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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE ASSUMPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF
ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS AND THEIR IMPACT ON
ENROLLMENT DECISIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN/BLACK STUDENTS AT A
PRIVATE, PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

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

By

Chase A. Loper

August 2021

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Chase A. Loper

2021

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ABSTRACT

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE ASSUMPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF
ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS AND THEIR IMPACT ON
ENROLLMENT DECISIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN/BLACK STUDENTS AT A
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By

Chase A. Loper

August 2021

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Rick McCown

The purpose of this study is to address the low participation of African American/Black students at private, predominantly White institutions (PPWIs), specifically exploring the influence the assumptions of administrators have of the current matriculation outcomes. The research question that drove the study is as follows: How do the assumptions and practices of administrators influence the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students at a PPWI? The research question is justified by the examination of empirical findings that describe the enrollment disparity among African American/Black students across higher education institution types and the systemic barriers that have impacted the participation of African American/Black students in higher education. Additionally, the changing demographics of higher education enrollment are examined to explain the approaching “enrollment cliff”, and the

projected increase of African American/Black, and Hispanic students, coupled with the decline in White students. The empirical findings will be understood through the theoretical lenses of the role of prestige as a driver of higher education decisions and student college choice theory. The principles of improvement research will serve as the general methodological frame for data collection and analysis. Qualitative data were collected via semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The participants were six members of the enrollment management group at a PPWI. The interviews yielded themes that helped to answer the research question. Four themes emerged from the analysis of interview responses: institutional self-perception, addressing affordability, lack of diversity, and lack of interest. The findings are interpreted in order to offer (1) an explanation of how the assumptions and practices of enrollment management professionals at a PPWI influence the recruitment and matriculation policies and procedures that target African American/Black students and (2) a plan for improving the systems that bear on increasing the proportion of African American/Black students and the particular PPWI that served as the research site.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my beautiful daughter Harper Noelle. There is no ceiling to your success, may this serve as an example that you can do anything you put your mind to. Daddy loves you!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This dissertation would not have been possible without a strong support system, and I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge its impact. First and foremost, I thank God for making this calling a part of his purpose and plan for me. I thank my family and friends for holding me accountable and helping me see this through. To my beautiful and amazing wife – Krista, I thank you for your endless love, support, sacrifices along this journey, and believing in me through this journey. I love you.

Shout out to my Team for always holding me accountable and providing the necessary encouragement when needed. Especially my brothers Anthony and Jeff for always being available and serving as my sounding board when needed – I appreciate ya’ll! To my #2020 cohort family, thank you for keep me motivated since day one. We made a commitment to support and see each other through, and we’ve done just that.

Lastly, thank you to my committee for allowing this to be possible, without your support and feedback, this is not possible. To my Chair, Dr. McCown, thank you for the countless conversations and brainstorming sessions to help me clearly articulate the problem explored in this study. I’m forever grateful!

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to address the low participation of African American/Black students at private, predominantly White institutions (PPWIs), specifically exploring influence the assumptions and practices of administrators have on the current matriculation outcomes. This chapter one outlines the matriculation rates of African American/Black students at predominantly White institutions, while also providing the local context and my personal leadership perspectives that support this study. In addition, the specific problem of practice and definitions supporting this study will be addressed. Chapter two presents a review of the literature that supports this study, which will be viewed through an improvement science lens. The methodology surrounding this research will be described in Chapter three, detailing the research site; the participants; the research question; and, the ways in which the data will be collected and analyzed. Chapter four will describe the findings that arose from this study. While Chapter five addresses the overall conclusions that developed as a result of this study, and provide recommendations to the field and educational leaders seeking to improve their recruitment trends of African American/Black students at PPWIs.

The state of higher education is approaching a period in time where they will experience a drastic decline in the enrollment among traditional, college-going students, thus intensifying the increase in competition of institutions. This demographic shift has been attributed to the declining birth rates, coupled with the rising costs of higher education, and the change in the overall outlook on the value of higher education, to name a few. These pressures are forcing higher education institutions to evaluate their recruitment efforts to minimize the impact they will face. In 2011, there were over 20 million college students enrolled in higher education, but has gradually been declining since, with only about 18 million in 2018 (IPEDS, 2018). White

