helped them to achieve academic success in order to assist students like them to have a similar educational outcome (Freeman, 1997). Therefore, this study also delved deep into the perspectives of the study participants and uncovered the meanings that the participants gave to their experiences that ultimately resulted in academic resilience. As such, a quantitative or experimental study would not have been appropriate since these forms of inquiry would not allow me to hear and make use of the participants’ storied experiences that led to their academic resilience.

Study Site

The location of the study is a public, urban research historically black university located in the north east and was referred to from this point using the pseudonym Lakeside University. In 2011 there were approximately 6,711 undergraduate students enrolled with the majority of the student population, 82%, identifying as African American and only 3% of the student population
identifying as White. Many of the students are first generation college students from low-income families with the median income of $36,710 being about half of the median income of the entire state, with 95% of the undergraduate student population receiving some form of financial aid and 50% being eligible for federal Pell grants. In addition, in 2010, about 80% of the incoming class placed into developmental education which indicates a significant level of under-preparedness for college coursework, the first year to second year retention rate for this same cohort was 72.9%, and finally, in 2011, 33% of all first year students earned a GPA of less than 2.0. All of the aforementioned institutional characteristics are representative of an at-risk student population (Gray, 2013). I selected this study site because I hold the position of Assistant Director for a department within the university that works with SBP participants, which gave me access to the important information that helped to guide this study, as well as significant access to the participants.

**Participants**

Purposive sampling was used to select the study participants since this method of sampling offered the best opportunity to learn from the shared narratives of their experiences upon entering the university as at-risk students; and thereafter overcoming this distinction by becoming academically resilient (Creswell, 2012). This is mainly due to the fact that purposive sampling allowed me to select students to participate in this study who I knew met an established set of criteria. The criteria for this study were as follows:

1. African American United States Citizens
2. Attended a high school in the United States
3. Accepted into the HBCU after successful completion of the university’s summer bridge program
4. Are currently in their senior year at the university or recent graduates

5. Have a cumulative grade point average of 3.4 or higher

Using the university’s student information database, I ran a query to find students who were known to have participated in a SBP and thereby deemed at-risk, were seniors or recent graduates, and exhibited academic resilience as evidenced by their cumulative GPA. Then, the university’s student information database was used to determine if the students identified as African American and if they attended a high school in the United States. It is important to note that some researchers (Goodwin, 2002; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991) view the experiences of first generation immigrants, second generation immigrants, and multi-generation African American minority students as being vastly different from each other. However, for this study, I considered any student who identified themselves as African American, and who met the remaining conditions of participant selection, as someone who had a story to share about overcoming adversity by being academically resilient (Martin & Marsh, 2006). For this reason, their voices should be heard and their storied experiences may make a significant contribution to this study’s purpose.

Once a list was compiled of students meeting the criterion outlined above, I sorted the list according to the highest to lowest GPA and selected the students with the top three highest GPAs as possible participants for this study. The decision to only include a small number of participants in this study was based on the fact that narrative research generally includes only a few participants and a larger sample would make it difficult for me to maintain the uniqueness of the participants’ individual stories during the data analysis process (Creswell, 2012; Maxwell, 2005).
The initial contact with the intended participants occurred via email correspondence (Appendix A) to ask if they were interested in participating in the study and willing to meet in person to discuss the particulars to ensure that potential participants were fully aware of the studies purpose, what their role was, as well as any potential benefits and/or risks resulting from participation. Upon meeting the student and disclosing the full detail of the study, the top two participants agreed to be a part of the study and were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix B). The next six intended participants that I sent the email to did not respond or elected to forego participation in the study. The third and final participant was the ninth name on my list of potential participants and also signed the consent form after I disclosed the full details of the study. Thereafter, I scheduled two 60-90 minute interviews with each of the participants individually that took place on campus. The first interview was to collect data regarding their precollege experiences, while the second interview was to collect data pertaining to the summer bridge program and their college experiences. The students’ schedules were accommodated as well as the students’ preferred meeting location on campus which ensured that the participants were comfortable and not intimidated by their surroundings.

**Data collection**

Two semi-structured, face-to-face interviews served as the primary means of data collection, and is the standard method of data collection used in narrative research (Creswell, 2012). Although observation of the study participants is also a common standard in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009), my work schedule did not afford me the opportunity to observe the participants based on schedule conflicts. I met with each participant individually for two 60-90 minute interviews. One of the benefits of using interviews as a means of collecting data is that it afforded me the opportunity to clarify any of the statements and information gathered during the
interviews (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). I also had follow-up phone conversations with the participants to clarify some of the data. I used an open-ended interview format which allowed the study participants to offer rich and detailed narratives through an in-depth discussion about their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The use of face to face in depth interviews also allowed me to gain insight and a greater level of understanding (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) of the experiences that had fostered academic resilience in the participants. In my opinion, this was the best approach to contextualize their shared experiences and relate it to academic resilience in a way that would be most useful to educational practitioners.

The interview protocol (Appendix C) that I developed was guided by Martin and Marsh’s (2006) measures of academic resilience which includes academic resilience items, predictors of motivation and engagement, and educational and psychological outcomes (p. 269). The interviews took place at a mutually agreed upon location on the university’s campus and lasted between 60-90 minutes. At the start of my meetings, I restated the studies purpose to the participants and reviewed the consent form (Appendix B). Also, I made it known to the participants that they should be sure to seek clarity for any question that they did not understand. The initial interview included the questions pertaining to their precollege experiences listed on the interview protocol (Appendix B). The second interview included the questions that pertained to the summer bridge program and college experiences also listed on the interview protocol (Appendix B). After I transcribed the data, I developed a list of follow-up questions that I discussed with participants individually via telephone. This process also helped to ensure that sufficient amounts of data were collected and that the data gathered was exact and understood. The final transcription from both interviews was shared with the individual participants via email.
for one final review, and then I contacted the participants individually via a phone meeting to
and obtained their consent to finalize the data.

**Data storage and management.** A signed participant consent form (Appendix B)
authorized the use of a digital recorder to record the interviews which I transcribed at a later date,
and granted permission to take notes during the sessions. Pseudonyms were assigned to the
university and participants to protect their privacy as follows: The university was referred to as
Lakeside University; participant one was referred to as Diamond; participant two was referred to
as Ruby; and participant three was referred to as Jade. In order to maintain confidentiality, at the
conclusion of each interview, I made sure all of the notes were placed in labeled file folders and
secured in a locked file drawer that only I have access to, and I assigned a password to the digital
recordings. It was important that I became acquainted with the data (Bloomberg & Volpe,
2012), so I personally transcribed each of the recorded interviews, including any observations
and notations I made during the interviews, into text using Microsoft Word. I made certain that
all documents were labeled according to the assigned pseudonyms and the files were password
protected to preserve confidentiality.

**Data analysis**

The use of coding techniques in qualitative studies allowed me to break down the data
into smaller parts in order to determine relationships within the different categories (Maxwell,
2005). As such, I began the analysis process by conducting an extensive review of the
individual participant data by reading over the transcribed interviews and making notes of any
initial observations and perspectives regarding the data. Then I used descriptive coding
techniques to label the themes that emerged from the data (Saldaña, 2012). Then I grouped the
codes into categories and assigned labels based on the themes that emerged from the data.
Finally, I examined the data across the participants using priori coding which allowed me to analyze the data based on the studies conceptual framework (Martin & Marsh, 2006; Saldaña, 2012). Analyzing the data in this way allowed me to determine if components of the 5-C model had emerged from the data.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Several methods were used to make certain that the data remained valid. For example, I used direct quotes throughout the data collection process to give credibility to the collected data and maintain the richness of the data (Maxwell, 2005). I also convened with a team of peers consisting of two educational practitioners who work with summer bridge program participants and at-risk students to get feedback on the findings during the data analysis and reporting phases of the study. Finally, member checking was used to ensure that the experiences of the participants were accurately stated and interpreted and so that the quality of the study was maintained.

Researcher Bias

My personal experience as an at-risk student fueled my interest in the topic of this study. I am an African American woman who entered college underprepared but managed to graduate from college. However, my GPA at the time of graduation was a 2.7 was considered non-competitive since most of the graduate school required a GPA of 3.0 or higher for admissions. As such, I was unable to gain acceptance into graduate school, and it was not until six years later when I had work experience under my belt that I applied to graduate school again and was accepted. I always maintained that if the institution that I attended had offered the right support services that were specifically designed to help students like me overcome a lack of college readiness and develop the skills to be academically successful; my college experience
would have led to a more positive outcome sooner. Although my story mirrors the participants’ in some ways, I was able to avoid allowing my personal biases to influence the recording of the participants’ experiences by accurately documenting the discussions and reviewing the data pulled from the transcription with the participants. Although asked specific questions, I refrained from leading the participants toward a particular response.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

The Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) requires that research involving human subjects obtain the approval of their institutions Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to engaging in the research. The purpose of this requirement is to protect the rights and welfare of the study participants. It also ensures that the ethical, moral, and legal aspects of the study have been considered prior to, and throughout the research process. According to Creswell (2012), ethical issues in qualitative research can arise at different points of the study and not just in data collection. Therefore it is important at every phase of the study to consider what ethical issues may arise and be prepared with solutions. As such, I obtained IRB approval from Lakeside University prior to the start of the study and practiced full disclosure so that participants were aware of any risks as well as benefits associated with participating in the study so that the subjects were able to provide informed consent.

For the data collection phase of the study, all data collected were stored in a secure place that only I have access to. I used coding techniques that are in support of maintaining the anonymity of participants. When interviewing the subjects, I refrained from using leading questions and did not attempt to guide the results of the research. In regard to data analysis, qualitative researchers have to be especially cautious about wrongfully interpreting results in an attempt to make certain that the results of the research support their research goals. In this
regard, I reviewed the final transcriptions from each interview with the individual participants to ensure accuracy and to clarify meaning.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experiences of three college seniors who were admitted to the university after successfully completing a Summer Bridge Program (SBP) for underprepared high school graduates at a Historically Black College University (HBCU) that accepts up to 300 SBP students each year. The narrative obtained from the interviews with each participant tells the story of how they were able to overcome being inadmissible at Lakeside University to achieving academic success. Their journeys offer insight into the factors that may influence the development of academic resilience amidst the many challenges that come with being underprepared for college. The findings from this study may lead to innovative ways to structure academic support programs that serve this population of students.

This chapter presents the findings to the overarching research question: What experiences contribute to the academic resilience of at-risk college seniors who were admitted to a HBCU through a SBP, and have a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.4 or higher? Martin and Marsh’s (2006) 5-C model of academic resilience was the conceptual framework used to guide the study. Profiles of each of the participants begin with their precollege experiences followed by their college experiences. Then the main themes that emerged during the data analysis process for each of the participants are presented.

