

**Social Transition and Connection:
A Study of Female Groups Students at
Indiana University Bloomington**

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TRIO programs exist to provide at-risk students with the tools they need to succeed in higher education. African American women comprise a large number of students participating in these programs. This study focuses on the stories of African American women's social transition and connection to a predominantly White institution through participation in Groups, a TRIO program at Indiana University Bloomington. Results indicate that participation in Groups facilitated the social transition and connection of these women.

Introduction

The 1960s ushered in a critical period in higher education, during which the Higher Education Act was passed and Pell Grants and TRIO programs were established (Cohen & Nee, 2000). The creation of Pell Grants provided students with federal financial assistance to access institutions of higher education. TRIO programs were designed to identify promising disadvantaged students, prepare them for college, provide information on academic and financial opportunities, and provide tutoring and support services to students once they arrived on campus (Hauptman & Smith, 1994).

As a result of both Pell Grants and TRIO programs, the 1970s saw an increase in the number of African Americans enrolling in higher education (Cohen & Nee, 2000). According to Wilson (1994), in 1965 there were 600,000 African Americans in college, and as of 2004, the number had increased to 2.1 million (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). This increase must be considered in the context of an overall increase in college enrollment. The proportions of African Americans in college must be consulted to get a true understanding of this trend. Despite a dip during the 1980s, the number of African Americans in college has continued to grow (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). In 1976 African Americans comprised 9.5% of all students enrolled in higher education, and by 2004 the total number had grown to 12.5%, an all-time high (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

According to Cohen and Nee (2000), African American communities have struggled to develop, maintain, and access all levels of education that ultimately provide young people with the resources they need to go to college. African American women have faced specific challenges in higher

education including adjustment to college, access to higher education due to race and gender, and development of one's sense of self at a predominantly White institution (PWI) (Johnson-Newman & Exum, 1998). In this study we examined the experiences of African American women participating in the Groups Student Support Services Program (Groups), a TRIO program at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB). Digging deeper into individual student experiences gives a more complete understanding of these issues, especially in terms of gender and race. While retention, grade point average (GPA), and graduation data exist regarding the academic performance of TRIO program participants, Kezar (2000) notes that little research has been completed on individual student experiences, specifically in summer bridge programs. Also, the variables of gender and race have not been isolated to examine social experiences in TRIO programs.

The purpose of this study is to assess how participation in Groups affects an African American female student's social transition and connection to IUB. In this context, *social* is defined as how a student spends her time out of class, and with whom she spends it. This can include, but is not limited to residence hall experiences, organizations and activities, and friendships formed. *Transition* refers to the shift from home and high school to college, with *connection* meaning how the student adjusts to the new college environment. Connection is used here to remove the implication that there is a need for a student to completely break ties with his or her home community (Guiffreda, 2006). In this paper, we will examine previous literature, outline the methods used to collect data on this topic, analyze and discuss the results, and finally make conclusions about student experiences. Future recommendations for research will also be provided.

Literature Review

National Information on TRIO Programs

There are more than 2,670 TRIO programs operating nationally serving over 870,000 students in the United States between the ages of 11 and 27 (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2006). Their purpose is to help students "overcome class, social, and cultural barriers to higher education" (Council for Opportunity in Education, p. 4). The United States Congress established TRIO programs to help low income Americans "enter college, graduate and move on to participate fully in America's economic and social life" asserting a commitment to provide "educational opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, ethnic background, or economic circumstance" (Council for Opportunity in Education, p. 4).

Currently, there are many studies that analyze the academic impact of TRIO programs on student participants (Astin, 1995; Council for Opportunity in Education, 2006; Lavin, 1965; York & Tross, 1994). For example,

national data show that students persist in college at more than double the rates of non-TRIO participants with similar characteristics (2006 directory, 2006). Evidence shows that student GPAs characteristically rise from one year to the next within cohorts of TRIO students (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2006). This is indicative of improved integration and academic performance, but is also partially attributed to the fact that the lower-performing students leave college and only the more successful students' GPAs are compiled.