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students make up the majority of students enrolled (50 percent) while African American/Black students make up only 13 percent. As the decline in participation among the majority has occurred, enrollment trends are projecting an increase in the participation among both African American/Black and Hispanic students – the minority. For historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and other minority serving institutions (MSIs) this is great, as historically these are the two demographic of students they were founded on and continue to predominately serve. However, they too, have been faced with enrollment challenges due to the changing demographics. For predominately White institutions (PWIs), the decline in participation of White students provides opportunity for them to adjust their strategies and practices to begin recruiting students beyond their traditional target demographics. For private, predominately White institutions (PPWIs) this is very important, as the majority of African American/Black students are participating at public non-profit institutions as well as for-profit institutions (Ma, Baum, Pender, Libassi, 2019). This data highlights the participation among Black students is not equally proportioned across all institution types, especially at PPWIs, signifying the possible barriers which still exist for these students to participate in higher education, and more specifically at PPWIs.

Through the years, court rulings and policies have served as ways to break down barriers and increase opportunity and access. The 1954 ruling of *Brown vs Board of Education*, deemed it to be unconstitutional for segregation within schools. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made it illegal to discriminate based on race, sex, or religion. In addition, affirmative action decisions provided opportunity to allow race to be considered during the college admissions process as a way to increase enrollment among underrepresented groups. Despite the continued and progressive pursuit for access and equality in higher education, the participation of African

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American students at PPWIs has remained the lowest among other institution types. This lack of participation leaves African American students at a disadvantage of reaping the benefits of being a part of a diverse learning environment, and the overall educational benefits of attending private, predominantly White institutions. As the participation at postsecondary institutions for African American students continues to increase at other institution types, compared to PPWIs, it would be advantageous of the administrators at PPWIs to evaluate their practices and try to understand the factors which play a role in the college choice decision of African American students.

As a higher education administrator who understands there are various factors which influence the college choice of prospective students, this study explores the assumptions and practices of administrators at Citytown University – a PPWI – to see how these behaviors can impact the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students in alignment with the influential factors existing research has suggested are key factors for these students.

Researchers have discovered and presented the arguments that African American/Black students navigate the college choice process differently than their White peers. This study recommends how administrators at PPWIs can leverage the aforementioned understanding to improve the enrollment outcomes of African American/Black students through a user-centric approach.

Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) student college choice model is used as part of this study to present the personal and institutional factors which influence student college decisions. The use of expanded research evaluating the influential factors of African American students, will aid in highlighting how these students are influenced differently. This will be used in effort to evaluate the root cause of existing assumptions influencing recruitment practices and impacting African American student matriculation decisions.

Through this study, Bowen's (1980) revenue theory of costs (RTC) is used to highlight the primary goals of higher education institutions, while also using a diversity lens to argue the importance of why PPWIs should focus on increasing their African American recruitment. A tenant of critical race theory (CRT) aid in the understanding how African Americans can be viewed at PPWIs influencing the assumptions and recruitment practices of these students. Better understanding of how assumptions and practices influence recruitment and matriculation provide insight of how administrators can enhance such practices by focusing on other influential factors which traditionally have not been utilized.

The subsequent sections will expand on the basis of this research, outlining the local context perspective; what I have seen through my personal leadership; the specific problem as it relates to Citytown University; as well as, presenting the specific research question this research will address. The local context provides perspective of the challenges higher education institutions face when it comes to meeting their enrollment goals. My personal leadership will highlight my experience and what I have observed regarding African American/Black student enrollment at the PPWI research site. This leads to the presentation of the specific problem as it relates to Citytown University, followed by the research question.

Local Context Perspectives

This section introduces the ground for the basis of this research study, highlighting the enrollment challenges of higher education institutions. It will address the lengths institutions will go to increase their prestige, academic excellence, and influence, while also desiring to increase diversity on its campus. In addition, an explanation of the lack of research addressing the college choice of African American/Black students, specifically the participation at predominantly White institutions, concluding more research needs to be done on this subject if institutions strive to

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improve the matriculation outcomes of this demographic of students and establish diverse learning environments.

