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A qualitative investigation of the college choice process for Asian Americans and Latino/as at a public HBCU

Dina C Maramba, PhD
Robert T. Palmer, PhD
Denise Yull, Ed.D
Taryn Ozuna, PhD, *University of Texas at Arlington*

A Qualitative Investigation of the College Choice Process for Asian Americans and Latina/os at a Public HBCU

Dina C. Maramba, Robert T. Palmer,
and Denise Yull
State University of New York at Binghamton

Taryn Ozuna
University of Texas at Arlington

Although research has shown that more Asian American and Latino students are choosing to attend historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), no research has offered insight into what motivates students from these demographics to enroll in these institutions. Given this, the authors explored the college choice process for Asian American and Latino students at a public HBCU. This article concludes with implications to help HBCUs be more intentional about increasing the recruitment and enrollment of students from these populations as well as discussing future research considerations.

Keywords: Asian Americans, Latinos, HBCUs, and college choice process

Evidence from the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) predicts that the population of racial and ethnic minorities is rapidly increasing, with Asian American and Latino individuals comprising two of the fasting growing groups. This increase has been apparent on all campuses in general (Kim, 2011) and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) specifically (Gasman, 2009, 2013; Lee, 2013).[1] Although HBCUs were created to provide educational opportunities to Black individuals when many predominantly White institutions (PWIs) excluded their participation, they never had a history of barring students on the basis of race or ethnicity (Jewell, 2002). Despite this, until recently, the student population of HBCUs has remained predominantly Black.

However, a report from the Center for Minority Serving Institutions (Gasman, 2013) has revealed HBCUs are diversifying. In the 1950s, HBCUs were nearly 100% Black, but presently students from this demographic makeup roughly 78% of the HBCU undergraduate student population nationally, with the remainder composed of other racial groups (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013).[2] HBCUs enroll 10% of White, 4% of Latino, and 1% of Asian American students at the undergraduate level (NCES, 2013).[3] Since 2000, HBCUs have more than doubled their enroll-

[1] In this study, we use the terms *Asian American* as a general term that refers to persons who trace their origin to Asian and Pacific Islander ancestry. We also use the terms *Latina* and *Latino* (*Latina/os*) to refer to persons who trace their origin to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Spanish speaking Central and South American countries, and other Spanish cultures (Fry, 2007). Although we recognize the complexities associated with both of these socially and politically defined racial categories, we acknowledge and preserve the essence of how the participants identified themselves racially and ethnically in this study.

[2] Although there are 105 historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) only has data on a 100 HBCUs because three are unaccredited, and IPEDS does not consider two as HBCUs (Gasman, Samayoa, Nguyen, Commodore, & Boland, 2014).

[3] Those who reported as nonresident alien, Native American, Native Hawaiian, two or more races, race–ethnicity unknown were not included.

ment of Asian American students and have increased their enrollment of Latino students by 90% (Lee, 2015).

As more Black students opt to attend PWIs (Sissoko & Shiau, 2005) and for-profit institutions (Patton, 2012), some HBCUs are actively recruiting non-Black students to remain economically healthy (Gasman, 2009; Lee, 2013). Moreover, given that *Adams v. Richardson* (1972) and *United States v. Fordice* (1992) compelled public HBCUs to increase the racial diversification of their student bodies, the enrollment of non-Black students may continue to increase (Gasman, 2009; Lee, 2012; Paddock, 2013). Three 4-year HBCUs (i.e., Lincoln University of Missouri, West Virginia State University, and Bluefield State College) now have majority non-Black student enrollments, and one 2-year HBCU (St. Philip's College) has a majority Hispanic student enrollment and is recognized as a Hispanic Serving Institution (St. Philip's College, 2014).

Although a limited but growing body of literature has examined the experiences of White students (Carter & Fountaine, 2012; Closson & Henry, 2008; Conrad, Brier, & Braxton, 1997; Hall & Closson, 2005; Nixon & Henry, 1991; Peterson & Hamrick, 2009; Strayhorn, 2010) at HBCUs, research on Asian American and Latino students is limited. For example, although some research (e.g., Conrad et al., 1997) has delineated factors that encourage White students to enroll in HBCUs (e.g., cost, program quality, or proximity to home), no empirical study has explored factors motivating Asian American and Latino students to attend HBCUs. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to better understand the college choice process for Asian American and Latino students at HBCUs.[4] Data for this study emerged from a study that focused not only on the college choice process for Asian American and Latino students but also on their perceptions of campus climate and critical factors to their success at HBCUs. Given this, the following questions guided this study:

- What influenced Asian American and Latino students' decision to enroll into an HBCU?
- What challenges, if any, did Asian American and Latino students encounter on enrolling in an HBCU? How did they overcome those challenges?

Although a number of themes emerged from this study, this study focuses specifically on the college choice process for Asian American and Latino students at HBCUs (see Footnote 4). To better help illustrate the relevance of this article, we will review literature on the college choice process.