Groups Student Support Services

Summer bridge programs are utilized at colleges and universities to help the transition of high school students to the college environment. Through data, Santa Rita and Bacote (1996) concluded that "summer bridge programs can help minority and low-income students adjust and adapt to college life and become members of their college community" (p. 15). Groups was established in 1968 to "address low college attendance rates among first-generation, low-income, and physically challenged students at Indiana University" (Cox, 2006). It annually admits a cohort of over 200 students who are introduced to university life during a six-week summer experience program. While Groups administrators make final admissions decisions, participants must have established Indiana residency and meet other performance-based standards related to high school grades and standardized test scores.

In order to understand how Groups fits into the IUB environment, it is important to note that African Americans comprise 4.4% of the total IUB undergraduate population (Indiana University Factbook 2005-06, 2006). More specifically, African American women make up 2.5% of undergraduates (Indiana University Factbook). Among African American Groups participants there is a 3 to 1 ratio of women to men (R. Gildersleeve, personal communication, October 10, 2006); specifically, the 2006 cohort had 114 women and 38 men completing the summer program. African American women make up 43% of the entire 2006 cohort (R. Gildersleeve, personal communication, October 10, 2006).

As in many other summer bridge programs, students who enter Groups often face "major barriers to success" including:

- 1) lack of self-confidence; 2) inappropriate expectations or knowledge about college environment; 3) lack of connection to the college community or external community; 4) lack of early validation within the college environment; 5) family members who do not understand the goals of college; and, 6) not involving faculty in summer bridge programs. (Terenzini, et al., 1996 as cited in Kezar, 2000, p. 3)

The program is designed to lessen these obstacles and provide students a better opportunity for success in college.

During the summer, students take three or more courses to prepare them for the college academic experience (Cox, 2006). To that end, Groups provides mentoring, academic advising, tutoring, and financial aid counseling to help these students succeed in college. Groups also assists students in learning how to navigate and engage in the campus which, together with academic support, ideally leads to persistence and graduation. Groups experiences an 80% persistence rate (R. Gildersleeve, personal communication, September 21, 2006), a figure which is consistent with national TRIO programs.

Student Persistence and Departure

As previously stated, one goal of Groups is to improve persistence in college reducing student departure. Tinto's Interactionalist Theory (1993) posited that student departure is based largely on pre-college attributes and the level of congruence between these attributes and the college environment. Pre-college attributes include socioeconomic status, parental educational achievement, gender, and race (Tinto, 1975). Tinto also identified a positive relationship between a student's social integration and his or her commitment to the institution of choice; thus, the student has a greater chance of persisting in college.

For students, connections will occur both at the institutional level and within subcultures on campus (Tinto, 1993). Groups can bridge the gap between IUB institutional culture and student subcultures for its participants, helping them to understand what to expect and how to find comfortable points of insertion at both levels. Braxton (2003) considered social integration to have the greatest influence on persistence and claimed that student affairs practitioners and programs are responsible for ensuring that social integration takes place as necessary. Studies suggest that social factors have great influence on the persistence of racial and ethnic minority students (Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Pascarella, 1985).

Despite the benefits of bridging such gaps, certain aspects of Tinto's original theory (1975) did not adequately address the issues minority students face. Critics claimed that Tinto described a student's need to break away from the home culture in order to successfully adapt to college culture, when this may be harmful to minority groups (Guiffreda, 2006; Tierney, 1992). Guiffreda stated, "a cultural advancement of Tinto's...theory begins by recognizing the need for minority college students to remain connected to supportive members of their home communities" (p. 457). The need for any student to adapt to a new culture on campus is clear; however, students from cultural minorities are said to benefit greatly from the support they receive

from family and friends at home once they are away at college (Guiffreda; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). In response to this critique Tinto (1993) described the need for students to establish "supportive personal relationships – with faculty, peers, and other significant persons" (p. 122) to help them handle the stress of college.

African Americans in Higher Education

In most aspects of higher education, African Americans differ greatly from their White counterparts. According to Nettles (1988) and Pope-Davis and Hargrove (2001), the parents of African American students are more frequently from urban areas, have fewer years of education, hold lower status employment, have a lower income, and experience higher divorce and separation rates than White students' parents. Allen (1992) noted that despite these social, economic, and educational disadvantages, "African-American college students have aspirations similar to (or higher than) their White counterparts; however, they attain these aspirations less often than White students" (p. 28). Reasons for low attainment are attributed to factors such as feelings of isolation, academic difficulty, and lack of educational resources (Allen; Fleming, 1984; Turner, 1994). Furthermore, students of color may have adjustment difficulties at a PWI where they must create their own social and cultural networks (Allen; Guiffreda, 2006; Tinto, 1993).