Participant Profiles

Diamond

“I was a force to be reckoned with.” Diamond was extremely excited to discuss her experiences with me. She believed that it was her duty to use her journey to positively impact other students with similar stories. As I listened to her narrative, I began to truly understand that
there was an incomparable level of commitment and determination that steered her toward success. Not only was she the first of her siblings to graduate from college, but she did so while earning a GPA of 4.0 in every semester that she was enrolled in college; a remarkable feat to say the least. This is Diamond’s Story.

**Diamond’s Precollege Experiences.** Diamond is a 22 year old African American woman. She was raised in a two parent middle class household with her three older siblings. Her mother is an educator who has earned a college degree; however, her father is a laborer and does not have a college education. Diamond attended a private catholic school for most of her K-12 experience, with the exception of the eighth grade when she enrolled in public school for that year. However, her mother felt that the curriculum offered at the public school was not challenging and she was also dissatisfied with the schools lack of focus on building the students’ character. As a result, Diamond enrolled into a private college preparatory high school, which was ranked second amongst private schools in the region, for her remaining high school years.

An educator by profession, Diamond’s mother was very strict when it came to education in their household. She established a daily schedule for her children that they consistently adhered to. Her mother always made sure that they completed their homework prior to engaging in play or watching television. As Diamond stated “everything was on a schedule...you did your after school activities, you did your homework and then dinner.” Her mother was tough but very encouraging, making sure Diamond and her siblings understood the importance of school while also counseling them on doing well academically so that they could later be prepared to go to college. Diamond shared, “In my house, college was a given. It’s like elementary school, high school, and then you go to college...we knew we had to go”. However Diamond struggled with staying focused on her academics and as a result, her grades would
fluctuate between As, Bs, and Cs. Diamond admitted, “In high school, I didn’t have the best of grades, but they weren’t the worst. I had more potential than I put forth…I could have done more than what I did…I did just enough to get by to pass and didn’t put my all into my academics”.

Diamond blames her gift of being quick-witted for her inability to remain focused. She would use her wit to entertain her fellow classmates and would often talk back to her teachers rather than concentrate on the lesson.

I wouldn’t say I had the best character. I was actually known as the class clown because I always liked to laugh and if someone was talking in class it was me. The teachers liked me, but they knew I had a mouth so they didn’t want to be bothered with me…I would go back and forth with them.

For this reason, she would periodically get called into the principal’s office and receive a lecture on how to conduct herself in the classroom and the importance of respecting her teachers.

However there was one instance during her senior year in high school where Diamond took things too far. While Diamond did not want to share the exact nature of the trouble, she did state the following:

One incident was bad and it could have hurt my future, and the thought that I could get kicked out of school really turned me around. It was close to graduation and I knew I had to graduate…so I was like I have to get myself together.

This event served as a turning point in her life.

It was at that time that she recalls her mother being extremely upset with her because she expected so much better from her. Diamond shared her mother’s words, “She said these words to me that always resonated with me in regards to school. She said I am depending on you [to graduate from college]. So that kind of internalized it like I have to do this”. And at that point,
she promised her mother that she would graduate from high school and complete college. The fact that her mother wanted her to attend college and graduate was nothing new. However because her older siblings had each enrolled in college and subsequently dropped out because it was either too rigorous or in one case they wanted to work instead, the need to fulfill the promise she made to her mother was immense. She managed to pull things together during her senior year by being attentive in class which improved her academic performance and led to her graduating high school with a GPA of 2.8.

Attending a college preparatory school definitely had its advantages. Diamond was able to take advanced placement courses and testing which helped prepare her for what to expect in college. She also became familiar with college writing since some of her classes assigned lengthy research papers. Diamond also gained useful skills such as mastering the Cornell Note Taking System. She asserts “Everything we did made you aware of what to expect in college”. However, when it came time to take the college entrance exams, Diamond did not do anything to prepare stating, “Honestly I don’t think anyone can really prepare someone for that test…the test is common knowledge…you either know it or you don’t”. So while, the school did offer SAT and ACT prep courses as well as study guides, Diamond did not use those resources and earned a combined score of 1240 on the SAT which is below that national average of 1500 and she did not attempt to take the ACT.

When it was time to apply for college, Diamond only applied to three schools; two out of state schools and one in state school. This was because she wanted to experience some place different then where she was raised. While she did get accepted to the out of state schools, the one in state school she applied to, Lakeside University, did not offer her regular admission as a result of her below average SAT scores, and instead referred her to their six week summer bridge
program (SBP) which would gain her admission if she successfully completed the program. The out of state colleges were not offering her much in the way of financial support, and Diamond’s mother had made it clear that the higher priced out of state schools were unaffordable for their family. So Diamond had no choice but to attend the SBP to earn admittance into the university.

I applied to other schools and got in without needing a bridge program but what led me to go to this [institution] was that it was cheaper…I had heard a lot about [the bridge program] because my cousin had attended it. I heard you get a scholarship for completing the program with a good GPA so I was like why not. Yes it was close to home but I realized I could keep money in my pocket. I am graduating with no debt. That was a major thing for me.

Diamond admitted that she was a little upset that she had to spend her summer taking classes but was presently surprised to find the program to be fun. She especially enjoyed living on campus and really getting the feel for what college would be like. She met students who were also in the program as well as students who were not. There were so many activities going on that she just enjoyed herself and did not have time to go home nor did she want to. However, she quickly discovered that the program was a lot different than high school. For example, Diamond pointed out that she had to be responsible for herself being sure that she did what was required of her.

It wasn’t like high school…if you don’t have something the teacher will help you get it. [The program] wasn’t like that but [the professors] did make sure you understood the work. It made you know you had to be responsible for yourself. Like nobody was tracking you down telling you to turn in your homework.
Being a part of the SBP helped Diamond learn the difference between high school expectations and college expectations. Diamond realized that she had to conduct herself differently than she had in high school if she wanted to be successful in the program.

I will never forget the argument I had with [the English professor]. We got into it about some assignment. He sent me down to your office and I’m like OMG this is like the second weekend of the program! What is going on? That experience helped me to humble myself. Like college is a whole different ball game…So after that experience it put everything into perspective for me.

The incident brought about a change in Diamond. She no longer talked during class unless she was contributing to the discussion. She began meeting other students and formed very close bonds with them.

Diamond’s friendships helped her develop a fun, supportive group that supported her college success. Diamond stated, “Being on campus was fun. I met other students in the program and that weren’t part of [the bridge program]; I made lifelong friends”. Her newfound friends really helped to support Diamond’s success during the program and beyond. They would meet together to study for quizzes and exams in the library. They would also compare notes and use words of encouragement whenever any of them began to feel like giving up. For Diamond, helping her friends do well in the program was a change from her distractive behavior in high school and when her friends would thank her for helping them with an assignment it would boost her self-confidence.

She began to realize that some of the habits that her mother would encourage such as creating a schedule and actually sticking to it in order to manage her time were reinforced during [the bridge program]. In addition, she began writing down her goals. Diamond shared, “when
you write [your goals] and say it, it happens. [The bridge program] taught me that…I learned a lot from [the bridge program] I really did”. She was much more disciplined and focused during the program than she had been in high school. Diamond stated “In the classroom I was really quiet…I was about my business in the classroom”. It was clear that Diamond was a different kind of student during the bridge program than she was in high school. As a result, Diamond earned her first 4.0 getting As in each of the required classes and earning a scholarship as well as admission into Lakeside University.

**Diamond’s College Experiences.** Diamond’s dreams of becoming a lawyer started at a very young age. Her grandfather would tell her that she was going to make a great lawyer one day because she was always debating with people and fact finding. For Diamond, the idea of making him proud served as motivation to keep the positive momentum she garnered from being successful in the bridge program going. She was also driven by the desire to be the first of her siblings to graduate from college.

I wanted to make history for my family. I wanted my siblings to go back [to college] and continue…and for my mom for her to be an educator and none of her kids graduate I know it affected her. I wanted her to know that she did what she could and so I wanted to be an example that you are a great parent and you raised me to do what I was supposed to do.

However, Diamond knew it was not going to be like high school where she would wait till the last minute to complete assignments. Diamond reflected on the kind of student she was before her newfound desire of being an outstanding scholar was ignited, “I would literally do my homework just before class starts…that’s not a scholar in my eyes. I wanted to be this lawyer that I always said I wanted to be so I knew I was going to work hard”. At this point, Diamond
was well aware of the commitment and dedication that she would need in order to accomplish her goal. So she made a promise to herself to always put her academics first no matter what the circumstances.

Diamond lived on campus for her first three semesters in college and she quickly learned that staying focused would be a challenge that she would need to prepare for. There were lots of distractions, boys, parties, and lots of social activities to participate in. Diamond made the following observation about campus life, “There were lots of things to make you lose focus whether it be friends, boys or family issues back home. You had to know what you were there for”. Knowing exactly why she was there helped her to make her academics a priority. For Diamond, that meant making sure she went to her classes ready to learn. She prepared for her classes first by looking over her syllabi as soon as she received them to know what was expected of her. Diamond shared, “I always sat in the front of the class”; and she was able to engage in class discussions because she spent a significant amount of time reading her textbooks and going over her notes in preparation for class. If there was something that she did not understand she made sure to seek clarity from her professors. She stated, “I would go to my professors and ask questions. Some would say you are a good student your [going to be] fine…others would say well study this or study that and they would give me some type of guidance”. The guidance that she received from her professors helped build her confidence and she used it as motivation to keep working hard and to stay focused.

Diamond also made sure to make use of her time wisely making sure that every hour was accounted for. Growing up in a well-structured home where everything was done according to a schedule made this an easy task for her. She would create a study schedule for herself that included spending several hours a week studying in the library.
Everybody in the library knows me...there are really helpful resources there, it’s quiet…I cannot personally study at home because I get sidetracked. I watch TV or I’ll eat, people call and I’ll answer the phone, but when I’m in the library I’m in my zone. These habits led to Diamond earning a 4.0 her first semester in college. She reflected on how such an achievement just further motivated her to keep working hard, “It wasn’t easy, but I got straight As again so I was like let me try this again next semester”. This cycle of working hard and earning all As continued for every semester thereafter. It was obvious that Diamond had found a system of success that worked for her.

However, Diamond’s journey was not without difficulty. There were times when she was unsure of herself and her confidence would wane. This usually happened when she did not perform as good as she had hoped on an assignment. She spent a lot of time tracking her progress in her courses and calculating what grade she would need to get on a given assignment in order to get an A in the class and this lead to her being even more stressed. She recalled a time when she had to write a paper for an English course. She submitted the first draft and he marked it up and told her to keep working on it. She followed his advice and submitted it, and again, he gave it back and told her to revise it. This brought Diamond to tears.