Review of Literature on the College Choice Process

Scholars have composed models to explain the college choice process for students (e.g., Chapman, 1981; Kotler, 1976). For example, Kotler (1976) noted that the college selection process consisted of seven stages, whereas Hossler and Gallagher (1987) proposed that students engage in a three-stage model as they begin the college search process. Specifically, Hossler and Gallagher's model begins with *predisposition,* which involves students making the decision to continue their education beyond high school. Once students decide to attend college, they generally turn to their social networks and examine external and institutional information to help inform types of institutions in which they should consider applying (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Finally, in choice phase of the model, students narrow down colleges to attend and eventually decide on a specific institution in which to enroll (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

In the context of HBCUs, research has revealed the college choice process for Black and White students (Astin & Cross, 1981; Freeman, 1999, 2005; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1995). For example, McDonough et al. (1995) found that a student's religion, the institution's academic reputation, and relatives served as the impetus for Black students to attend an HBCU. Similarly, Freeman (1999) identified three influences on Black students' decision to consider attending HBCUs: (a) knowing someone who attended an HBCU; (b) seeking cultural empowerment and knowledge; and (c) lacking cultural awareness. Moreover, research has shown that White students enroll in HBCUs because of

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[4] While we recognize that Asian Americans and Latino persons are two vastly different racial and cultural groups, in this article, we grouped them together because of the commonalities in their experiences in selecting and attending an historically Black college or university.

the quality of their academic programs, availability of financial support, low cost of tuition, and a sense of feeling welcomed and supported (Conrad et al., 1997).

Although prior research has explored factors that encourage Asian American and Latino students to attend PWIs (Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Kim, 2004; Kim & Gasman, 2011; Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, & Mc-Donough, 2004), research on what motivates Asian American and Latino students to attend HBCUs is nonexistent. For example, in a qualitative study with 14 Asian American individuals at a PWI, Kim and Gasman (2011) revealed that institutional fit, parents' opinions, institutional reputation–prestige, and proximity to home played a role in the college choice process for the participants. Similarly, using data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, Teranishi et al. (2004) examined the college choice process for five ethnic groups (e.g., Chinese American, Filipino American, Japanese American, Korean American, and Southeast Asian American). They found differences among the groups related to use of information and guidance, influence of cost and aid, influence of prestige–reputation, and college applications and choices. For example, although Japanese and Korean Americans were less inclined to factor distance of the college into their decision to attend the institution, Filipino and Southeast Asian American individuals from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds were more likely to attend a college because it was close to home.

Equally significant, in a qualitative study on the college choice progress for 20 Latina seniors attending a large urban high school in California, Ceja (2006) noted that although their parents had high aspirations for the participants, in many cases, the parents lacked information about the college process. Nevertheless, the participants gained critical information about college and the application process from their siblings. Moreover, Kim (2004) found that accessibility to financial aid played a major role in institutional selection for Latino students. On the same accord, O'Connor, Hammack, and Scott (2010) argued that accessibility to social capital increased Latino students' knowledge about the financial process, which later influenced their enrollment in 4-year institutions.

Methodology

Data for this study emerged from a case study that focused not only on the college choice process for Asian American and Latino individuals at HBCUs but also on their campus experiences and critical factors to their success at these institutions. Given this approach, data were collected from multiple sources (e.g., interviews, observations, and perusing the institution's webpage as well as other documents) in a bounded system. The study's epistemological approach was anchored in the constructivist tradition to construct knowledge, understanding, and meaning through human interactions (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). Given that Charmaz (2000) recommended that grounded theory strategies can be incorporated into other qualitative perspectives, tenets of grounded theory strategies were used to analyze the data. Because of this approach, this study did not use a pure grounded theory approach in which a theory would emerge.

Geographic Location

This study was conducted at East Coast University (ECU; a pseudonym)—a public, HBCU located in a mid-Atlantic state. We selected ECU because of our prior professional relationships with administrators and staff, who helped us gain access to the student population. Less than 10,000 students were enrolled at ECU when data were collected during the 2013–2014 academic year; approximately 82% were Black.

Participants

To recruit participants, we sought the help of staff, administrators, and graduate students at ECU to select students who met the study's criteria of identifying as an Asian American or Latino individual. Specifically, the ECU contacts sent out announcements about the study to various student e-mail Listservs. This process resulted in seven participants who contacted the researchers to indicate their interest in the study. Administrators at ECU also referred two students to the researchers. Additional participants were recruited through *snowball sampling*. Snowball sampling is the process of asking those who have participated in the study to refer others who meet the study's criteria (Jones et

al., 2006). This process resulted in three participants.