African American Women in Higher Education

In a 1988 study by the American Council on Education, African American women roughly outnumbered African American men by a 2 to 1 ratio in higher education (as cited in Allen, 1992). Twelve years later, African American women continued to comprise "the majority of African Americans enrolled in college and receiving associate, bachelor's, master's, doctorate, and professional degrees" (Cohen & Nee, 2000, p. 1161-2). Despite the higher enrollment of African American women than men in higher education, Allen noted that researchers should continue to critically examine African American women's college experiences. In other words, while rising enrollment is a positive trend, it alone does not paint an accurate picture of what it is like to be in college.

When looking at the experiences of African American women in higher education, one can see that they face additional challenges in college. This is especially true for African American women at PWIs as they identify with traditionally discriminated categories like race and gender (Johnson-Newman & Exum, 1998). They receive exclusionary or demeaning messages from the media which often play out in real terms on campus (Johnson-Newman & Exum). Along with these discriminatory messages, Allen (1992) also noted social class as an additional issue that African American women

face within higher education. These challenges can directly impact an African American woman's satisfaction and achievement in college (Allen).

These oppressive realities negatively impact not only one's adjustment to the college environment, but the establishment of a coherent sense of self, which is especially important for African American women at PWIs (Johnson-Newman & Exum, 1998). According to Fleming (1984), women in this situation face issues of anxiety in competition while also dealing with fears about competence. African American women tend to be more assertive than African American men at PWIs, which may cause feelings of social isolation resulting in difficulty forming relationships (Fleming). Some women suppress their assertiveness to gain approval from men and to develop relationships (Fleming). Interpersonal relationships serve as the link between an individual's predispositions and the institution, thus influencing academic performance, extent of social involvement, and occupational goals (Allen, 1992). It is the student's perception of, and response to, events in the college setting that shapes their college outcomes (Allen).

Social Transition in Higher Education

For all college students, leaving family, community, and culture is a major life transition. Schlossberg (1984) developed Transition Theory as a framework for understanding how individuals handle significant changes during the process of entering adulthood. Transition is "any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p. 27). This theory emphasizes the importance of considering the individual's perception of the situation. The transition only exists if the individual recognizes it as such and assigns significance to the experience (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Going to college, or simply gaining access to college for some, is a classic example of a major life transition – one that is usually anticipated but is still difficult. How a student copes with this change, and how he or she perceives the situation, has an impact on the overall experience. Schlossberg claimed that four main factors influence how an individual handles transition: the *situation*, or what is taking place; the *self*, or to whom the transition happens; *support*, or what assistance is available to aid the individual; and the *strategies* available to help the person cope (Schlossberg et al., 1995). In this study, Groups plays an important role in providing the support and possibly additional coping strategies to all students. The women described in this study are individuals who handle the change of going to college differently due to their distinct personalities and perceptions of the situation.

Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) proposed two constructs that have the strongest impact on a student's ability to handle such life changes: mattering and marginality. Students who feel that members of their

new home care about them and want to help them succeed are more likely to persist. More importantly, they tend to have more positive feelings about their overall experience in college (Schlossberg et al., 1989). This is what defines *mattering*. *Marginality* refers to feelings of isolation which students experience upon leaving the home environment and entering college; not surprisingly, it is often linked to student departure (Schlossberg et al.). In the case of African American female students entering a PWI, achieving feelings of mattering is a formidable task. Building a comfortable community, or finding familiar surroundings and activities, can prove difficult.

Social and academic transitions in higher education take place simultaneously (Milem & Berger, 1997; Guiffirda, 2006). At the precise intersection of these two aspects of adjustment, summer bridge programs such as Groups attempt to fill the void. Students have the opportunity to begin building new networks during the summer and to help each other adjust and connect to IUB, while developing intellectually through courses provided by Groups.