Despite the efforts and desires to increase the diversity, participation of African American students at PPWIs is the lowest compared to participation at other institution types. The low participation of African Americans at PPWIs has left these students missing out on the benefits of attending these institutions. Private institutions tend to be more selective and spend more money per student than other institution types, allowing opportunity for higher investment in the student experience impacting their academic success because of these additional resources. Through the creation of diverse learning environment on campuses, researchers have been able to unpack the benefits to both students and the institution. The positive effects of diversity on campuses have been linked to the increase of students' complex thinking skills, retention, cultural awareness, interest in social issues, and support for the diversity initiatives set forth by the institution (Chang Denson, Saenez, Misa, 2006; Hurtado, 2001). For many students, exposure to diversity will happen for the first-time during college, making it important for institutions to understand their influence and responsibility in developing well-rounded students that can navigate a diverse society. PPWIs are falling short in this area as matriculation of non-White students remains lower than other institution types, specifically among African American students. While there are benefits of institutions intentionally creating diverse learning environments, such efforts do not help influence an institution's prestige which Bowen (1980) identified as the primary goal on higher education institutions. This challenge has left institutions to have to figure out how to achieve two important goals – prestige and increasing diversity.

Although there has been an abundance of research studying the experience of African American students on predominately White campuses, there has been minimal research on the

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factors which influence why African American students decide to attend PWIs (Freeman & Thomas, 2002). When it comes to the college choice of African Americans students, research has tended to focus on price sensitivity, omitting attention to other influential factors. This has left institutions assuming financial aid is the only factor that drives these students' decisions, thus influencing the recruitment strategies of colleges and universities. Utilizing the voice of African American students, researchers discovered there are more factors than just affordability influencing college choice of these students (Freeman, 1999; Freeman & Thomas, 2002; Harper, 2012a; Williams, 2018). Understanding the student college choice framework, allows administrators to consider additional influential factors to aid in the matriculation decision of these students. Findings of this research study indicated administrators at Citytown University assume price is one of the only reasons African American/Black students do not attend their institution. Participants failed to acknowledge other influential factors previous research has presented. These assumptions are demonstrated through the institution's practices as described by the participants, making it important for administrators to consider a college choice framework specific to African American/Black students.

Multiple college choice frameworks have been developed over the years but, Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) student college choice model has been the most referenced model for researchers seeking to capture all influences of students, utilizing a three-phase approach: predisposition, search, and choice. This study presents arguments to emphasize the importance of recruitment actors understanding the factors influencing the college choice of African American students, and provides recommendation of how a user-centric approach of engaging key stakeholders within the recruitment system can improve the matriculation outcomes of said students. The enrollment trend of African American students at Citytown University has been

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consistently lower than, not only other institution types, but also among other PPWIs. This consistent outcome, while promoting diversity efforts publicly, demonstrates a need to understand the assumptions which influence current recruitment practices in order to improve the outcomes the system is currently producing.

For over 10 years at Citytown University, enrollment among African American students has not exceeded 5%, despite the growth of other non-White student groups. Through my interactions with administrators responsible for recruiting students, a consistent response as to why African American enrollment is so low, has pointed to price sensitivity. While reflecting on my own college choice navigation, and the factors beyond affordability that led me to not enroll at a PPWI, left me to ponder the factors which drive students to institutions other than Citytown University. Through an improvement science lens, this research will focus on how a user-centric approach can create networked communities to drive improvement within the current recruitment system to yield better matriculation outcomes among African American/Black students.

Personal Leadership

My personal experience and perspective to the matriculation challenges of African American/Black students at Citytown University is presented in this section. I will also present basic information about Citytown University to help illustrate the enrollment trends and demographic student makeup on campus. In addition, a summary of the recommendations of how administrators can utilize this research to improve the recruitment outcomes of African American/Black students.

Citytown University is an institution founded on providing educational access and opportunities to the disadvantaged and underrepresented within the community. We, as leaders at the institution cannot lose sight of the reality of there still being students who are unable to

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participate at such an elite institution, like Citytown, because of existing assumptions and recruitment practices in place. The consistent investment and success in achieving prestige have shifted the demographic of the student body make-up at Citytown University, from serving immigrant students to now serving a predominately White student body of higher socioeconomic status (SES). Such behavior validates the rules of Bowen (1980) that prestige, excellence, and influence remain to be the primary goal of institutions. Educating roughly 9,000 students annually, only 4 to 5 percent have historically identified as African American/Black. Citytown University's enrollment trends of African American/Black students fall below the average enrollment of other PPWIs (IPEDS, 2018). In addition, the institution, among others, continue to promote the importance of diversity and creating diverse learning environments, yet their non-White population, specifically African American/Black population, has remain stagnant. If intentions are true of wanting to grow the African American/Black student population, it is important to make sure those responsible for recruiting students are knowledgeable of what influences the decisions of these students and how existing assumptions and practices may play a role in the current outcomes.