I will never forget English 102. I wrote a paper and it was the paper to pass the class, and it was never good enough. He said you have to change this. He said that each time I went to him. I just got to the point where I can’t do this. I cried and called my mother and told her I am doing this and that and it’s not good enough. She told me to hold it together and just keep writing. At the end of the semester, not only did I get a good grade, but he wanted to use my paper for an example for other students. That really sold me and really made me know I can do this and go far.
Another obstacle that Diamond had to overcome was using food to handle her stress. However, as she began to gain weight she realized that overeating was adding additional stress. She started to feel fatigued and had less energy. The more stressed about a class she was, the more she would overeat. Diamond would call her mother and talk to her about how she was feeling and her mother suggested she start going to the gym a few times a week to release her stress. Diamond admits that she quickly learned to love working out because it made her feel energized. She also stopped overeating and began making healthier food choices. These changes helped to keep Diamond focused and gave her the strength to stay the course graduating with a cumulative GPA of 4.0 or Summa Cum Laude (with highest honor).

Diamond’s Emergent Themes. There were three themes that emerged from Diamond’s story. These themes offer clarity into how Diamond understood and explained her experiences in overcoming and developing academic resilience. They are as follows:

Theme #1: A solid foundation makes for a strong structure. As Diamond shared the narrative of her childhood it was clear that her mother played a role in developing some of the major factors that contributed to her academic success, discipline, consistency. For example, when Diamond discussed how she was able to remain disciplined and manage her time she stated:

My mother…we were always on a schedule. There was always something to be done at a particular hour so I guess the way I was raised has a lot to do with my level of discipline. I had to leave for school at this time. I had to do my homework before I ate. We ate at this time. We went to volleyball practice at this time. We went to bed at this time. Everything was on a schedule.
So when Diamond began her college journey, she was able to apply what she learned from her childhood about time management to maintain a consistent study schedule which she believes helped her to stay on track and remain focused on her academics.

**Theme #2: Keep up the good work.** For Diamond, being recognized for her academic achievements served as motivation to continue working hard even when faced with a challenge. This recognition came in different forms such as positive feedback from professors for an assignment done well, being invited to join honor societies, and even from her personal affirmations to self as evidenced in the following statement:

One thing that I always did around midterms when I get my grades back, I may have an A and some may be Bs. What I would do is write in my agenda ‘keep up the good work’ and ‘turn those Bs into As’. I wrote it in my agenda book every time midterms came. You have to talk to yourself or do things so that you know you can do it. When you write it and when you say it, it happens.

Having others acknowledge her academic success helped to increase Diamond’s self-confidence and it motivated her to continue working hard. It was also important for her to take ownership of her academic standing and she did that making notes to herself and saying positive words of encouragement out loud.

**Theme #3: Know where you are going and what it takes to get there.** Diamond understood that once she set her goal of getting a 4.0 every semester, she would have to work very hard to achieve it. She made sure that her academics were her number one priority. She spent hours at the library daily sacrificing her personal life in order to make sure that she reached her goals. Diamond stated, “I want to be this lawyer that I always said I wanted to be so I know I have to work hard and with hard work comes success”. She was able to manage the rigor
involved in being academically successful by developing a system of knowing what was required of her to pass each course by reviewing the syllabus and talking to her professors. In addition, she monitored her progress in a course using Blackboard and would always know exactly what she needed to do in order to get an A in a course. Diamond explained,

    Blackboard always let you know your grade or what you need to do to keep that grade or get a better grade. So that helped me to have a sense of control. I had to make sure I got an A on this cause I got a C here. Blackboard was my best friend. Some teachers did not use Blackboard so I would average my grades out myself.

For Diamond, setting goals and mapping out a plan for how to achieve them helped her to remain focused. She also monitored her progress in her classes so that she was always aware of what would be required to reach her goal. This behavior helped her to remain in control of her academics and is what she believed helped her to become academically successful.

Ruby

    “Deep down I knew I wasn’t a dummy.” I really enjoyed interviewing Ruby. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that beneath her demure exterior is a confident young woman whose narrative is one of courage and determination. Ruby is a 22 year old African American woman who was raised in a middle class, two parent home with one older sibling. Her parents were both college educated professionals; her mother a registered nurse with a four year degree, and her father an engineer technician with an associate’s degree from a two year college. Her parents were very religious and raised her to be a devout Christian. This is Ruby’s Story.

Ruby’s Precollege Experiences. Ruby came into this world a fighter. When her mother was in the early stages of her pregnancy with Ruby, she was in a near fatal automobile accident. As a result, her mother underwent multiple extensive surgeries. Her mother had to be heavily
sedated as she healed from the surgeries and thereafter continued to take pain medication. Thankfully, Ruby’s mother recovered and maintained her pregnancy to full-term. When Ruby was born, her doctor told her mother that she was a healthy baby and had not been affected by the accident. However, Ruby’s mother noticed that Ruby’s motor skills seemed to be underdeveloped. She didn’t crawl until she was one year old and started walking well past the age of two. Ruby’s mother became concerned and wondered if Ruby’s development had in fact been affected by all of the surgeries and medications. Ruby stated, “My parents were like ‘I hope she doesn’t have any mental disabilities’”. Her parents however were afraid of getting a disability diagnosis because of the stigma associated with being labeled as disabled and instead they ignored some of the early signs that Ruby may need further assessment, and enrolled her into a private Christian school.

In kindergarten, Ruby remembers having difficulty sitting still. She moved around a lot and struggled to stay on task. Her parents were aware of her inability to stay focused but still did not get her assessed, this time afraid that she would be diagnosed with ADHD and stigmatized—a common concern in the African American community (Kellison, Bussing, Bell, & Garvan, 2010). Ruby stated, “At one time my mom was thinking about seeing if I had the diagnosis of ADHD when I was younger, however she didn’t go through with that because she didn’t want the stigma”. Meanwhile, Ruby continued to have difficulty academically averaging Cs and sometimes Bs in her classes. This worried Ruby’s parents who placed great importance on education and it was stressed throughout her formative years that she had to do well and go to college. Ruby shared, “My mother and father were very strict on education and getting your college degree…when I was growing up that was engrained me at a very young age”. But Ruby was falling behind and in an effort to gain control of her academic progress, her mother with the
support of her father, made the arduous decision to withdraw Ruby from the private school she was attending and homeschool her for the fourth and fifth grades.

For Ruby, homeschool was a lot different than her experiences in her former school. Her mother was responsible for teaching her at home. She felt that Ruby could benefit from the one on one instruction and was determined to help Ruby to reach the level that she should be at academically. Ruby remembered, “I would be up late and she would be drilling stuff in my head. Even when I was tired she did that. She made sure I got the one on one attention because she knew it was important even when I didn’t want to [do the work].” Her mother also made sure to teach her important skills that would help her to be successful. Ruby explained, “I was homeschooled because [my mother] wanted that one on one so that I could catch up…so that I could have those functioning techniques such as studying, and how to read, not just read but comprehensive reading…those kinds of skills.” It was her mother’s goal to make sure that she helped Ruby reach the same level as her peers academically and that she was prepared to compete with her peers academically when she returned to private school for the sixth grade.

When Ruby returned to a private Christian school for the sixth grade, the challenge was trying to fit in and not being lazy. Her mother would always tell her that she should strive for As but Ruby was too distracted and wanted to be socially active. Sometimes, Ruby would choose socializing over her academics in an effort to be part of a particular group of students. While she did her school work and was more focused than she had been when she was younger, she still was a B and C students with occasional As through middle school and high school.

Ruby knew that she would have to attend college, but her parents could not afford to pay for the SAT prep course that was offered through her school. So when it was time to take the exam, she had done nothing to prepare and received a combined score of 590 on the reading and
math. Disappointed with such a low score, she began using a SAT prep study guide in preparation for retaking the test. This helped to bring her combined reading and math score to 760; better but the low score along with a 2.9 GPA was still not good enough by most colleges and university admission standards. Consequently, when it was time to apply for college, Ruby’s confidence was at an all-time low; therefore, she only applied to a community college and Lakeside University afraid that no institution would accept her. She was accepted into the community college, but received a letter from Lakeside University rejecting her for regular admission, but offering her the opportunity to participate in the summer bridge program. When this happened, the principal called her in her office to discuss Ruby’s future. She reflected on the conversation stating,

The principal at my high school had a talk with me and made the statement that college isn’t for everyone. Yes that’s true for certain people but for me…that wasn’t an option. I wanted to prove her wrong, but I also wanted to prove to myself that I know I am not a dummy. So [the bridge program] was my second chance, my chance to redeem myself because when I graduated high school I was okay but not my best. I could have done much better.

The principal’s statement ignited a fire within Ruby and she eagerly accepted the opportunity to participate in the bridge program with every intention of taking full advantage of what she considered a second chance at success.

When she arrived on campus for the SBP she had a completely different perspective than she did in high school. Ruby described herself in the following way, “I was driven, determined, failure wasn’t an option. In my mind I was going to step up to the plate. I wanted to earn all As. I wanted to push my limits and that is what I did”. She immediately connected with other
students in the program and realized that there were other students like her who had messed up in high school and wanted a chance to make things right. Ruby shared,

I can’t put it into words but [the bridge program] helped me to grow. It helped me realize you can make mistakes but what will you do about it? You move forward and make sure that if someone comes behind you, you can tell them your story so that they can use it to better themselves. That is really what hit home for me when I was in [the bridge program].

As such, she was extremely motivated while in the program and her confidence was gradually increasing. The challenge however was getting used to living on campus and having a roommate. She had to learn to study in the presence of someone else, and if that did not work, she had to be disciplined and go to the library to study. Ruby stated,

Things about class and studying I already knew, my parents had engrained that in me and my sister went to college, so even though I was lazy in high school I was very observant so I learned from watching her the type of mindset I had to be in…I saw [the bridge program] as a test trial to see how I had to act and what I had to do to get As.

Ruby equated the SBP to a test run of the do’s and don’ts of college used it to test out the study skills that she had learned from her mother and watching her sister. Not only did the program help boost her confidence but it motivated her to persist. For example, each time she received positive feedback from her professors during the program or received an A on an assignment or exam, she became even more motivated to work hard. It also helped her with the college transition by reinforcing behaviors she had already witnessed her sister partaking in like using an agenda book to keep track of her assignments and by teaching her other important factors about
college like respecting your roommate. At the end of the program, she had received all As in the required courses and was awarded a scholarship as well as admission into Lakeside University.