Overall, the sample consisted of 12 students—6 were Asian American and 6 were Latino. The participants' ethnic backgrounds included Bengali, Chinese, Dominican, Filipino, Mexican, Panamanian, Puerto Rican, Nepalese, and Vietnamese. The study included 7 women and 5 men. The participants' ages ranged from 19–26 years, and their majors consisted of education, electrical and computer engineering, business administration, nursing, sociology, family and consumer science, and political science. Eight students reported they were first-generation college students (i.e., from a family where no parent or guardian has earned a baccalaureate degree; Choy, 2001). Six lived in urban cities, four lived in suburban cities, two lived in rural environments, and four were from out of state. Information about the participants is provided in Table 1.

Data Collection

We conducted one face-to-face in-depth interview, which ranged from 90 to 110 min, with each participant. As an incentive and recruitment method, all participants received a $20 gift certificate for their participation. Before beginning the interviews, participants signed a consent form and completed a brief demographic form. The demographic form allowed the researchers to collect information, such as the participants' age, race and ethnicity, and college major.

Although a standard interview protocol was used to conduct the interviews, discussions often became conversational, which allowed the researchers and participants to mutually share experiences relevant to the topic of discussion, encouraging deeper reflection among participants. Although we included the primary questions that guided the larger study, examples of questions that focused specifically on this study's emphasis on the college choice process for Asian American and Latino students at HBCUs included the following: (a) What did you know about HBCUs before applying to college? (b) How did you learn about HBCUs? What messages were given to you? (c) What influenced you to consider attending an HBCU? (d) What factors mattered most when you decided to attend an HBCU? Observations regarding the ways in which participants responded to questions and their willingness to engage in the interview were recorded throughout the process of data collection.

We also conducted follow-up phone interviews with four participants, which ranged from 15 to 25 min. The decision to conduct these interviews was prompted by listening to the digital recording and consulting field notes for each person we interviewed and discerning that we missed opportunities to probe or clarify responses with these participants. Phone interviews were conducted in lieu of face-to-face interviews because the researchers and the participants had difficulty scheduling a subsequent face-to-face interview.

Researchers' Positionality

For any qualitative study it is important to discuss how the position of the researcher in-

Table 1
Asian American and Latina/o Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race/ethnicity	Generation attending college	In state/out of state
Jack	21	Male	Asian American/Bengali	2nd	In state
Laura	22	Female	Asian American/Chinese	1st	In state
Stacy	24	Female	Asian American/Filipino	1st	In state
Kelly	20	Female	Asian American/Malaysian	1st	Out of state
Steward	24	Male	Asian American/Nepali	1st	In state
Ryan	26	Male	Asian American/Vietnamese	1st	In state
Marcella	22	Female	Latina/did not specify	2nd	In state
Janet	22	Female	Latina/Dominican	2nd	In state
Michelle	20	Female	Latina/Mexican	1st	Out of state
Rochelle	21	Female	Latina/Panamanian	1st	Out of state
Marc	21	Male	Latino/Puerto Rican	1st	Out of state
Omar	18	Male	Latino/Puerto Rican	2nd	In state

fluences data collection, analysis, and interpretations (Jones et al., 2006). This research was conducted by one Black man, one Filipino American woman, one Black woman, and one Latino woman; all researchers were affiliated with a PWI when data were collected. Specifically, the Black male and Filipino American female researchers conducted all of the interviews together, whereas the Black female and Latino female researchers took notes during all of the interviews. Our scholarly interests are similar in that they assess campus climate across institutional types (e.g., HBCUs and other minority serving institutions), investigate factors promoting the success of students of color specifically at HBCUs, and examine racial–ethnic disparities in college student outcomes. One key difference among the researchers is that the Black male researcher attended an HBCU for his graduate training, whereas the other researchers attended PWIs for all of their educational training. Given that the Black male researcher spent extensive time on the campus for an HBCU as a graduate student, he noticed that many non-Black students with whom he encountered appeared lonely and seemed out of place on campus. These observations served as hunches about the experiences of non-Black students at HBCUs and informed the development of questions used in this study. To counter any bias that may have resulted from any of the researchers' experiences, we debriefed with one another throughout the research process and engaged with five peer debriefers (see credibility and trustworthiness). Thus, we allowed the findings to emerge independent of our observations or prior research experience.

As researchers, we believe an increased level of trust and comfort was established immediately with participants. One critical factor we believe facilitated the establishment of trust was our self-disclosure during the interviews. Specifically, we were able to relate to participants by sharing experiences of being students at diverse institutional types (e.g., PWIs and HBCUs), which seemed to help relax the participants and normalize some of their experiences. We believe this allowed for a greater sense of comfort in the dialogue. Evidence of participants' sense of comfort was seen after the conclusion of the interviews, where some of them thanked us for being interested in their stories and allowing them an opportunity to talk about their experiences at ECU.

Data Analysis

We engaged in the constant comparison of data, including reviewing memos, observations, and interview transcripts to identify recurring patterns (Jones et al., 2006). According to Jones et al., constant comparative analysis engages the researcher in a process of collecting and analyzing the data simultaneously at "all stages of the data collection and interpretation process, and results in the identification of codes" (p. 44). As the data became increasingly voluminous, we used ATLAS.ti (version 5.0), a qualitative data management software program, to help organize, manage, and code the data.