Focusing on these influential factors will help administrators enhance their recruitment efforts by allowing them to gain a better understanding of the students they seek to recruit. This research is relevant and necessary due to the minimal research which exists on African American/Black student college choice, and the role administrative assumptions and practices plays. Due to most of the research focusing affordability and the relationship between costs and enrollment, I have noticed within my sphere of influence administrators refer to price as the only reason African American students do not attend Citytown University, despite receiving the highest amount of institutional aid. Although this may be true, exploration of other ways to

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recruit these students will be discussed. This research seeks to evaluate how existing recruitment practices at Citytown University align with the factors which influence the college choice process of African American students found by other researchers, in effort to provide opportunity for improvement of recruitment practices. Although I do not believe administrators are not intentionally not recruiting African American students, I do believe existing recruitment behaviors are based on historical assumptions that have not been reevaluated to align students outside the demographic. This leaves institutions to apply the same practices to all students regardless of race/ethnicity. Thus, the system continues to get the same results. Implications from this study, through an improvement science lens, suggests utilization of a user-centric approach will cultivate networked communities among key recruitment actors to establish effective strategies to improve African American/Black student matriculation outcomes.

Specific to Problem of Practice

This section explains the goals of this research, and the recommendations for educational leaders of what to consider when recruiting African American/Black students at a PPWI. In addition, the research question steering this study will also be addressed in this section.

The institution at the focus of this research is not the only institution who seeks to maintain and increase their prestige, excellence, and influence, while also having the desire to increase diversity. Therefore, my hope is to provide administrators with benefits of how a user-centric approach can aid in development of practices that more effectively recruit more diverse, specifically African American, students while also sustaining or growing their prestige, excellence, and influence. With the cost of attendance continuing to increase driven by the efforts mentioned in the previous chapter, it will be critical for the institution to look at other ways to recruit students in ways other than just awarding aid. This study brings to light that

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African American/Black students seek more than just affordability, and institutional leaders need to reevaluate their assumptions and practices if they wish to change the current matriculation outcomes.

As the demographic of White college-going students continues to decrease and increasing among Black and Hispanic students, recruitment strategies must be modified to align with how these students navigate the college choice process, while recognizing the systemic challenges that exists when it comes to educational access and opportunity. The methods used during this study will explore how the following areas are assumed to influence the college choice of African American/Black students. These specific areas include: (a) the engagement and use of family, friends, and alumni; (b) the promotion of campus climate; (c) recognition of what students are really seeking to gain from the institution (i.e. educate others, self-identity, athletics, financial and status goals, etc.). Though there is no cookie-cutter way to recruit students, scholars have discovered factors that influence the college choice of Black students, of which recruiters should be cognizant of when engaging with these students. Recognizing this will provide opportunity for the institution to make strides toward increasing matriculation of African American/Black students. Thus will help the institution achieve its diversity goals, and sustain its prestige. Melguzio (2008; 2010) found higher levels of persistence for African American students when enrolled at more selective institutions, despite not having all the desired attributes.

As the higher education “cliff” approaches due to the drastic decline in White students participating in college, a shift in focus will be required if institution seek to remain competitive and maintain sustainable enrollment. However, some higher education experts believe, PWI recruitment efforts will remain the same, yielding projected lower enrollment (Kelderman, Gardner, Conley, 2019). It is my hope that this research shines light on the value of modifying

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traditional practices in effort to live out the mission of providing education to all students. In order to achieve this, a user-centric approach is necessary to gain better understanding of existing assumption and practices of administrators influencing the recruitment and matriculation of African American students. Therefore, this research seeks to address the following research question outlined in the next section.

Research Question

In effort to better understand the administrative assumptions and practices at a PPWI which influence the outcome of low African American enrollment, this study will be guided by the following research question:

How do the assumptions and practices of administrators influence the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students at a PPWI?

The next chapter will justify the research question by the review of both theoretical and contextual frames that will illuminate methodological practices in the literature. First, definitions of frequent terms used in this study will be defined.

Definitions

Below defines and provides context to the terms that will be used in this study as it relates to the factors that should be considered when understanding the African American student college choice at a private predominately White institution (PPWI).

African American/Black: These terms will be used interchangeably to represent students who classify as such. According to Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), individuals having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa fall into this category (Definitions for New Race and Ethnicity Categories). However, it is important to note there are

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individuals who may classify as one or the other, but are perceived to be the same based on the generalization used by society set forth above.