Methods

Procedure

For this study, we interviewed three first-year African American female undergraduate students participating in Groups. The women lived in university residence halls, which is a requirement for all first-year students (Indiana University Residential Programs and Services, 2006). By interviewing them we hoped to gain information regarding their social transition and connections to IUB. In order to recruit participants, we provided an e-mail to Groups staff that was sent to all first-year females in the program. This message publicized the study and asked for volunteers. We interviewed the first three respondents, and assigned them pseudonyms to protect their identities.

We conducted semi-structured one-on-one interviews that lasted up to one hour each. Participants were notified of the general purpose of the study ahead of time and were given a description of the study at the time of the interview. Each interview was held in a private space ensuring that the participants had the ability to share their experiences openly and candidly. The researcher conducted the interview, tape recorded the session, took notes, and the session was transcribed. The notes the interviewer made and the transcriptions were used for basic summarization and data analysis.

Data Analysis Procedure

When coding and analyzing the interview transcriptions, we utilized several techniques. We first read through each transcription to gain a general understanding of the interview data. We then worked with each question and the participant's response looking for key words, phrases, or themes utilized by the participant in order to condense and categorize the information. By

condensing information we hoped to retain the original meaning of the data, but provided a brief and succinct understanding of the material to see what themes emerged (Kvale, 1996). After completing the initial analysis of each interview, we utilized the emergent themes to determine what similarities and differences existed in each participant's story.

Participants

Rachel is from northwest Indiana. Both of her parents attended four-year institutions and she came to IUB because many of her high school friends were attending. During high school she was in an advanced academic program and participated in numerous academic clubs. In Groups, Rachel bonded with three other students, two females and one male, whom she called her "family." Rachel used her free time during Groups to network with her instructors and other Groups administrators. At the time of the interview, she was involved in her residence hall student government, played an active role on her floor's leadership council, and was a member of a number of performance ensembles. Rachel reported visiting the Groups office on a weekly basis for studying and advising purposes.

Olivia is from northeast Indiana. She came to IUB as a last-minute decision due to the number of high school friends who were attending. She was not very involved in high school, but she was in an advanced academic program. During her summer Groups experience, Olivia made friends with three other students with whom she remained in contact at the time of the interview. One of these women was her current roommate. Olivia used her free time during Groups to meet other people and find popular party spots on campus. Olivia resided in a residence hall with a mix of first-year students and upper class students. Along with her roommate, Olivia considered her best friends to be the two women across the hall, both of whom were Groups students.

Ashley is from central Indiana and came to IUB because of Groups. She was not involved in clubs until her senior year of high school. She joined these clubs in order to overcome her shyness, and reported that she was becoming more outgoing through her Groups experience. By becoming friends with two other Groups students, her boyfriend and her roommate, Ashley used the summer Groups experience to adjust to college life. This included adapting to college coursework, becoming familiar with professors' expectations, and meeting students. At IUB, Ashley reported spending her time either working or studying and going home every other weekend. Ashley visited the Groups office weekly for tutoring and advising. At the time of the interview she was not involved in any clubs on campus.

Results

When looking at the transcripts of the three interviews, four themes emerged from the data. The themes included friends at IUB, social networking and adjustment to IUB, Groups office usage, and strong ties to home. In the interviews, Olivia, Rachel, and Ashley each expressed the uniqueness of their experiences at IUB. Additionally, each woman said that Groups has impacted her life, but the impact was different for each student.

Friends at IUB

Each woman had a core group of friends which consisted of other Groups students. Olivia and Rachel mentioned having many friends within and outside of Groups, while most of Ashley's friends were from the program. Each woman lived in a different residence hall; however, each identified on a personal level with the Groups students in her common living space. Rachel and Olivia noted that they regularly interacted with others on their floors, including non-Groups students. While Rachel's interactions were along the lines of her leadership position as floor governor, she said she would "probably talk with everyone else anyway." Ashley only spoke with her roommate, who is a fellow Groups participant.