We used open coding, which involved analyzing the data line by line, to identify initial concepts and categories related to each phenomenon. The line-by-line coding allowed for themes to emerge from the data and become aggregated into response patterns (Jones et al., 2006). We then performed axial and selective coding procedures. Specifically, with axial coding, data were reanalyzed to determine words or patterns that could be combined or collapsed into similar categories. Last, selective coding was used to elucidate detailed examples and accounts, which helped us to solidify and cluster the data into the themes presented in the findings section of this article. In discussing the findings, we present excerpts from the participants' responses verbatim to preserve the essence of their voices. We used pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of each participant.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

To ensure the data's trustworthiness, we also conducted member checks by returning the transcribed interviews to all participants so they could review transcriptions to ensure that they were not misquoted. As the study progressed, participants were provided an opportunity to review our interpretations of the data. Last, we used feedback from five peer debriefers, who were well versed in in-depth interview methods and active researchers on HBCUs, to ensure credibility. Similar to the participants, the debriefers were provided with raw transcripts from each participant and later our interpretation of the data. The debriefers reanalyzed significant portions of the data and engaged the

researchers in a series of ongoing discussions regarding the tentative meanings made of the participants' experiences throughout the research process (Jones et al., 2006).

Findings

In this section, we summarize three themes that emerged from the interviews. The first theme reveals that though all participants were encouraged to attend college, their motivation for doing so came from different sources, such as parents, peers, mentors, and cultural expectations. In the second theme, participants explain that despite attending ECU, some were quite knowledgeable about HBCUs and others had limited knowledge. In the final theme, participants discuss how ECU's financial incentives as well as other practical reasons played a role in their decision to attend the institution.

Encouragement and an Expectation to Attend College

All of the participants in the study stated their parents, especially their mothers, and close family members expected them to attend college. In other words, it was not a choice about whether to attend college but where to attend college. Although the expectation to attend college may not appear to be out of the ordinary, the students' decision to attend was strongly linked to cultural expectations from their family members. Cultural expectations within the context of this theme were often unsaid by their parents, but the students felt a sense of responsibility to take care of their immigrant parents, especially by fulfilling parents' hope for their children to be successful. For example, Omar, a Puerto Rican engineering major, grew up in a neighborhood he described as "a lot of teens running amuck doing what they want, not going to school, cutting class, in gangs, doing drugs." He continued to explain his mom's influence and expectations for him to attend college. Specifically, he shared the following:

> My mother, she always wanted me to be better than what she was, so she wanted me to attend college right after high school. She had me very involved in high school, do extracurricular activities, made sure I was on top of my school and everything like that. So the way she raised me really motivated me to go to college and prepare me for my future.

Jack, a Bengali student majoring in informational systems, grew up in a similar situation to Omar. Like the other participants, cultural expectations were strong in Jack's case because, although his mother did not verbally tell him, Jack felt the responsibility to support and take care of her. He shared that besides his own motivation to go to college, his mother did not directly say he had to go to college, but he felt his mom expected him to go to college. He noted,

> My mom is a single mother, and she basically just worked. I chose to do my homework. I chose to do everything. I guess I was in the lower middle class. My mom she had to do everything for me. Because she took care of me, I know she wants me to help take care of her . . . going to college will help me provide for her.

Similar to Omar and Jack, Marc, a Puerto Rican business administration major, explained that his mom always wanted him to go to college: "that's all she spoke about . . . she would tell people that I'm going to college." Marc's mother is a domestic worker in Puerto Rico. She often shared with Marc that she did not want him to experience the same difficult times she faced as a high school dropout; therefore, Marc felt a strong need to meet his mother's expectation to attend college.

Janet, a Dominican student, majoring in family and consumer science, stated that, "Not going to college was not a choice in my house." She shared that she grew up in a household with strict parents who felt that "Just having a trade at something wasn't enough." Stacy, a Filipina who was majoring in nursing, came from a large family with many siblings. She explained that her parents came to America so that she could attend college and eventually help her family and people in the Philippines. Asked about the expectation to attend college, she said, "It's a must, I was brought up like that." She also experienced similar cultural expectations and sentiments to the other participants, although her family did not directly tell her, she still felt a strong sense that attending college was a means for her to then support and give back to her family and relatives after college. Stacy said, "going to college . . . and majoring in nursing, we like to help our family . . . they helped me with everything, [my] number one focus, family comes first."

Participants also attributed the expectation to attend college to their peers with whom they attended high school or mentors with similar life experiences. Michelle, a Mexican American majoring in sociology, shared that in addition to her parents' expectations of her attending college, she surrounded herself with peers who wanted to attend college. Michelle, who was also a student athlete, broached that her high school softball team was "Especially for athletes who wanted to go to college. The high school classes I took were mainly college prep. It was competitive but positive." Laura, a Chinese American, majoring in education and vocal performance, echoed similar sentiments. Laura attended a diverse high school where the majority of the students were expected to go to college.