Historically Black College or University: With the intent of serving the Black community, these institutions were founded to do just that, abbreviated HBCU or HBCUs (Types of Colleges: The Basics, 2020).

Predominately White Institution: Institutions with enrollments with White students making up 50% or greater fall into this category, usually abbreviated PWI or PWIs (Brown & Dancy, 2010).

Private predominately White Institution (PPWI): In combination with the definition of PWI, a PPWI represents the institutions that are heavily dependent on tuition dollars and outside funding sources, unlike public institutions who are funded by state and local governments (Types of Colleges: The Basics, 2020).

Prestige: *U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges* rankings will define institutional prestige, which will be used interchangeably with reputation.

The "Cliff": The projected decline of potential first-time college-goers, expected to occur in 2025-26 (Adams, 2020).

Chapter 2 Review of Literature

This chapter provides a review of the literature that aligns with this research study and its research question. First, context to the problem will be addressed speaking to the enrollment disparity among African American/Black students across institution types. The next section explains the history of African American/Black students' participation in higher education, capturing the systemic barriers that have impacted their participation. Despite the disparities of enrollment among African American/Black students caused by systemic barriers, an explanation of the changing demographics within higher education will be addressed outlining the projected increase of African American/Black and Hispanic students, and coupled with the decline among White students. This outline describes the enrollment cliff.

Scaffolding with the research above, subsequent sections will outline the difference in institution types and their consistent pursuit of prestige. Pursuit of prestige will be described to show how such pursuit influences institutional practices hindering the matriculation of certain prospective student demographics, specifically among African American/Black students.

Literature arguing the value of diversity will follow, trailed by an explanation of the college choice framework. With the projected increase in African American/Black participation in higher education, the review of the literature will show there is value in these students attending private, predominately White institutions, and present the factors that should be considered by higher education institutions when engaging with these students during the college navigation process.

Context to the Problem

This section will provide context to the enrollment disparity of African American/Black students at private, predominantly White institutions. Despite the postsecondary participation among African American/Black and Hispanic students continuing to increase, their participation

at PPWIs continues to be disproportioned compared to other institution types. Yet, colleges and universities continue to strive to recruit classes that are both racial/ethnically and socio-economically diverse to reflect the country (Melguzio, 2010; Melguzio & Chung, 2012). Of the over 20 million students enrolled in postsecondary education in 2017, Black students made up only 12 percent of the total student enrollment at 4-year private nonprofit institutions compared to 17, 27, and 29 percent at 4-year public, 2-year public, and for-profit institutions respectfully (Ma, Baum, Pender, & Libassi, 2019). Utilizing data from fall 2018 to examine the enrollment of Black students at PPWIs specifically, Table 1 shows African American/Black students made up about 9% of the total population at not-for-profit, 4-year PPWIs, while making up almost 14% at for-profit PWIs – the highest among participation at all other institution types. To provide additional context to the table below, for-profit institutions, which would include 2-year, 4-year, and less than 2-year institutions, are represented by a combination of junior colleges, trade or specialty schools, and fully online institutions like West Virginia Junior College, Academy of Professional Cosmetology, and University of Phoenix respectfully.

Table 1

***African American/Black Enrollment at PWIs by Institution Type
FALL 2018***

Institution Type	AA/Black Total	Total Enrollment	Ratio Makeup
Private for-profit, 2-year	7,452	58,018	13%
Private for-profit, 4-year or above	17,882	130,195	14%
Private for-profit, less-than 2-year	8,644	60,209	14%
Private not-for-profit, 2-year	1,861	14,164	13%
Private not-for-profit, 4-year or above	207,383	2,413,015	9%
Private not-for-profit, less-than 2-year	269	2,268	12%
Public, 2-year	266,254	2,581,129	10%
Public, 4-year or above	432,036	5,403,441	8%
Public, less-than 2-year	2,804	39,715	7%
Grand Total	944,585	10,702,154	9%

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Data adapted from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

This disproportionate student body makeup can leave one wondering why these students are choosing other institutions, especially with the desire to increase diversity. Black students made up 13 percent of the total postsecondary education population; 29 percent of enrollment at for-profit institutions; less than 15 percent at all other institution types; and, specifically 12 percent at 4-year private nonprofit (Ma et al., 2019). This research seeks to contribute to the literature by explaining how a user-centric approach can address the imbalance of the enrollment among African American students at PPWIs as illustrated in Table 1 above, and the role administrative assumptions and practices play in these students' matriculation decision. This conceptual framework will show how an institution's pursuit of prestige can lead to assumptions influencing the matriculation and recruitment practices of Black/African American students.