**Ruby’s College Experiences.** Ruby was determined to use her newfound confidence to be successful in college. One of the first things she did as a freshman was to go and meet with an advisor in the sociology department because she was interested in declaring sociology as her major. After hearing about the different career paths that sociology majors take, she decided that the social work major was better suited for her since she wanted to be hands on in helping to improve the quality of life for less fortunate people. She became excited about declaring her major and eventually was able to meet with an advisor in the social work department. Ruby recalled her relationship with her advisor stating, “She impacted me so much. She attached herself to me and saw me as her mentee”. Ruby was able to go to her advisor about most things. There was one time when she was feeling stressed about a course and she went to go see her advisor to talk to about how she was feeling. Her advisor suggested that she go to her professor’s office hours and talk to them about the difficulty she was facing in the course. Ruby took her advice and it was one of the best things she could have done. Ruby spoke of her experiences with professors and said,

> The professors truly cared and were willing to work with me. You had to be the type of person to go to them and show that you cared about your work and you care about where you want to go in life. They would tell you to come to their office at this time and they would help you.

During her second year of college she was able to develop relationships with some of her professors which helped to build her confidence level, and their words of encouragement would motivate her to continue working hard. She recalled a time when her professor was so impressed
with a paper she had written, he told her it was the best in the class and asked her to read a section of it out loud to the class. After that, other students in the class reached out to her and asked if she would like to form a study group. She noticed that the more positive feedback she received from her professors, the more her confidence would increase and the better she would do in her courses. She began to look for opportunities to use her command of the subject to help her peers who were having difficulty understanding the material and this helped her to become a better student.

After her first year in college, Ruby made the connection that her input affected her academic outcomes. “I knew that if I worked really hard on something and gave it 100% or 120%, went above and beyond and did everything I could… I had nothing to worry about. You studied at least a week before a test, you don’t wait ‘til the day before, and you took great notes you will do well”. Ruby described herself as consistent, “spending time with my academics, taking great notes, reviewing every single day”. In addition to developing good study habits, Ruby learned to manage her time. “All of my time I had to dedicate toward my academics and toward my goals and my dreams that I wanted to achieve…so I really had to sacrifice certain aspects of my life”. Ruby had to learn what worked for her in order to manage her time properly but felt it was not a difficult feat because it was how she was raised. “My parents engrained that in me at a very young age and I saw my sister and how she was focused on her academics. She graduated from college with honors and I wanted to be like her”. As such, Ruby attributes much of her success not only to her support system but to her own hard work. In her second year she earned a 4.0 at the end of both semesters. Ruby took advantage of the positive momentum stating,
I built on the consistency that I was having. I was perfecting my skill of staying focused on academics and making sure I studied within a certain timeframe and learning different techniques on how to study. I set goals to stay driven toward my passion and it kept me going. I listened to my body and got to know me. I knew I was a morning person so I knew my mind was more alert in the morning…so for studying I would do it during the day because I would get tired at night…and even with that if I needed more time to study I would do it at night. I did what I had to do.

Ruby also learned that good grades opened doors for other opportunities. She made the Dean’s list and was invited to join various honor societies on campus. She noticed that job opportunities and internships used a good GPA as a requirement for the position. Feeling confident and ready to build her resume, Ruby applied to be a peer mentor for the summer bridge program that she had completed to gain admission into college, and she also applied to be a resident assistant in her junior year. She was offered both jobs and accepted the positions.

During the summer before her junior year, Ruby was able to be a mentor to students that she saw herself in. She described the experience as follows,

They were nervous and timid like I used to be. I wanted to help them to be successful. And when they passed the program I was so happy and I knew my priorities but my priorities changed a little. They were not only my academics but also my jobs because I could help people. I wanted to do well but I also wanted to be involved and make connections.

Ruby’s experiences in college helped her develop a new sense of purpose and direction.
Ruby’s newfound sense of purpose was not without its trials. However, she had a very strong spiritual foundation and was able to remain focused on her goals by maintaining her spiritual self. Ruby stated,

I would get frustrated and tired and for me my foundation being a Christian and Him being there for me, my personal relationship with Christ has grown so much. So I can’t say I did anything on my own. He was there helping me giving me the strength and guiding me. I have doubts at times, but that’s when I lean on God. I leave it up to God…and He has always had someone in my life to help me.

Ruby also used her spirituality to keep stress at bay by reading the Bible every day to strengthen her relationship with God. Remaining strong in faith and praying daily also helped to keep her calm and minimize her stress. Ruby shared, “When I felt overwhelmed, I would write my thoughts down on paper to free my mind. Then I would pray. I wasn’t fanatical but I would pray. It gave me peace of mind”. For Ruby, her faith helped her to stay focused on her goals and helped keep stress at bay. Ruby reached her goal and graduated with a GPA of 3.6 or Magna Cum Laude (with high honor).

**Ruby’s Emergent Themes.** There were four themes that emerged from Ruby’s story. These themes offer clarity into how Ruby understood and explained her experiences in overcoming and developing academic resilience. They are as follows:

**Theme #1: What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.** Ruby’s secondary education experiences were full of setbacks. She struggled with staying focused and as a result, her academics suffered. Even though stopping out for the fourth and fifth grades to be homeschooled did help to improve her academic standing, she was still easily distracted and striving to fit in. When her high school principal insinuated that college wasn’t for her, Ruby
made the decision to turn things around. She considered her participation in the bridge program as a chance to redeem herself and she did so by successfully completing the program with a 4.0 GPA and receiving a scholarship award.

**Theme #2: Pillars of Support.** Ruby spoke about having low self-esteem when she entered the SBP, but her confidence continued to increase as she became consistent in getting good grades and by engaging with her advisor and professors. “Talking to my advisor and professors …like okay I’m smart, I’m intelligent…they spoke to who I was as a person and that helped build my confidence”. Regarding a professor, Ruby shared, “A professor wrote a very nice comment on my paper saying it was the best paper that she had read in a while and that really impacted me in a positive way”. Her relationship with her family, friends, and campus staff helped her to realize that she had many sources of support that were rooting for her success. “My professors and advisors in the social work program were very nurturing. It was a combination of people in my life who helped me”. As such, Ruby attributes her ability to remain focused on the guidance and support she received from the people that she was able to develop relationships with.

**Theme #3: When opportunity knocks.** Ruby’s determination to be successful was fed, and her self-confidence increased, each time she was invited to join honor societies as well as when she was selected for leadership positions. “I joined the Golden Key Honor Society and the Collegiate 100, and Phi Alpha the honor society for social work. All of these honors and being a residence assistant, all of those successes resonated in me that if I focus on my academics, if I am very driven about something and very determined about something, I can do it”. Being recognized for her academic success validated all of her hard work and served as motivation for Ruby to continue working hard.
Theme #4: Say a little prayer. Ruby consistently referred to Christian faith and her relationship with God throughout her narrative. Ruby stated, ‘God showed me through my experiences and through people what I needed to do to be successful. He always had someone in my life to help me”. She simply did what she believes God guided her to do. For that reason, Ruby did not take any credit for her success but instead gives all the glory to God.

Jade

“I was tired of being invisible. I wanted to make connections. I wanted to be seen.” Jade is an admittedly shy young lady. Although she was very excited to share her story, she struggled with opening up and going in depth when sharing her experiences. Of all of the participants, I spent the most time with her. As she began to talk about her experiences it was obvious that she was not used to sharing so much of herself. As a result, I met with Jade for an initial interview, and then again for two follow-up interviews in an effort to gain more insight into her experiences. This is Jade’s Story.

Jade’s Precollege Experiences. Jade grew up in a two parent home and is the oldest of four children. She recalls moving around a few times as a child before they eventually settled down. Jade doesn’t know exactly why her parents moved a lot, however she does recall feeling sad because she had to repeat the first grade after doing poorly on a placement test at her new school. Both her mother and father worked fulltime and had bachelor degrees. Her mother was an office manager and her father was a police officer. She attended public school in what would be considered a low ranking school district through junior high. To Jade, school work was easy. She didn’t have to work hard to get good grades because it came easy to her. Nonetheless her parents always made sure that her and her siblings did their school work first and play came
later. She remembers making the honor roll without really trying and she recalled feeling “happy” when she got good grades.

However, when there was a change to their county’s zoning rules, her mother was able to take her out of the low ranking school and enrolled her in a more competitive school for her high school years. Jade was opposed to switching schools and begged to stay in the school where she had built friendships. But her mother objected to this and told her that she would learn more in her new school. Jade reluctantly began attending her new school and immediately felt isolated. She stated, “It was a predominantly White school. There was hardly anyone who looked like me there. I didn’t fit in”. For Jade, part of the reason why she did not make friends was because she didn’t think White people liked her. She recalled a time when she was 7 years old and her and some friends were riding bikes in their neighborhood. Jade shared,

We were young about 7 just riding our bikes and we rode near this White man’s lawn and he yelled at us. He said get off my lawn niggers! I was traumatized. I didn’t understand why he didn’t like us but it made me afraid of White people. When I told my mom she said all White people don’t feel that way. But I don’t know, after that I felt like White people didn’t like me.”

This incident stayed with Jade and it hindered her from assimilating into her new predominantly White environment. She used to enjoy going to school but now she felt anxiety and never stopped asking her parents if she could return to her old school. Jade did not get involved in any extracurricular activities and would just rush home afterschool and read, listen to music or hang out with the kids in her neighborhood. In the past Jade would get mostly As and Bs on her report card. Jade stated, “Being the oldest child, I knew I had to be a good example for my younger brothers and my sister. At some point in high school it kicked in that I had to do great for
them… I needed to set an example”. But at the new more competitive high school she began getting more Bs and sometimes Cs. She took two AP courses and failed one and she began to doubt her academic ability. Jade stated,

For the first time I started worrying about my grades. I never used to have to worry but this school was definitely harder and I didn’t feel like working hard because I was always sad. I did what I needed to do but nothing extra. I hated it. I felt disappointed.

When it was time to begin preparing to apply for college, Jade took the English portion of the SAT prep because she felt as though she was strong enough in Math and did not need extra preparation. She ended up scoring a 1060 which is below the national average of 1500, and her GPA when she graduated from high school was a 3.1.

Her below average SAT scores caused Jade to apply to only three institutions; a local community college, a private all girl institution, and Lakeside University. She was only admitted to the community college but did not want to go there because most of the girls from her high school had planned on enrolling. She was rejected from the private all girl institution which sent a letter suggesting she try to gain admission later as a transfer student, and finally Lakeside University referred her to the summer bridge program. Jade was ecstatic about the opportunity to attend Lakeside University for a few reasons. She explained,

So I got the letter from Lakeside University and I felt excited because I thought it would be good to not have a break. I chose the school because I wanted a small environment so I can get to know people. I like familiarity; I don’t like large campuses. I wanted to be in a black environment and see people who look like me. I didn’t know how to connect with people in high school. I thought going to an HBCU would allow me to be with
people I can relate to. Plus both of my grandparents went there and met there so that was cool too.

After receiving the letter, Jade was excited to get started in a community that she knew would be welcoming and supportive.