> In my [educational] community everybody in high school moved on to a university afterward. So they kind of pushed me to also go. The school that I went to was very diverse. We had Asians, Caucasians, [Blacks] every kind of racial background there. And the majority of the students were encouraged to go to college, if it wasn't a 4-year institution it was a 2-year college.

Moreover, the desire to attend college was also further influenced by mentors or advisors who had similar life experiences to the students and were willing to help them with the process. Omar shared that he had advisors at school who believed in him and his abilities. They would often say, "You would do great in college. I can see the potential you have." His advisors' encouragement provided much confidence in his ability to attend and succeed in college. Overall, attending college for all of the participants was an expectation, more specifically a cultural expectation. There was not a doubt about whether they were going to college, although their next step was to decide which college options were best suited for them.

Knowledge About HBCUs

The second theme centered on the students' knowledge about HBCUs and their choice to attend an HBCU. Specifically, seven participants were knowledgeable about HBCUs and made a deliberate decision to attend ECU. For a number of them, their knowledge about HBCUs stemmed from interactions with peers who knew about HBCUs. For example, Laura had prior knowledge of HBCUs before applying.

She attributed her knowledge about HBCUs to her close friend, who she mentioned is Black, as her friend provided more information and gave her a better idea about these institutions. Laura shared, "I heard about other HBCUs, I didn't know [ECU] existed. I knew Howard existed and there's another one that I forgot. But my best friend is Black, so she kind of introduced HBCUs to me."

Laura shared that the more informed she was about ECU, the more excited she became about the possibility of attending the university. She stated,

> So I just chose [it], and plus it has a really good choir program and music department . . . I'm a music minor so I wanted to find a place that was really good with their music department. So that kind of pulled me into it.

Omar conveyed similar sentiments about his choice of applying to an HBCU because he knew this particular institution had a reputable engineering program. He visited [ECU] a few times through afterschool programs and decided that this was the best option for him. "I came for two years [for the after school program] then decided to apply. I knew they had a good engineering program." Steward, a Nepalese student, majoring in electrical engineering, was well informed about HBCUs because his cousin attended one and in talking with his friends, he was convinced that he needed to apply. He shared,

> Yeah, my cousin really helped me by giving some advice and suggestions. He told me, "When you go to Black schools, concentrate on the academics" . . . He was like, "Once you graduate, it's not that you go to the company to ask for a job . . . they come to you. They'll just grab you before you graduate."

Similar to Laura, Omar, and Steward, Janet was very familiar with HBCUs and their mission. She was familiar with the curriculum, the history of HBCUs, and "wanted to attend an HBCU." As someone who planned to be a social worker, she also chose to attend an HBCU because she thought it would help prepare her for working with the urban community. She commented,

> An HBCU is supposed to [offer] a curriculum based on [Black people], you know geared toward the urban community. Honestly, I want to be a social worker in an urban community. So I felt like a HBCU would give me the best education geared toward dealing with the kind of people that I wanted to deal with.

Jack always wanted to attend an HBCU. According to Jack, who grew up in a diverse neighborhood, he chose to attend [ECU] because "Most of my friends are [Black] . . . I've been around [Black people] my whole life." Most of the information he received about HBCUs was through conversations he had with his friends. Michelle knew about HBCUs. However, she received many negative comments from her peers about HBCUs having a bad reputation. Michelle described her conversation with her friends at home:

> I knew what an HBCU was, but it was more of a negative connotation from peers like, "Oh you're going to an all-Black school?" Like [they were] downplaying the school. I guess they have a bad reputation. It was all summed up, I guess, that education isn't valued as much from schools like that . . . and they're like, "you sure you want to [go there]?"

Regardless of the disapproving comments from her peers, Michelle still decided to attend an HBCU. As a student athlete, attending college was important for her especially since she wanted to continue playing softball.

Although a number of the participants knew about HBCUs and understood their mission, five participants had very limited knowledge about HBCUs before and even after they applied to ECU. For some of the participants, their knowledge about HBCUs was so limited, they were not even aware that they applied to an HBCU. However, even with little to no knowledge about HBCUs, those particular students shared that they are still satisfied with their decision to attend. For example, Stacy did not know the university she applied to was an HBCU. Instead, she heard about ECU through talking with some friends who told her it was a good school and she should apply. Also, since it was the closest school to home, she decided to apply. She shared,

> When I applied to [ECU], I didn't know it was [known as a] Black school. Yeah, so I didn't really look at it like that. I had applied to [another university farther away] and I had to consider how close it is to my house. I work at a restaurant and I know a lot of people and they were like, "Have you picked out your school yet?" And I was like, "No I haven't." This one person who went to ECU said it was a really good school. So I applied there, and I got in.