This study is grounded in economic, diversity, and student college choice theory. Bowen's (1980) rules around the rising costs in higher education can be summarized as the behavior of institutions to raise and spend as much money as they can to reach the dominant goals of prestige, academic excellence, and influence. As this framework shows how institutions devote resources to accomplish the items mentioned above, institutions also seek to accomplish higher diversity makeup among its student body. Theories arguing the benefits of diverse learning environments will be explained to show the educational, personal, and institutional value of colleges and universities focusing on such efforts. Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) student college choice framework will provide the fundamental structure associated with understanding the influential factors of prospective students' decision making. Collectively, these theories will illustrate how the pursuit of prestige can impact an institution's ability to

increase diversity, thus making it important for institutions like PPWIs to find how they can accomplish both prestige and diversity.

Prior to expanding on the theories mentioned above, a historical timeline will be explained to provide context of the evolution of African American/Black participation in higher education. This will be done in attempt to show the influence historical events have had on current practices and perceptions around recruitment and matriculation of African American's at PPWIs. The research presented will be synthesized through an improvement science lens to better understand the results which are being produced by the existing system. If PPWIs truly seek to increase the enrollment of African American/Black students, leaders must consider their role in each phase of the student college choice process recognizing that there are more influential factors than affordability. When taken seriously, both the institution and students benefit from having a diverse student body.

Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu (2017; 2010) present six guiding principles of how to effectively evaluate and improve a system specifically within higher education:

1. Making the work problem-specific and user-centered.
2. Focus off various performance.
3. See the system that provides the current outcomes.
4. We cannot improve what we cannot measure.
5. Use disciplined inquiry to drive improvement.
6. Accelerate learning through networked communities.

Through this lens, review of the literature will help shape the specific problem within the enrollment system. The literature will aid in unpacking the system for the results which it

produces, leaving opportunity to improve the outcomes through disciplined inquiry. However, first it is important to understand the system and how it got to this point.

African American/Black Postsecondary Participation

This section will provide context to how the participation among Black students has evolved throughout the years spanning from the end of the Civil War through today. Table 1 provided a visual of how the participation of African American/Black students continues to be one of the lowest at private predominantly White institutions, compared to other institution types, concluding the low enrollment at PWIs needs to be addressed with the projected change in student demographics within higher education.

Following the Civil War, advocating for education commenced from the likes of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois. Participation did not happen rapidly, due to the shortage in secondary schooling which eventually led to segregated schools in the South during the 1900s (Geiger, 2016, p. 471). This shortage was also the root of the establishment of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), as a way to provide education to Blacks after the Civil War (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009). The 1930s is when enrollment began to increase at PWIs, but with limitations, as African Americans were unable to capitalize on the college experiences like campus living, participating in athletics, financial support, etc. (Geiger, 2016, p.478). When racial segregation was ruled unconstitutional as a result of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education*, schools began integrating but at different speeds leaving inequities within the educational system (Allen, Jewel, Griffin, & Wolfe, 2007). The participation of African American students at PWIs continued to increase after the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, making it illegal to discriminate because of race, color, religion, or national origin (Freeman & Thomas, 2002). Affirmative action rulings around admission policies to increase

diversity has led to an on-going debate on the educational value of diversity and diverse interactions on college and university campuses (Chang et al., 2006; Saenz, Nagi, & Hurtado, 2007). This has left opportunity for researchers to try and settle such debate. Research supporting institutions' ability to use race and ethnicity during the admissions process have been able to link degree attainment to the selectivity of an institution; whereas those opposed, feel students not fully qualified to attend selective institutions are placed at a disadvantage because they are less prepared (Melguzio, 2008; 2010). Since student outcomes influence institutional rankings, selective universities recruit students that are more likely to succeed. There is a level of persistence students carry when given the opportunity to participate at more selective institutions. Melguzio (2008) found there was an increase in degree attainment for minority students who attended more selective institutions despite not having as high of academic ability. Although these policies have provided access to education, specifically at PWIs for African American students, they failed to consider the cultural norms governing these campuses for decades, dismissing the needs and interests of these students (Harper, 2013). In addition, this has influenced the way African American students are perceived within higher education especially at elite institutions (Harper et al., 2009).