Social Networking and Adjustment to IUB

The three women stated that their social networking was improved by Groups. Rachel reported that her "social activity" was highly influenced by her Groups experience, and she has networked through the connections that the program has provided. Olivia described a group of "party friends" which was not solely comprised of Groups students; however, her "core friends" were her roommate and neighbors on the floor, all of whom were Groups students. Ashley was not as involved as she wanted to be and mentioned her coursework as being the reason she waited to become more active. "This first semester I just wanted to make sure I stay a little concentrated on school and stuff, and next semester I'll probably get involved." However, she felt that Groups provided more social outlets such as friends inside and outside of the program. "I probably wouldn't have met as many people, I probably wouldn't know as many people as I do now...a lot of people from Groups are in my classes, so we still communicate...for homework and stuff like that."

All participants felt that Groups has affected their adjustment to IUB, both socially and academically. Rachel and Olivia stated that due to the heavy course load during the summer academic program and the "forced interaction with the instructors," they felt more comfortable approaching their current professors for assistance. Rachel also noted that one of her Groups classes taught her to be more critical of what she was reading and better able to analyze it. Ashley stated that because of Groups, she has felt

over-prepared for her current English class, proven by her "all-'A'" standing in the course.

Groups Office Usage

Each woman reported frequent visits to the Groups office to study, to meet with advisors, and to speak with other Groups administrators about classes. They also mentioned using the Groups office in their first semester for social reasons. While the intervals of use varied, all noted going at least once or twice a month. Rachel went to the Groups office almost daily to receive assistance in her advanced calculus class, while Olivia visited once or twice a month to seek advice from her academic advisor and to see "who is hanging out." Ashley went to the Groups office twice a week for tutoring, to see her advisor, and "to say hi" to other students. Rachel often stopped at the office to speak with older Groups students and to network with them. She said that this is an important step in preparing her for future professional opportunities. Ashley reported often breaking the boundary of academic advising, asking for "real life" advice and general support from her advisor.

Strong Ties to Home

All had a strong connection to home, and all went home in their first semester at IUB, but they had various connections to the university. Rachel and Olivia went home once during the first term, and stated they both felt they were "missing out" on activities at IUB. Rachel felt overwhelmed with school work when she returned and Olivia felt like she was missing parties and other social opportunities of the weekend.

Rachel and Olivia also mentioned having the chance to go home during IUB's homecoming weekend and not taking it for different reasons. Rachel participated with a group of current students who acted as mentors to current high school seniors considering applying to IUB. Olivia did not want to miss out on the parties that were taking place that weekend, hosted by both Groups and non-Groups students. In comparison, Ashley went home every other weekend during the semester and felt that if she did not go home, she missed out on events with her family and friends such as going to church and seeing her mother. When asked the reason for going home every other weekend, she stated "basically for church cause I don't get to, I don't have a church down here so I just go back home and go...my mom always misses me." While saying this, Ashley also talked about the negative aspects of going home every other weekend. "I think it might be better for me to stay here sometimes cause when I go home sometimes on the weekend I don't stay as concentrated, and I won't get work done when I go home. So sometimes, I might want to stay here."

All three participants mentioned maintaining regular contact with family and friends from home. Rachel and Ashley reported speaking with

their mothers at least once a day. Olivia claimed to call home every couple of days and speaking with her mother for at least an hour each time. Olivia also mentioned that her mom was very excited that the Facebook website, www.facebook.com, was now allowing non-students to sign up, because this opened up a new line of communication. Rachel and Olivia mentioned sending text messages to their friends from home or using America Online Instant Messenger (AIM) to communicate with friends at other institutions. Ashley stated that her means of communication with her friends "back home" was solely through telephone conversations or when she saw them in person. Most of her friends from home did not have computer access, so e-mail or AIM was not an option.

Discussion

While each student has had a different first-year experience at IUB, the common themes identified above could be considered in studying other African American women at PWIs. Being able to successfully transition and connect to a PWI is essential to the social and academic achievement of African American women (Allen, 1992). As this study demonstrated, however, individuals have their own individual social experiences.

These women are at different levels of their own social identity development. While Rachel and Olivia were comfortable going out and meeting people, Ashley's shyness often impeded her social networking. Rachel and Olivia's participation in Groups helped them to develop socially, but their ideal social environments are very different. Ultimately, having these interactions will help Rachel and Olivia transition into other new experiences in the future. Their college careers will be positively impacted by their social development, while Ashley's limited social experiences could hinder her transition to IUB as an African American woman. These three women's varying transitions to IUB could lead to different consequences for each of them.