On a similar note, Kelly, a business administration major, who identified as Malaysian, and Rachelle, a Panamanian student majoring in political science, did not know anything about HBCUs except that they thought it was majority [Black] before they applied. They are both student athletes who were recruited at the same time. They both shared that the recruiter (their coach) did not tell them that it was an HBCU. All they knew was that he was pinpointing minority players. Kelly shared,

> I didn't know what an HBCU was because back home there's no such thing. I just didn't know that [ECU] was an HBCU until I got here . . . he [my coach] didn't really say it was an HBCU. He never really said anything. He just said [ECU].

The participants' knowledge about HBCUs varied. Some students were familiar with HBCUs and clearly understood why they wanted to attend. However, the majority of those who were not familiar with HBCUs prior to applying were not disappointed by their decision to attend one. This study further reveals that peers who had prior knowledge about HBCUs shaped and influenced the decision-making process for these students. It is interesting that in this theme, each of the participants were very much aware of their own ethnic identity; that is, that they were a non-Black student attending an HBCU. However, this awareness did not necessarily impede their decision to attend nor did it produce a negative perception of the HBCU. In sum, the majority of the participants discussed more about their connection to the Black culture and community because they were either familiar with or grew up in a similar environment. Still for those who were not familiar with HBCUs before they attended, how the participants identified ethnically did not play a negative role in their decision to attend an HBCU as they all said that they did not regret their decision.

Financial and Practical Reasons for Attending an HBCU

The third theme regarding students' decision to attend an HBCU was because of financial and other practical reasons. Financial reasons included scholarships offered to them and the low cost of tuition. Still for others, practical reasons included the university being close to home thus making it financially feasible for them and their families. In addition, all of the participants mentioned financial incentives and affordability as one of their main reasons for attending an HBCU.

For example, Ryan, a psychology major who identified as Vietnamese American, and Stacy mainly decided to attend because of the proximity to their home and their families. Since both were working to support their parents and siblings as well as to help pay for their school expenses, commuting from home was most beneficial for them. Stacy shared, "The tuition fees and expenses [were low] so I picked ECU." Similarly, Jack was concerned about his mom who lives alone. He also shared that ECU was a good option for him because the fees were low and he needed to attend a school that was close to his home.

A number of participants mentioned the financial incentives such as diversity grants offered by the school. ECU awarded diversity scholarships to non-Black students who attended the institution. Additionally, some students received honors scholarships that further solidified their desire to attend the university. Kelly, who earlier said that she did not know anything about HBCUs, admittedly shared that if the financial aid was not offered, more specifically her athletic scholarship, she would not have attended.

Janet, who attended ECU because of the diversity grant, was also concerned about finances. Although it was financially challenging her first 2 years, she sought out all of the funding opportunities available to her. She also confessed that she felt ECU's financial aid staff was extremely helpful and supportive as she pursued other funding opportunities. She shared,

> All I had was my diversity grant. This lady at the financial aid office helped and forwarded a list of stuff, so I started applying to those things. And I applied for a scholarship . . . I just had to write a thousand word essay about my experiences at an HBCU. It was like a thousand dollars.

Although the diversity grant factored into other participants' decision to attend ECU, Jack mentioned, after he enrolled and rented an apartment, the university informed him that it ran out of funds and could not provide this aid to him. He was, for a moment, in a state of panic but after talking with a representative in the financial aid department, the institution promised to provide some financial assistance the following semester. He shared,

> And I was like, "Oh my goodness!" [after finding out they ran out of funds]. I'm already here. I got my

apartment. I got everything else. I'm like, "It's ok. It will just take a little longer to pay off [my loans] but that's fine." But it kind of hurt my feelings. I've already talked to them [financial aid office], and they're going to try to give it to me next semester.

In sum, the participants underscored that ECU's proximity to their homes, low tuition and fees, as well as the financial aid incentives factored into their decision to attending this HBCU. The diversity grant or other financial incentives issued to the participants not only attracted them to ECU but also relieved some financial stress with their school expenses.

Discussion

In this article, we underscored the critical aspects involved in the college choice process for Asian American and Latino students at an HBCU. On the basis of findings from this study, we have a better understanding of some of the salient factors that motivated students from these demographics to attend an HBCU. First, and not specific to HBCUs, the findings from this study reinforced the important role that family members, peers, mentors, and cultural expectations play in encouraging Asian American and Latino students to attend college. For example, in a study that Kim and Gasman (2011) conducted with 14 Asian American students at an elite, private university in the Northeast, they found that cultural expectations, parents, friends, teachers, and counselors played a critical role in the participants' decision to attend college.

Moreover, other studies have found that the parents of Latino students are supportive of their children's pursuit to attend higher education (Alva, 1995; Garcia, 2001) and that peers, family, and institutional agents from high school or college play an important role in where Latino students attend college (Nuñez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, & Vázquez, 2013). It is interesting that although each participant was aware of their ethnic identity, the majority did not discuss how their identity influenced their decision to attend an HBCU. Perhaps if this study had focused more intentionally on the role that identity play into the decision-making process for Asian American and Latino individuals who attend HBCUs, we might have collected data on the ways in which ethnic identity impacts Asian American and La-

tino individuals' decision to attend HBCUs. To this end, future research should be more intentional about examining the role that identity plays into the college choice process for Asian American and Latino students at HBCUs.