At the start of the SBP, she still struggled with being socially awkward, “I was okay academically but not socially. I needed to work on my social skills”. But as she progressed in the program Jade began to make friends and things changed. It was the structure of the SBP that facilitated the relationships. The 300 students were divided into cohorts of 20 students and each cohort went through the classes and activities together. They participated in activities and group projects that forced even the shy students to interact with each other. For Jade, this was exactly the type of interaction that she was missing in high school. Jade and three other girls in her cohort began meeting together after classes to study in the library. They also worked on a group project together for one of their classes. They would talk about their goals beyond college and they formed a strong bond. Jade stated,

For the first time in years I felt a connection. We were going through this together, we were a team…We were all on the same mindset and page, we helped uplift each other.

There was no competition, we just helped each other. We built long-lasting relationships. Jade’s friendships were a foundation of her success in college.

There were skills learned in the SBP that Jade believed supported her academic success. For example, she learned the importance of being prepared for class. In high school she did very little to prepare for class, however, in the bridge program the topics changed so quickly that if she did not study and review and read in advance, she would feel left behind. Therefore, she went through each syllabus and highlighted the topics, homework assignments and test dates,
and then entered the information into an agenda book that she began carrying with her everywhere. Jade stated, “I learned to use an agenda book and write everything down so I knew when things were due and so I could keep track of my assignments”. This helped her to prioritize assignments and study for exams well in advance which resulted in good grades.

Jade did well in the program and got As in all but one course where she received a C. She stated, “Everyone got a C or failed that class. The teacher was horrible…I learned that sometimes no matter how hard you try things still may not go your way…I was disappointed but I was happy I still would be admitted to [the university]”. Jade completed the program with a newfound sense of self; a bit less shy, a little more confident, and great friends.

**Jade’s College Experiences.** Jade did not recall a specific point in time where her parents spoke to her about going to college. It was just something she knew she had to do. After her successful completion of the bridge program, she was motivated to do her best in college. Jade shared, “I just knew I had to do well. It is just something I carried with me from childhood, something my parents taught me. It was just inside of me”. For Jade, this experience was much different than high school because she finally felt good about herself. She stated,

I struggled with confidence issues in high school. I didn’t fit in, I was anti-social and I avoided everyone. I wouldn’t hang out…I didn’t care about my appearance. But after [the bridge program] my social issues were affecting my confidence and my appearance was linked to my confidence. I started hanging out and dressing better so when I started college as a freshman I was much more confident than I had ever been. I still have work to do but I am not like I was before.

Jade’s confidence allowed her to feel more confident socially and she believes that her confidence helped her establish friends who encouraged her academically.
The friendships that Jade established were a key part of her college success. Once Jade selected her major which was biology, and started taking the required courses, she noticed that she would see some of the same people in most of her classes. Jade explained, “Around my sophomore year I started seeing the same faces in my classes and thought I might as well make friends with them. We were all in the same major, had similar goals. We could help each other”. So one day when Jade and her classmates were meeting to work on a group project, she suggested they form a study group and everyone agreed that it was a great idea. From that point on, they developed a strong bond. Jade credits her friends with keeping her focused and motivated. She stated, 

We were all motivated to work hard and if my grades weren’t what I wanted I would work even harder. Sometimes my friends struggled too but we would have breakdowns together and then we would pick each other up. If I was feeling down about something, I would talk to them. They always made me feel better no matter what I was going through.

Although the relationships she built with her peers were her main source of support in college, she also had to establish relationships with others at the college.

Jade also built relationships with her professors. Her willingness to go and talk with professors helped her through difficult course materials. When Jade would talk with her professors, she made sure she was prepared for the meetings. Jade shared, 

One of my biggest challenges was trying to pass organic chemistry one and two. Every time I got to a topic that I didn’t understand, I would go to office hours. I would be prepared to show him my notes, my practice problems and talk to him about how I had been approaching the problem. I noticed professors are more helpful when they can see
that you have already been putting in work and you aren’t just trying to find an easy way out. I also had one or two friends that I would work with we’d meet up and go over the work together and work through it. I used teamwork and meeting with him to pass those classes.

Overcoming challenges such as passing a difficult course motivated Jade to continue working hard. She also found encouragement through recognition. Jade said, “Making the honor societies were my biggest accomplishments and really made me feel validated. It made me feel like I was a part of something and motivated me to do even better the next semester”. With hard work, Jade entered her senior year with a cumulative GPA of 3.4 or Cum Laude (with honor).

**Jade’s Emergent Themes.** There were three themes that emerged from Jade’s story. These theme offers clarity into how Jade understood and explained her experiences in overcoming and developing academic resilience. They are as follows:

**Theme #1: Product of the environment.** Jade expressed that her academic performance in high school was not a result of her inability to understand the material, but instead her dissatisfaction with the environment. Prior to transferring to a predominantly White high school, Jade was a great student. However, her experience being yelled at by a White male affected her ability to integrate in a predominantly White environment. Jade felt as though she did not fit in and spoke of just wanting to get out of that school. During her time there, she never made any real connections. She wanted to be around people that she could relate to which is the primary reason that she applied to an HBCU. Jade’s narrative speaks to the idea that students can be bright and have the tools to be successful, but their performance and motivation to success can be hindered if they are not comfortable in their environment.
Theme #2: Social gains. When Jade discovered that she would have to attend the SBP, she was ecstatic. Given her struggle to fit in during high school, she thought it was an opportunity to start fresh and meet people that she had more in common with. Participating in the SBP gave her an opportunity to work on her social skills. Being around people from similar backgrounds made it easy for her to build relationships with her peers. In addition, she began to feel better about herself and her confidence began to increase; and as her confidence rose, so too did her motivation and desire to do well academically.

Theme #3: Lift as you climb. The SBP opened the door to what she refers to as “long-lasting relationships” with her peers. Jade was able to meet other biology majors and they became her main source of support during the course of her academic journey. They shared a common goal of overcoming the stigma associated with being at-risk and proving that they could be academically successful. Whether it was studying for exams, doing homework together or just crying on their shoulder when she was feeling overwhelmed, Jade always relied on the support of her friends to help her get through it.

Summary

This chapter focused on the experiences of the participants that led to their academic success in college beginning from precollege to graduation. There were four key patterns that were apparent across the narratives. First the participants came from very supportive middle class two-parent households with each of their parents having completed some form of college. It was clear that education was of primary importance in their homes and that their parents communicated the importance of education on a daily basis which strongly influenced their decision to attend college. Second, each of the participants experienced turning points in high school which influenced their perspective of college. For Diamond, it was not letting her mother
down, and Ruby wanted to prove to herself and her family that she was capable. Jade wanted to finally make the connections that she was unable to make in high school. Although their motivation for success varied, it played a significant role in helping them to remain focused on their goal of college completion.

In addition, each of the participants credits the SBP with helping them to successfully transition to college. However, they did point out that the SBP reinforced good habits already formed during their pre-college years in their household. It also helped to understand how to apply those skills in a college environment. The SBP also helped to foster supportive relationships with their peers which continued through college. Lastly, the experiences that helped them to develop confidence and minimize stress were very similar. For example, each of the participants spoke about feeling more confident after being recognized for their academic achievements. Also, their relationships with professors were very impactful because it increased their confidence, helping them to understand course expectations, and helping them to stay focused and work hard.
CHAPTER V: INTERPRETATIONS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

This study emerged from the desire to give voice to a group of students who are often unheard, and who benefited from a program designed to increase access to education for underrepresented populations, and who managed to overcome the odds for completion that plagues this population by reaching their senior year with a cumulative GPA of 3.4 or higher. Specifically, this study focused on the experiences that helped these students to become academically resilient and achieve academic success. In an effort to understand how the participants made meaning of their experiences that contributed to their academic success, the following research question was asked: What experiences contribute to the academic resilience of at-risk college seniors who were admitted to a HBCU through a SBP, and have a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.4 or higher?

The findings from this study may be useful to practitioners seeking to find innovate ways to help underprepared students reach degree completion with a GPA that is considered competitive in a global economy. This chapter begins with the interpretations of the participant’s narratives based on the conceptual framework, followed by a discussion of the key findings as it relates to the literature reviewed for this study. Then, implications for practice and research are presented, followed by the study’s conclusion.

Interpretations

This study adopted Martin and Marsh’s (2006) 5-C model of academic resilience as a lens by which to examine the development of academic resilience in underprepared college students. The 5-C model found that academic resilience is evident when the following five factors are present: confidence (self-efficacy), coordination (planning), commitment
(persistence), control and composure (low anxiety). An analysis of the data across the narratives of the study’s participants provided evidence in support of the conceptual framework in the following ways:

Confidence (Self-Efficacy)

According to Martin and Marsh (2006) confidence in the form of self-efficacy is a major predictor of academic resilience. Self-efficacy refers to belief in one’s ability to achieve a specific goal. Two of the three participants, Diamond and Ruby, expressed that they had a strong desire to graduate from college. Their determination was grounded in the need to prove to themselves and others that they could be academically successful, and they believed in their ability to accomplish their goal which they expressed in the following statements:

Diamond: “My level of self-confidence is really high. I know I am a great person and that I can do great things”.

Ruby: “My level of self-confidence right now on a scale of one to ten is a nine or a ten…Failure isn’t an option…In my mind, I knew I could step up to the plate”.

Diamond’s confidence was developed early on as a child. Her family always encouraged her, but it was the encouragement from her teachers in secondary school that had an even greater impact. Diamond shared,

My family always told me they believed in me and that I had potential, but it was people outside of my family that helped build my confidence because family can be biased but being told you are a bright student, that encouragement provided that security like I am somebody, I can do this. That is what really built my confidence.

Diamond’s confidence, supported by her family, was a key to her academic resilience in college.
Ruby differed in that she struggled with a low sense of self in secondary school as a result of her academic performance. She credits participating in the SBP with helping her to develop her confidence and belief in her ability to be successful. Ruby shared:

The [bridge program] gave me confidence because I did have low-self-esteem in regard to my academics because of my past...So I pushed myself. I wanted to make all As and I did. I wanted to push my limits and that is what I did. I wanted to prove myself right, that if I put my all into something, I can do phenomenally well.

In Ruby’s case, the SBP helped her with confidence. However, Jade was still working to develop her confidence stating, “It [confidence] has grown. I struggled with confidence issues since high school. Academically I was fine but the social aspect affected my confidence”. So for Jade, the SBP provided a platform that helped Jade to begin to develop confidence.

**Developing Confidence.** According to Bandura (1977), individuals who have high confidence in their ability to complete a task are more successful and motivated to accomplish their goals even if the situation is challenging. The participants in this study provide evidence that students begin the SBP with varying levels of confidence. Therefore, it will be useful to develop an assessment that measures student’s belief in their ability to be academically successful in order to better understanding of the needs of the students participating in the bridge program.