The data indicate that each participant's original motivation for attending IUB has impacted their social transition. For Olivia, becoming involved socially at IUB was placed at a high level of importance, even above academic success during her first semester. Ashley and Rachel noted that they were specifically in college for academics. Rachel noted that she would "worry about her social life" when she finished studying, which is a wise decision to make for a first-year student.

The social outlets utilized by each participant have had an impact on the connections they have made at IUB. Rachel and Olivia had different reasons for staying on campus during the weekends. Rachel felt like she was losing the opportunity to study, which could have a negative effect on her socially. She frequently studied alone with her door closed. This im-

peded her social interactions with other students, including her "family" whom she says often "hangs out without her." While Rachel's academics are paramount to her success in college, it is vital for her, and others like her, to make strong social connections on campus.

Ashley's choice to return home every other weekend was to maintain her connections to home, including attending church services and seeing her mother and friends. Sustaining these important relationships can aid her transition to college (Guiffreda, 2006; Tinto, 1993). By doing this, she has not formed many social networks in college, which could result in the lack of opportunity to do so once social groups have been formed. As Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) stated, an individual undergoing change will use different strategies to cope with transition. While all students do not have to be connected in the same way, Tinto (1993) noted that some level of connection is essential. Ultimately, Ashley's lack of connection through personal relationships or involvement in campus subcultures could result in her departure from IUB, a trend for African American women at PWIs (Allen, 1992). On the other hand, her heavier use of support from family and friends from home may provide what Ashley needs to persist in college. This distinguished Ashley from Olivia and Rachel. However, an overall agreement among the women centered on the fact that Groups made them feel supported. Regardless of their level of connection, this fact ties directly to the idea of mattering (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Groups has aided all three women in feeling that someone on campus wants them to succeed, which results in more positive feelings about being in college.

When looking at the campus involvement of Ashley and Rachel, one can see an important difference between the two women. Rachel was very involved in different groups on campus and held leadership positions in two activities. She was not concerned about the balance between being involved on campus and achieving her academic goal. Ashley had plans to become more involved in on-campus events next semester, but "wants to get her academics in order" first. She was concerned that adding an extracurricular event would throw off her academics, a valid concern for gifted students who have already overcome numerous hurdles to gain access to college. We believe that Ashley's lack of involvement and social interaction in extracurricular activities could prevent her from connecting to the campus, thus leading to a greater chance of early departure for her (Milem & Berger, 1997).

Each participant came to IUB from a different home situation and a different reason for attending college. Rachel and Olivia knew they would attend a four-year institution, regardless of any participation in a summer bridge program. Ashley stated that without Groups, she "probably would not have come to college." She felt that Groups was the only way to gain access

to higher education. This directly links to the importance of access underscored in the mission statement of Groups.

Each student's connection to IUB comes partly from developing her own subculture with other African American students on campus, rather than changing to fit into the dominant culture of the PWI (Allen, 1992). When Olivia went out on the weekends, she went out with her "Black people." Rachel did not hesitate to interact with other cultures in her leadership positions, but felt she was forced to do so as the meetings were required. Ashley's two friends, her boyfriend and roommate, were African American, and she stated that she did not feel connected to students of different cultures.

The importance of connections to the university, supported by Guifrida (2006) and Tinto (1993), outlined that African American students can make their own subculture, allowing them to feel more comfortable at a PWI. As long as connections existed at a PWI either in the dominant culture or in subcultures, African American women have a higher graduation rate than those who lack those ties (Allen, 1992). This can have specific consequences – in this study, a possible indication of departure for Ashley, and indications of persistence for Olivia and Rachel. However, it is important to remember that this is only one lens through which to view these women and speculate on their futures in college. Looking at the usefulness of maintaining ties to home, reviewing these students' academic successes, or knowing that Groups impacts their feelings of mattering, may lead one to draw other conclusions.