The findings from this study also shed light on how participants learned about HBCUs and how they could be viable options for them to attain a college education. As noted, although some participants were not aware of HBCUs before they attended one, many of the participants were aware of HBCUs and the positive attributes of these institutions. The participants also emphasized that knowing HBCUs offered majors that matched their interests and provided opportunities to support their professional goals helped them decide whether HBCUs were good options for them. For example, students knew the engineering program as well as the business programs at ECU had a positive reputation. Other students underscored that they wanted to work with particular populations in their profession and an HBCU provided such an environment. Similarly, others explained they were well aware of the good reputation that HBCUs had and felt confident they would be guaranteed a good job after graduation. That Asian American and Latino participants in this study were encouraged to attend ECU because of the quality and reputation of its academic programs is consistent with research regarding White students' reasons for attending HBCUs (Conrad et al., 1997). Specifically, Conrad et al. (1997) found that White students were motivated to attend public HBCUs because they offered academic programs in fields, such as business, education, engineering, nursing, and public administration. Oddly enough, many of these academic programs attracted Asian American and Latino students to HBCUs.

Despite that participants were encouraged to attend ECU because of the strength and reputation of its academic programs, some participants shared that their friends did not hold HBCUs in high esteem when they disclosed to them that they decided to attend one. Although this theme is inconsistent with Freeman's (1999, 2005) research on the college choice process for Black students at HBCUs, it parallels some empirical and anecdotal evidence on the perceptions that some Black students have of HBCUs. For example, in a qualitative study of 19 Black students enrolled in a PWI, Palmer, Maramba, and Lee (2010) found that participants did not consider attending HBCUs because they regarded them as "party schools" and felt they lacked academic rigor. Dancy (2005) echoed these findings in an article published in *Black Issues in Higher Education.*

Aside from attending ECU because of the quality of its academic programs, some participants attended an HBCU because of its proximity to their homes. Research has shown that Asian American individuals in general (Kim & Gasman, 2011) and Filipino persons as well as Southeast Asian American individuals specifically are more likely to attend colleges near their home (Teranishi et al., 2004). Similarly, research has also shown that Latino students are more inclined to attend institutions close to home because they are viewed as more affordable options (Kim, 2004; Martinez, 2013; O'Connor et al., 2010).

Finally, the findings from this study indicated that many of the participants attended ECU because of its low tuition and financial assistance it provided to non-Black students. Research has shown that in comparison to their private HBCU counterparts as well as their public PWI peers, public HBCUs generally have lower tuition (Brown & Davis, 2001). Although research has indicated that minority students are more likely to attend an institution because of the availability of financial resources (St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005), research suggests that access to financial assistance may be especially important to the institution selection process of Latino students (Nuñez et al., 2013) and Asian American students (Chang, Park, Lin, Poon, & Nakanishi, 2007) in general as well as Filipino and Southeast Asian American students specifically (Teranishi et al., 2004). It is interesting that although ECU offered diversity grants to increase its enrollment of non-Black students, Paddock (2013) indicated that many HBCUs are offering such grants or scholarships to non-Black students to comply with the implications of *United States v. Fordice* (1992), which mandates that they recruit and retain a specified percentage of non-Black students.

Limitations

This study was conducted with 12 participants at one HBCU. Nevertheless, we provided thick description of the institutional context to

allow readers to assess the transferability of findings to similar contexts. In addition, given that we selected ECU out of convenience and not because it has a sizable enrollment of non-Black students, our findings should be interpreted with caution. However, with the exception of a few HBCUs whose student enrollment is composed of 40% or more of non-Black students (e.g., Lincoln University of Missouri, West Virginia State University, and Bluefield State College; NCES, 2013), ECU's enrollment numbers for non-Black students are consistent with many HBCUs. Moreover, interviews may not be an effective way to collect reliable information when the questions pertain to matters the participants perceive as personally sensitive; thus, to address this limitation, future studies on this topic might use a mixed-method approach.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

Research has shown that although fewer Black students have opted to enter HBCUs over the years, there has been a gradual increase in the number of Asian American and Latino students enrolling in HBCUs. On the basis of data from this study, in this section, we will provide implications for future research and practice aimed at helping HBCUs recruit more students from these demographics.