All of the participants stated that being recognized for their academic achievements helped to increase their level of confidence. Specifically, recognition in the form of feedback from their professors, scholarship awards, making the Dean’s list, and being invited to join honor societies. Also encouragement from family members, secondary school teachers, college professors and advisors helped to boost their confidence. As such, intentional efforts to formally
and informally recognize students for their achievements, and being sure to include professors and family members in the process wherever possible may be an effective means of developing confidence in underprepared students. This can include but is not limited to recognition banquets, scholarship awards, honor societies, and encouraging emails, bulletins on social media websites and in newsletters.

**Coordination (Planning) and Commitment (Persistence)**

Coordination or planning is what Martin and Marsh (2006) refers to as the ability to affectively set goals. Whereas commitment or persistence refers to understanding and having the wherewithal to perform the steps involved in working to achieve them. Both are interrelated and as such will be discussed concurrently. All of the participants were goal oriented and identified their purpose within the narrative. For example, Diamond knew at a very young age that she wanted to be a lawyer. As a child, her family supported her goal and would encourage her by telling her often that she would make a great lawyer. In high school, when her behavior almost kept her from graduating, her mother told her that she was depending on her to be successful. She warned her that it was time to get serious and turn things around because graduating from high school and completing college were very important. This helped her to refocus and get back on track. Diamond shared,

That whole thing like I am depending on you really touched me and internalized things for me that this [education] is important…Lots of things can make you lose focus whether it be friends, boys, family issues. You have to know what you’re there [in college] for. I knew I was there to get my degree. I wanted to make history for my family.

Diamond was able to use her family’s belief in her ability to be successful as motivation to persist.
For Jade, making the decision at a young age to be an example to her younger siblings is what drove her decision to do well in college. Jade explained,

I needed to set an example for my younger siblings. At some point in middle school or high school it kicked in that I have to do great for them. They would get bad grades and I knew I needed to set an example and go to college. And now they are going to college. Unlike the other participants, Ruby did not set goals in her precollege years. It wasn’t until the start of the SBP that she set a goal to redeem her lackluster academic performance in high school, and prove to herself that she was no “dummy”. Later as she decided on a major she became inspired by the idea of getting a degree in social work to help others. This newfound passion also served as additional motivation to persist.

**Developing Coordination and Commitment.** Coordination and the ability to set goals is an important factor since people are generally more motivated when they have something tangible to work towards. However, commitment is important because it requires awareness of the steps required in order to achieve the desired outcome. The participants had one primary goal, but then they also established goals within that to help facilitate the end goal. As such, coordination can be developed by enhancing an individual’s capacity to plan and ensuring that any expectations for a given assignment are clearly stated and understood. Having strong time management skills and knowing what is required to complete a task helps to develop both components. The participants demonstrated these factors in the following ways:

As a child, Diamond’s mother made sure that she and her siblings stuck to a strict schedule daily; a behavior that Diamond carried with her to college. Diamond explained,

I would say I was raised on a schedule, but [the bridge program] reinforced it by putting everything into perspective and helped me continue being on a schedule and being
disciplined. I would plan my schedule out. From this time to this time I’m going to study this, from this time to this time I’m going to do that.

Diamond made studying a priority which provides further evidence of her level of commitment. She spent a lot of time in the library because she discovered that she was more productive when she studied in that environment. It helped her to remain focused on the task at hand because it was quiet and had fewer distractions. In reference to her time spent in the library Diamond stated, “I know I am here for a reason. I have to do this paper, so that’s what I am going to be focused on”. Diamond also would write positive affirmations to herself in her agenda book. She believed writing down statements such as “keep up the good work” or “keep getting As, would help make it a reality and that motivated her to persist.

When Diamond found an assignment challenging, she would go to her professor for assistance. Diamond shared,

It was a research class, everything was done so fast…you had to write a certain way and it was very challenging. The way I handled that was to work with my professor. I would email her and see when she was available and I whatever time she said I would go meet her.

Similarly, Ruby’s ability plan and focus on her goals was instilled in her as child by her parents and also by watching her older sister who was very focused on her academics in high school and in college. Although Ruby had difficulty remaining focused on academics in secondary school, when she arrived on campus she was determined to apply what she had been taught growing up in an effort to achieve a more positive outcome. Ruby also shared that watching her mother overcome hardships helped her to understand that overcoming is a process and you have to keep at it until you are successful.
Ruby also sought assistance from her professors if she was having difficulty with an assignment and credits their willingness to help with her ability to be successful. She stated:

The professors truly cared and were willing to work with you…You had to show them that you cared about your work and I care about where I want to go in life. There were those professors who would say well come at this time and they actually did help you. Ruby knew to go to professors if she was struggling, even though it required extra effort. She was committed to ensuring her success doing her coursework.

Jade showed commitment and coordination by sticking to a schedule and developing good study habits which was something she learned from her mother growing up. However, she also credits the SBP with reinforcing those habits. She stated, “[the bridge program] helped with my study habits. It really kicked in during college”. Planning and persistence in her planning, helped Jade attend all of her classes and be successful in those classes.

For all of the participants, the primary steps used to successfully work toward their goals, remain focused, and persist, included using one or more of the following strategies: managing their time, prioritizing assignments, self-motivation and receiving guidance from their professors. They attributed their behavior to their upbringing and believed that their participation in the SBP helped to reinforce what was already within them. Zimmerman (2002) refers to these strategies as self-regulatory skills. Self-regulation refers to an individual’s thoughts, feelings and behaviors that support goal attainment and is a skill that can be acquired in a classroom, as well as by emulating parents, instructors and even one’s peers (Zimmerman, 2002).
Control and Composure (Low-Anxiety)

Martin and Marsh (2006) asserted that when individuals have uncertainty and do not feel in control of a situation they can become non-productive. Similarly, anxiety can also inhibit an individual’s ability to adapt to a challenging situation which can make it difficult to complete tasks. It was evident within each of the narratives that there were times when the participants were faced with stressful situations. Both Diamond and Ruby learned to remain in control of their academics and keep stress at bay, while Jade spoke of constant breakdowns which may mean that she had not fully developed definitive ways to manage these components.

Diamond, understood that what she put in is what she would get out. So she would study spend a lot of time study for her exams. She made it a habit to keep track of her grades in her courses either through the Blackboard platform or manually, and sought guidance from her professors which also helped her to feel in control. Diamond stated,

Blackboard always let you know your grade or what you need to do to keep that grade or get a better grade. That helped me have a sense of control. I had to make sure I got an A on this cause I got a C here. No teacher ever told me oh you’re going to get an A…Some teachers didn’t use Blackboard so I would average my grades out myself…I would go to professors and ask questions…and they would give me some type of guidance. So I would always go to them.

Diamond’s emphasis on academics and getting good grades took a lot of time and effort which caused stress.

During her first year of college Diamond began using food to ease her stress (Martin & Marsh, 2006). However, not only was she making unhealthy food choices, but she was overeating. She began to gain weight and her dissatisfaction with her appearance made her feel
additional stress. Diamond would talk to her mother about how she was feeling and in her sophomore at the urging of her mother, she began to eat healthier and workout at the gym. She stated, “Once I got to my sophomore year I used to the gym to relieve stress. I would go to workout and I wouldn’t have a care in the world. More importantly the gym was good because you’re working out and you’re getting healthy”. In order to maintain low anxiety (Martin & Marsh, 2006), it was key to have a strategy for relieving stress.

Similar to Diamond, Ruby felt most in control (Martin & Marsh, 2006) when she knew she had given her all. She stated,

I know if I did everything I could and everything I was supposed to do, I had nothing to worry about...Its about being independent and making sure you do what you are supposed to do because when you don’t, that is when you start worrying.

For Ruby, doing what she was supposed to do meant studying for exams well in advance and not at the last minute, taking good notes, reviewing her notes before and after class, and seeking support from her professors. Her faith was also an important factor in relieving stress. She shared, “Now there were times when I slipped up and went through some challenges...I would write down my thoughts...I don’t fall apart or anything like that. God taught me a lot through my experiences...And I pray. It gives me peace of mind”.

Conversely, Jade understood that if she put the work into her academics, the outcome would be positive, she struggles with maintaining her composure during challenging times. Jade explained, “When I put in a lot of effort I knew I would get something good from it”. However, throughout her narrative, she mentioned having several breakdowns especially around midterms and finals. Jade said,
I would get a bad grade at least once during a semester and it would be depressing and I would have to let out a cry, but my friends would lift my spirits and say we are going to get through this together because we are in this together. I would let out a cry and be in bed all day. I also would listen to music to feel better. It would take my mind off of what was going on.

Based on Jade’s narrative, she did not appear to have developed the tools to minimize stress (Martin & Marsh, 2006). Developing a strategy for dealing with stress could have been a potential area for development in a SBP.

**Developing Control and Composure.** Students who are able to maintain control over their academics and exercise composure are able to adapt in challenging situations and achieve success. Control and composure are developed when there is a strong understanding of input versus output. In addition, individuals who are equipped with effective study techniques are more prepared to establish a method of preparation that leads to positive outcomes which in turn reduces anxiety. Also, helping students to discover what outlets are most effective in helping to reduce anxiety and then making sure it is part of a daily regimen can help to support both components.

Overall, examining the women’s stories through the lens of academic resilience made me realize that although the primary focus of the study’s institution SBP is academic remediation, it cannot be assumed that the inability for many of its participants to persist in excellence has everything to do with their academic preparation or socioeconomic status. Perhaps this indicates a need to conduct thorough assessments of applicants to determine if students need academic remediation and or nonacademic remediation. More specifically, since the precursors to being categorized as underprepared are quite varied, support programs must be varied as well. As such,
in order to truly impact access and student success for African Americans and other populations, this common model of SBP may need restructuring.

This is important for many reasons. From an institutional perspective, a significant amount of resources are used to support these programs and the current structure may not be maximizing the return on the investment since these students often have difficulty being retained and persisting. At the practitioner level, delivering services to students with a one size fits all model makes it difficult to achieve optimal levels of effectiveness bilaterally. Lastly, from the primary investors’ standpoint, the students themselves, it gives a false sense of hope to think that successfully completing the SBP translates to their ability to be successful in college. Any attempt to address this issue will need to consider all of these factors.

**Discussion**

**Precollege Experiences**

The literature reviewed for this study detailed the history of access to education for African Americans and the lack of college readiness issues that confront this population. While the existing literature assumes that the lack of college readiness is an issue resulting from low socio-economic standing, and noncompetitive, under-resourced schools (Rushing, 2003), the narratives told a different story.