Limitations

We recognize that our study was limited due to several factors, one of which is the small number of students whose experiences we analyzed. The purpose of this paper was not necessarily to apply our findings to a greater population, but the number of participants does hinder the ability to speculate on the applicability of the study to other students. Another limitation was the lack of college experience that our participants had as first-year students. These women may not have the ability to reflect on their experiences thus far in their college careers. As a result, the participants may not have been able to understand how their involvement in Groups and their living situations impacted the transition and connection to IUB.

The racial and gender differences between the researchers and the participants may also play a role. The researchers included four White females and one White male. It is difficult to truly understand the experiences of others, especially where differences in race or gender exist. With even the best intentions and careful analysis, researchers cannot avoid imposing their personal biases when analyzing and interpreting qualitative data (Mertens, 2005). Additionally, we feared that it would be difficult to establish an open

and trusting relationship with the participants. This was due to two main factors: the differences in background described above and the short time frame in which we were able to conduct the interviews.

Conclusion

Based on our findings, conclusions can be made regarding persistence and departure decisions in Groups at Indiana University. According to the existing literature, social factors play into a student's decision about persistence or departure (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tinto, 1993). Factors such as finding a "home" and connection points at the university play into a student's decision, as do academic factors. If Groups has been successful at aiding their social transitions these women should persist. However, due to the limitations of this study, it is too early to make any definite conclusions. Overall, we feel that two of the women, Rachel and Olivia, have a strong chance of persistence, but Ashley's lack of campus involvement and limited friendships may lead to her departure. She has not established the strong social connections that may be critical in her persistence.

Further conclusions apply to Groups in general. Our original research question was to determine if participation in Groups affects an African American female student's social transition and connection to a predominantly White institution. Groups is instrumental in the formation of the transitions and connections of these women to IUB. As these women pointed out, Groups serves as an entry and connection point for them. Groups is providing the social connections that can make a difference in their persistence.

Future Research

This research may only begin to fill a gap in the current literature about the experiences of African American women's transition and connection to the college environment. The study solely examined the social aspect in transitioning and connecting to a university, whereas other studies have focused on the academic experience. This topic could be expanded upon and researched more thoroughly. Further research on the combination of both academic and social experiences of students would be beneficial. Conducting a longitudinal study with these women and following up with them as they continue in college could provide important results as well. A broad study of TRIO programs could be pursued, including a comparison of African American women participants and non-participants of TRIO programs. Overall studies at different institutional types, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and women's colleges, could provide further insight into the factors of gender and race that so heavily influence the way these students manage the transition to college.

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Factors Influencing Higher Education in Kenya

Philemon Yebei

University education has potential economic and social benefits for the individual and society in general. Attainment of university education for many Kenyans is impeded by among other factors, limited access, high tuition, insufficient student loans, and the prevailing austerity in higher education. This paper examines higher education in Kenya through a framework defined by four issues: politics, access, affordability, and accountability.

Introduction

This paper examines several factors that have influenced higher education in Kenya. It develops a brief analysis and synthesis defined by four issues: politics, access, affordability, and accountability. These issues are selected since they are recurring themes of recent conversations in the field of higher education (Johnstone, 1998). Other potential areas of discussion are retrenchment, restructuring, improved performance, quality, mandated change, autonomy, diversification of funds, transformational leadership, and independence (Gumport & Sporn, 1998; Johnstone, 1998). In order to limit the scope of this paper, and because of the interdependent and consistent nature of these areas, the latter are only mentioned as they relate to the main themes of politics, access, affordability, and accountability.

This paper provides a brief description of the Kenyan education system, the political arena in Kenya, and the impact of politics on educational policy. The concepts of access, affordability, and accountability in higher education are discussed. The paper wraps up with reflections, some recommendations, and conclusion.

Education in Kenya

The education system in Kenya falls under the legislative jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MOEST). The primary function of MOEST is to promote education in Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 2006). The MOEST minister and assistant ministers are elected Members of Parliament appointed by the incumbent president. The education structure is an 8-4-4 system: 8 years of primary, 4 years of secondary, and 4 years of tertiary education. Tertiary education in Kenya encompasses technical and vocational institutes, polytechnics, colleges, and universities (Republic of Kenya, 2006). These tertiary institutions are either public or private; the latter are typically affiliated with religious organizations. As shown in Figure 1, the Kenyan student has an educational path which may