First, in terms of practice, there are a number of opportunities that HBCUs can pursue to further attract Asian American and Latino students. For example, all of the study participants had family members, peers, and or mentors who expected and encouraged them to attend college. Some of the family members and peers knew about HBCUs. In some cases, the participants' peers even attended an HBCU. Indeed, their peers further encouraged, or in a few cases, attempted to discourage them from attending an HBCU. Given the role that peers can play in influencing one to attend a particular institution, HBCUs can further improve recruitment practices by highlighting the experiences of current students in the recruitment process. For example, HBCUs can consider including peers in campus visits or college fairs, which can help foster relationships between current and prospective students. HBCU recruitment practices may also benefit from mentor programs where current students advise prospective students

through the application process. This way, prospective students can learn more about the HBCU's culture, ask questions about campus life, and develop friendships that may assist in their transition to college. Further, HBCUs can use their social media outlets (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) to feature HBCU students, host virtual recruitment events, or coordinate online question-and-answer sessions with current students and prospective students.

In regard to addressing the important influence that family members have in encouraging students to attend college, institutions can also consider how to better inform parents or family members about the benefits of attending an HBCU. HBCUs can develop information sessions in the evenings or on Saturdays, and these sessions may be bilingual, depending on local demographics. These face-to-face meetings can provide an opportunity for families to learn about the history of HBCUs as well as the academic program offerings and financial resources available to students. Better information at this level can increase options for students who do not know about or have limited information about HBCUs. Because relationships were instrumental to the participants' college choice process, HBCUs may also consider forming parents' associations for parents to meet locally and support one another. These local associations can also host recruitment events where prospective HBCU parents are invited to meet current HBCU parents.

In addition, many Asian American and Latino participants were encouraged to attend ECU because of the school's proximity to their homes, low tuition and fees, and reputable academic programs. To this end, as suggested by Gasman and Bowman (2011), HBCUs need to do a better job at telling their story and disseminating information about their institutions. A number of constituents can be involved in this endeavor, and HBCUs must be at the forefront in marketing themselves and educating communities, high schools, counselors, and students on the mission and opportunities at HBCUs. For example, college recruitment fairs might be one such venue to increase visibility. Also, HBCUs may consider inviting local schools and community colleges to visit their campus to introduce students to the culture and context of HBCUs. Further, HBCUs may benefit from developing and nurturing partnerships where they can ex-

change student workers or volunteers with local high schools and community colleges. These student exchanges may focus on leadership development or research projects. Ultimately, they can help promote the visibility of the HBCU, while providing students with valuable work and research experience.

In addition, offering financial assistance in the form of scholarships or diversity grants really seemed to have encouraged many of the participants to attend ECU. In terms of diversity grants, it is apparent that this practice is not endemic to the HBCU in this study, as other HBCUs appear to be offering non-Black students such grants or scholarships to help encourage their enrollment (Paddock, 2013). While HBCUs, particularly public HBCUs, may be offering financial assistance to non-Black students to comply with *Fordice,* if this money is coming from a finite source, we wonder how this might impact the enrollment of non-Black students at HBCUs when the money is depleted. Given that this is one of the factors motivating Asian American and Latino students to attend HBCUs, while we recommend that HBCUs continue this practice, we suggest that they explore other alternatives that might be equally as effective in encouraging Asian American and Latino students to attend HBCUs.

Given that this is the first study to focus on factors that encouraged Asian American and Latino individuals to attend public HBCUs, additional research on this topic is warranted. This is particularly true because some participants attended ECU by happenstance and others were intentional in their decision to enroll. Moreover, future research on the college choice process for Asian American and Latino students should consider the institutional context of public HBCUs vis-à-vis private HBCUs. As indicated, the tuition of public HBCUs is generally lower than many private HBCUs. To this end, Asian American and Latino students at private HBCUs may be attending these institutions for different reasons than their counterparts at public HBCUs.

Finally, future research on the college choice process for Asian American and Latino students at HBCUs should be more intentional about exploring within group differences among these demographics. As noted in the footnote on page one, there is vast ethnic diversity within the Asian American and Latino communities. Though still quite limited, there is more research that considers the ethnic diversity within the Asian American community than the Latino community (Nuñez et al., 2013). Given this, despite the small sample size of this study, we attempted to be attentive to the ethnic diversity among the Asian American students in our study more so than the Latino students because there is extant literature that allows for discerning similarities and differences with the findings of our study. As a result, one of the interesting observations we noticed is that certain ethnic groups within the Asian American community may be more inclined to attend public HBCUs. Future research on this topic that considers ethnic differences among Asian Americans at HBCUs may help confirm or disapprove our observation.

Conclusion

HBCUs were created as a conduit through which Black students could access higher education. Although these institutions never prohibited the enrollment of non-Black student populations, the student population of most HBCUs is predominantly Black. Nevertheless, given the ebb in the enrollment of Black students attending HBCUs, research has suggested that HBCUs must be more intentional about recruiting and retaining non-Black students to help ensure their survival. Because of this, and other factors (i.e., *Fordice*), some HBCUs are actively recruiting a racially diverse student body. This article has provided critical insight into the influences encouraging Asian American and Latino students to attend an HBCU. The information discussed in this article could be immensely helpful to HBCU administrators as they seek to recruit and retain Asian American and Latino students on their campuses.

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