Each of the participants self-identified as African American, non-first-generation college students. Although they were classified as middle class and attended competitive high schools, these students scored below the national average on the SAT exam. More specifically, they were not offered regular admission into Lakeside University, making the only in state option community college or the summer bridge program. There are various perspectives on what classifies a student as underprepared. However in this study, underpreparedness refers to the
lack of college readiness or inadequate preparation to enroll in and successfully complete credit
bearing college courses at a four year institution without remediation (Conley, 2008). High
school students who meet one or both of the following criteria: low high school GPA, and or
below average performance on college admissions tests (ACT, 2007), are considered to be
underprepared for college. Based on that definition, these students qualify as underprepared.
This is significant because the existing literature assumes that the primary precursor to
underpreparedness is being of low socioeconomic status, and attending under-resourced and non-
competitive schools, which does not match the profile of the participants.

While the participants’ experiences at home and backgrounds influenced their success,
their schooling experiences also had an influence on their college preparation. All three
participants attended competitive high schools that were considered college preparatory or
offered AP courses, but they indicated that their high schools did not prepare them. For example
none of the students recalled being coached about the expectations of college admissions offices
and the importance of performance on the SAT exam. Interestingly, two of participants did
nothing to prepare for the SAT exam, while the other only studied for the English portion of the
exam. This is significant since historically, performing below average on college entrance
exams have been found to limit access to four year institutions especially for African American’s
who are severely outperformed by other populations (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009).

Based on the narratives, the participants’ upbringing played an important role in their
ability to become academically resilient. They often referred to the success strategies that they
employed as things they just knew from growing up. Frequently these success strategies were in
contrast to what was emphasized in high school. These findings suggest that an individual’s
upbringing supports individuals’ ability to develop academic resilience. Further, their
upbringing and values can provide students with the necessary foundation to be resilient in spite of challenges faced in various environments, such as high school.

**Summer Bridge Program**

For each of the participants, the SBP did serve as a gateway to gain access to a four year institution that they would otherwise not have been admitted to (Strayhorn, 2011). The study participants would not have been admitted without the SBP because of their below average performance on the SAT exam. These students were able to enroll in college because at the SBP, they had the opportunity to complete remedial classes and a college success strategies seminar as a prerequisite for admission to the university. This is indicative of HBCUs ongoing mission to increase access to education for underrepresented populations (Davis, 1998; Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand, 2001).

The narratives support the claim that SBPs help students transition to college and persist through their first year by helping students to become acclimated to their environment (Ackerman, 1991; Stolle-McAllsiter, 2011; Walpole et al., 2008). For example, Diamond learned the proper way to engage with her professors, Ruby came to understand the dynamics of roommate relationships, and Jade learned to navigate the campus. Even though these students entered the program with different needs, they all described the SBP as providing needed support. It is important to note that the support provided to students were in a variety of areas.

The narratives suggest that SBP help students to develop all of the components included in the 5-C model of academic resilience (Martin & Marsh, 2006) in one or more ways. For example, each of the participants reaffirmed or set a personal goal to complete college which helps foster coordination, and college success strategies such as time management and study skills were reinforced which supports coordination and commitment. The SBP also provided a
supportive environment through encouragement and relationships with peers, factors which Martin and Marsh (2006) help to boost students confidence, feel in control and increases composure.

Finally, the SBP met the varied needs for students in different ways. For Jade, the SBP was really not about academic preparation or learning how to study. Instead, it was an opportunity to finally be amongst peers that she could relate to. This helped her to feel valued which positively impacted her level of confidence, which in turn, motivated her to persist. Whereas, it was an opportunity for Diamond to prove that if she applied herself she could be successful, and Ruby was able to strengthen her Math and English skills while also proving that she was capable of success. The findings point to the need for an assessment of students needs prior to entering the program. Having this type of information can assist in making sure the program is structured in a way that offers its participants the opportunity to develop their academic resilience.

College Experiences

There are specific institutional characteristics as in the demographic and financial structure (Berger & Braxton, 1998), and behaviors as in the instruction, support services and environment (Berger, 2002) that have been found to impact student success (Titus, 2004; Lau, 2003). However, in these narratives, only one institutional characteristic was described as impacting academic resilience and that was by awarding scholarships in recognition of academic achievement. In regard to institutional behaviors, only two factors were found to impact academic resilience; instruction and environment. The findings suggest that students who find ways to have consistent interaction with professors are more likely to develop academic
resilience, and academic resilience is more likely to be developed if the institution offers an environment where students feel comfortable.

While the existing literature related to the persistence of at-risk students illustrates patterns of low achievement and persistence (Attewell et al., 2006; Moore et al., 2010), these participants were able to produce a different outcome. Again, underprepared students are considered to be individuals who lack college readiness. College readiness is measured according to high school GPA and scores on college admission test. Based on that measurement, these students may not have required academic remediation in order to successfully complete college courses since their high school GPAs were average. Instead, these students lacked adequate SAT preparation.

Each of the participants was armed with the tools for success in their childhood, but it was suppressed until a significant event in high school changed their perspective. Diamond’s attitude nearly destroyed her chances of completing high school and attending college. After a candid discussion with her mother about her future, Diamond became determined to become serious about academics. Ruby’s less than stellar academic performance in high school led to her school’s principal statement that maybe college was not in her future. This insinuation ignited a sense of purpose within her and she became determined to use the SBP to prove to herself and others that she could be successful. Finally, Jade’s high school environment left her feeling alone and she longed to be with people, especially peers that she could relate to; the SBP provided that. These events were drastically different from one participant to the next. However, the SBP was the primary source of commonality and the program served as a tool for strengthening skills that already existed. Once the participants were able to apply these skills
and reap the reward during college, they became motivated to persist and became academically resilient.

**Preparing Strong Students in Spite of Underprepared Label**

*What experiences contribute to the academic resilience of at-risk college seniors who were admitted to a HBCU through a SBP, and have a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.4 or higher?*

At the start of this study, the premise was that study participants were at-risk because they were unable to gain admission to Lakeside University without first completing remedial courses while participating in a summer bridge program. These students managed to defy the odds facing many of their counterparts categorized as at-risk and persist to their senior year with honorable academic standing. I wanted to learn from their storied experiences so that I can help other students accomplish similar outcomes. Instead, I found that the broad definition of underpreparedness, and how it is measured, may be capturing a group of students who do not qualify as at-risk based on their overall profile and who may be mis-assigned to remediation. This wrongful labeling of some students as at-risk can be problematic in a few ways. First, it may mean the HBCUs that allocate a substantial amount or resources to support access programs like SBPs may not be reaching the maximum number of truly at-risk students as previously thought. Second, for students like those in this study, bearing the burden of being labeled as at-risk is something that can have a negative impact on their self-confidence and may not always translate into added motivation to succeed. In some cases, although not for these students, it can result in the delay of enrollment in college-level coursework. Based on this finding, HBCUs should work to develop another category that better describes this population of high school students who are perhaps poised to successfully complete credit bearing college courses but did
not receive proper SAT preparation in high school. This will allow for the delivery of support programs that are more tailored to fit their needs. While the study participants may not have had the typical profile of an at-risk student that the program was established to serve, we can still learn from their experiences that led to academic success.

**Supportive Families Outside of College**

The primary finding of this research is that the participants’ upbringing was the most significant factor that contributed to their academics success. This finding suggests that parents that make education a priority in the household, ensure that their child adheres to a daily schedule, and consistently encourages their child to do well, are helping to develop behaviors that support academic resilience. Although as youth, the ability to be resilient may not have been immediately evident in the participants, as they matured into young adults, they were able to model their parent’s behavior and successfully transfer it to the college environment. It can further be concluded that students who have strong family support, and who were raised in a structured household will benefit from a SBP differently. More specifically, SBP will likely serve as a reinforcement tool for these students which are quite different than the needs of other students in the program who did not have a similar familial background and support.

**Programming that is Individualized to Meet Students’ Needs**

Another finding was that all of the participants expressed that participating in the SBP helped with their transition to college. As previously stated it helped them to learn how to apply preexisting behaviors like time management to support their academic success in a college environment. Second, the participants learned how to build relationships with their professors, advisors and peers which were key factors in their success. Lastly, the participants were able to navigate the campus and adapt to a new environment. However, none of the participants spoke
of the remedial courses as being a major contributor to their academic success. The primary conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that not all college applicants who perform below average on college admissions tests are in need of remediation. SBP and other avenues established to increase access to educational opportunities may need to reconsider the use of a one size fits all model to ensure the needs of all students are met in the most effective manner.

**Student Support to Foster the Development of Academic Resilience**

Finally, the findings were in support of Martin and Marsh’s (2006) 5-C model of academic resilience with two of the three participants citing experiences linked to each of the components as being a significant factor in their academic success. Practitioners can work to incorporate strategies into their student support services that include the following: goal setting; effective step by step planning techniques; intentional opportunities for peer interaction; intentional opportunities for faculty interaction and guidance; and consistent recognition. It can be concluded from this finding that students who are able to develop all five components of the 5-C model of academic resilience (Martin & Marsh, 2006) are more likely to be academically successful even in the face of challenging circumstances.

**Implications in Practice**

This study highlights the experiences of three college seniors that supported their academic success. More specifically, it captures how students make meaning of their experiences from precollege to graduation that led to academic resilience. The findings have practical implications for secondary schools, higher education institutions, and educational practitioners. It is important to acknowledge that just as the factors that lead to a student being referred to a SBP are varied, so too are the structures of secondary schools, SBPs and the target
population being served, as well as college campuses nationwide. As such some of these recommendations may not be applicable to all.

**Secondary Schools**

Secondary schools have a unique role in preparing high school students for post-secondary education. Two suggestions for how secondary schools can help students be prepare for college is as follows.

1. Develop and implement a program for parents that offer practical ways to incorporate success strategies like time management, goal setting and study skills into their child’s lives prior to graduating from high school.

2. Establish Mandatory SAT and ACT preparation in high school. Look for possible grant funding opportunities to support families who may have difficulty covering the associated costs.

The participants in my study already had important success skills for college under their belt, learned at home, such as goal setting. This helped them be more prepared than students, whose families did not help teach them these skills. Also, in high school, as mentioned, the participants did not receive support with testing. Additional support and preparation for the SAT may have helped them to arrive at college without the at-risk label.

**Higher Education Institutions**

Institutions of higher education also have a role in helping students that are underprepared. Based on my personal experiences as a college student who was considered at-risk, along with the participants’ experiences, it is apparent that universities and colleges frequently treat all at-risk students the same without a deep understanding of each student’s needs. Therefore I suggest that institutions develop a profile of the student that the institution is
seeking to target. This profile should be much more specific than the broad term of “at-risk”. Then the Admissions Officers can be more effective in referring students to the SBP, and the program managers can be more effective in their efforts to serve the targeted population.

**Education Practitioners**

Practitioners who are responsible for the programing structure of SBPs should develop an assessment tool to determine the needs of the entering SBP participants. This assessment should not be solely based on academic measures such as GPA or SAT scores, but should include nonacademic measures like self-motivation, study skills, and social capacity. In fact, several studies support this concept (Moore, 2001; Palmer & Young, 2008; Schwartz & Washington, 2002; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985). For example Moore (2001) stated “success in college has less to do with aptitude in cognitive measures . . . than non-cognitive measures such as self-efficacy, motivation, commitment, and persistence” (p. 77). As such, practitioners can use the results of an assessment to develop an individualized program that meets the needs of all participants.

Students who are able to effectively apply the skills that are learned are more likely to be successful (Martin & Marsh, 2006). Therefore, it may be useful to develop a method for monitoring students’ use of nonacademic skills after the SBP. Practitioners should also work with faculty to provide intentional opportunities for students to receive guidance and feedback throughout the semester and include their peers and family members in student recognition initiatives.

**Implications for Future Research**

This study found that non-cognitive factors influenced the academic success of participants. It would be useful to study how students develop and make use of these non-
cognitive factors in high school to become academically successful. This study provides evidence that SAT scores and a student’s demographic profile may result in being wrongfully labeled as at-risk and or mis-assigned to remediation. Further research into the effects that being wrongfully categorized as “at-risk” has on a student’s ability to be academically successful would be useful. Also, this study found that although the participants attended competitive high schools, they were not properly prepared to take the SATs. Therefore, an evaluation of college preparation across competitive and non-competitive high schools is suggested.

The findings in this study suggest that family and upbringing may influence an individual’s ability to develop academic resilience. Further examination of how family members perceive their role in the development of academic resilience in college students is warranted. This study found that the five factors outlined in Martin and Marsh’s (2006) 5-C model played a significant role in the participants’ ability to be academically resilient. Incorporating the development of these factors into a SBP and evaluating its impact on the academic success of participants’ may offer additional evidence in support of the 5-C model (Martin & Marsh, 2006). Finally, examining the effects of a more individualized approach to SBPs on the academic success of students is also recommended.

**Study Limitations**

This study was not without limitations. In order to obtain a greater understanding of the experiences of at-risk college students and expand the existing literature related to this topic, I recommend examining the phenomenon in the following ways: include a larger number of participants; include male participants since only female students participated in this study; and the site of this study was an HBCU, a similar study can be conducted on other types of college campuses to see if similar findings would result.
Plan of Action

As a scholar practitioner who is passionate about issues related to educational attainment and success of underrepresented populations, specifically underprepared students, I plan to use the findings of this study to construct a new definition of college readiness to capture students like those included in this study, and to develop an assessment tool that determines the nonacademic profile of SBP participants in order to ensure that the program is structured to capture the needs of its participants.

It is also imperative that I reach out to high schools and discuss establishing a partnership to develop and implement a program designed to teach parents how to develop the 5-Cs (Martin & Marsh, 2006) in their children. This may help parents to be more intentional when establishing structure in the household before a student enters college. I will also propose a Pre-SBP for high school juniors and seniors to assist with college entrance exam preparation and the development of the 5-Cs (Martin & Marsh) over a two year period. This may prevent students who are not academically disadvantaged from being denied admission into four year institutions based on test score, and leave space in the SBP for students whose profile shows the need for academic remediation.

The retention of underprepared students remains a pressing issue for educational leaders today. The staggering statistics are indicative of the need for institutions to not merely provide access to a college education, but to have structures in place to facilitate the much needed supports that foster their development of academic resilience. However, this study highlighted the fact that no matter how innovative and empirically grounded support programs are, success will not be achieved if you do not truly know the population that you are serving. Incorporating an individualized assessment of needs can help practitioners to increase the rate of degree
attainment for this population of students and allow them to not just graduate, but to do so in
excellence in preparation for entering into a competitive global economy and to be productive
members of society.
References


Gardner, D (2010, December). Examining the role of summer bridge programs in promoting college readiness and completion: Lessons learned from Texas’ developmental summer bridges. Presented at the American Youth Policy Forum. 


Gray, S. S. (2013). Framing “at risk” students: Struggles at the boundaries of access to higher education. *Children and Youth Services Review, 35*(8), 1245-1251.


McMickens, T. L. (2012). Running the race when race is a factor. *Phi Delta Kappan, 93*(8), 39-43.


Reed, R. J. (1978). Increasing the opportunities for black students in higher education. *Journal of Negro Education, 47*(2), 143-150.


Appendix A

Recruitment Letter

<<Date>>
<<Name of potential participant>>
<<Address>>
<<City, State, Zip>>

Re: Fostering Academic Resilience in Underprepared Students at an HBCU

Dear <<insert name>>:

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about academic resilience. This study is being conducted by Nuriyah Clark at Northeastern University. This study will explore the experiences of students who entered into the university after attending a summer bridge program at a historically black college or university and who have entered into their senior year with a cumulative grade point average of 3.4 or higher.

You were purposely selected for this study because you meet the following criteria:

1. African American United States Citizens
2. Attended a high school in the United States
3. Accepted into the HBCU after successful completion of the university’s summer bridge program
4. Are currently in their senior year at the university or recent graduates
5. Have a cumulative grade point average of 3.4 or higher

Your participation in this study requires a 60-90 minute interview that will be audiotaped and transcribed with your permission. This is so that the researcher can be certain that all information gathered is accurate. You will be assigned a pseudonym so that your name is never used and confidentiality is maintained. The interview will be conducted at a mutually agreed upon time and location. You agree to meet for a follow-up interview also 60-90 minutes and at a mutually agreed upon location should the researcher require clarity of the previous discussion or additional questions.

Please reply to this email to inform me of your interest in participating. I will contact you by phone call on <<insert date>> as a follow-up to this email. Please note that expressed interest, agreement to be contacted, or a request for more information does not obligate you to participate in this study.

If you do not want to receive a phone call from me, please call <<insert number>> or reply to this email and request that no further contact be made.

If you would like additional information about this study, please call Nuriyah Clark at 443-885-1440 or send an email to clark.n@husky.neu.edu.

Thank you again for considering this research opportunity.

Respectfully,
Nuriyah Clark
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

PART 1: Research Description

**Researcher:** Nuriyah Clark

**Research Title:** Fostering Academic Resilience in Underprepared Students at an HBCU.

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Nuriyah Clark, a doctoral candidate at North Eastern University. The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of students who entered into the university after attending a summer bridge program at a historically black college or university and who have entered into their senior year with a cumulative grade point average of 3.4 or higher.

Your participation in this study requires a 60-90 minute interview that will be audiotaped and transcribed with your permission. This is so that the researcher can be certain that all information gathered is accurate. You will be assigned a pseudonym so that your name is never used and confidentiality is maintained. The interview will be conducted at a mutually agreed upon time and location. You agree to meet for a follow-up interview also 60-90 minutes and at a mutually agreed upon location should the researcher require clarity of the previous discussion or additional questions.

**Risks and Benefits:** This research will help educational practitioners to develop programs that help foster academic resilience in underprepared students so that they can overcome obstacles resulting from entering college underprepared and achieve degree completion. The risk of participation is the same amount of risk one may encounter in a classroom setting. Participants will not receive any incentives for their participation.

**Confidentiality:** Participants will never be identified by name during or after the study, or in a future publication. All of the data collected will be coded and stored in a protected location and used for professional purposes only.

**How the Results will be used:** This research will be submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts. The results of this study will be published as a dissertation. In addition, the information in the study may be used in professional presentations and educational publications.

PART 2: Participant’s Rights

- I have read and discussed the research description and fully understand the purpose of this study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may choose not to participate in the study, and at any point, withdraw from the study without jeopardy to my status as a student or otherwise.
- I understand that the researcher may withdraw me from the study at any point at her discretion.
- The researcher agrees to provide me with any information that may develop during the course of the study that may affect my willingness to participate in the study.
- I have been informed that if at any point I have questions, I can contact the researcher, Nuriyah Clark at 857-939-1832, who will answer my questions. If at any point I have comments or concerns about the conduction of the research or questions about my rights as a study participant, I should contact Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 617-373-4588.
- I understand that I will receive a copy of the research description and this signed Informed Consent document.
- I understand that the researcher will take notes and observe me during the interviews and would like to audiotape the interviews for later review.

□ I consent to being audiotaped
□ I do not consent to being audiotaped

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.
Participant signature________________________________________Date:__/__/____
Name: (Please print)________________________________________

Investigators Verification of Explanation

I, _____ Nuriyah Clark, certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research to_____________________(Participant Name). He/she has had the opportunity to discuss it with me in detail. I have answered all his/her questions and he/she provided the affirmative agreement to participate in this research.

Investigator’s signature______________________________________Date:__/__/____
Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Precollege Interview Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. In order to accurately capture your thoughts, I would like to record our interview. May I have your permission? The focus of this interview will be your experiences before starting college. Let’s begin.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. How would you describe your childhood?
3. Describe your family’s educational background.
4. Describe your experiences in elementary school and junior high school?
5. Talk about your experiences in high school that helped you prepare for college.
6. Tell me about when you decided to apply for college.
7. How did you come to the decision to attend this university?
8. How did you hear about the summer bridge program?
9. Tell me about why you decided to enroll in the summer bridge program?
10. How would you describe the type of student you were when you began the summer bridge program?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add about your pre-college experience?
12. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your time!
Interview Two – College Experience

Thank you for agreeing to continue with your interview. Again, in order to accurately capture your thoughts, I would like to record our interview. May I have your permission? Last time you shared your experiences prior to starting college with me. This time, the focus of this interview will be your experiences in college and your plans after college completion. Let’s begin.

1. Tell me about your transition to college.
2. What would you say were the main factors that contributed to your academic success during your four years in college?
3. How would you describe your level of self-confidence in college?
4. Describe the factors that helped you build your self-confidence in college?
5. What experiences had the greatest impact on your self-confidence in college?
6. Did you have any experiences that negatively affected your level of self-confidence?
7. Describe how you were able to manage the rigor of college?
8. In what ways did goal setting and time management impact your academic success?
9. Tell me about how you were able to develop those skills?
10. Were you aware of what was expected from you as a college student?
11. What experiences helped you to meet those expectations?
12. In what way did the institution assist in helping you meet those expectations?
13. Describe a time when you knew that your efforts led to academic success.
14. Did this make you feel a sense of control?
15. In what ways did your professors help you to feel in control of your academics?
16. What other experiences helped you to maintain control over your academic success?
17. Can you recall times when you were stressed about your academics?
18. Describe the different ways in which you were able to manage your stress?

19. Describe your use of institutional support services that helped you to manage stress.

Post-College Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your plans after college?

2. Describe how your college experiences helped you to decide on graduate school/career choice.

3. To what or who do you credit your overall success to and why?

4. Is there anything else you would like to add about your pre-college experience?

5. Do you have any questions for me?

   Thank you for your time!