In the Fall of 2017, Black students made up 13 percent of the total undergraduate enrollment, with the largest participation at public 2-year institutions (43%) and only 14 percent at 4-year private nonprofits (Ma et al., 2019). Although only four percentage points below the participation of White students at 4-year private nonprofit (18%), White students made up over half of the total undergraduate enrollment in 2017 making them the majority of the population at this institution type (65% compared to 12% for Black) (Ma et al., 2019). As illustrated previously in Table 1, African American/Black students were 9% of the enrollment at 4-year

PPWIs, but when analyzed further, these students only made up 5% in 2019, and years prior at Citytown University (IPEDS, 2019)

The five percent referenced above, refers to the specific participation gap of African American/Black students that exists at the research site, Citytown University, surrounding this study compared to the national percentage, thus providing grounds for this research. Enrollment trends are looking to take a dramatic shift within the next 5-7 years due to the anticipated reduction in the number of traditional college-eligible students, leaving opportunities for institutions like this PPWI to evaluate their recruitment practices.

Changing Demographics

This section will address the changing demographic among prospective students driving the cliff. Projections are anticipating a drastic decrease among White students, and an increase among African American/Black and Hispanic students. Because White students make up the majority of college participants, this demographic shift has the potential to impact the enrollment at predominately White institutions most since these are the students they recruit. This is compared to historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and minority serving institutions (MSIs), thus providing ground for this research study.

The Great Recession of 2008, has left many concerns surrounding the higher education industry, from financial concerns, reduction in traditional student enrollment due to a decrease in birth rates, and the rising apprehension of the value of college given the climbing costs of attendance (Kelderman et al., 2019). The decrease in birth rates has contributed to the enrollment crisis leaving less available traditional students to recruit, which is something all institutions will experience, especially those in the Midwest and Northeast (Kelderman et al., 2019) causing an increasing demand for non-traditional students.

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From 2000-2010, total enrollment was increasing by an average of 3 percent annually; however, from 2011-2015 has been decreasing on average about 1 percent annually (Schmidt, 2018). In the Fall of 2017, White students made up over 55% of the total population in higher education, while Black students only made up 13% (Ma et al., 2019). When analyzing the race/ethnicity of the anticipated projections, White student enrollment is projected to decrease 6%; African American and Hispanic students are expected to increase 8% and 14% respectively, between 2017-2028 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Despite the continued enrollment growth and persistence of African Americans and other minority groups within higher education, Melguzio (2008) found there has been disparity among these students at selective institutions, like PPWIs.

When analyzing the projections by institution type, the increase of enrollment at public and private schools is 3% and 2% respectively between 2017-2028 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). This highlights the competition for students among public and private institutions is also anticipated to remain. Along with the described competition among public and private institutions, both are dealing with their own challenges with decrease in government subsidies, accompanied with an increased price tags and discounts (Kelderman et al., 2019). The estimated enrollment of non-White students, specifically African American students, highlights the importance of higher education institutions needing to evaluate current recruitment practices in order to attract and incentivize these students to attend their institution. Kelderman et al., (2019) emphasizes the need of colleges and universities to modify usual practices as the demographic of traditional students is changing. Although traditional students are typically described as students between 18-24 years old, for PWIs this also means their historical focus on White students. This encouraged change would result in PWIs considering

students outside the 18-24 age range and non-White students; however, the concern is selective institutions will continue to focus their recruiting efforts on White students, despite the anticipated increase of minority students (Kelderman et al., 2019).

In their report addressing the “turbulent” future of enrollment, Kelderman et al. (2019) quotes the president of National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC), Stefanie Niles, addressing the shift in the market: “Many colleges will have to look beyond their traditional missions to serve a more diverse population of students...there will be fewer students and different kinds of students.” Expanding on Niles’ comments, there are implications to policymakers’ and administrators’ need to understand these different kinds of students, and the impact their institution has on the college experience and development of said students.

The next section will describe the difference between institution types and how their practices are driven by their agendas. The section will compare public versus private; and, non-profit versus for profit institutions, calling out the pros and cons of each.

Types of Institutions

This section will address the different types of higher education institutions, defining the difference between for-profit and non-profit, as well as the difference between private and public institutions. These differences highlight the varying strategies of institutions operate under based on how they are classified.

For-profit vs. Non-profit

Within the higher education industry there are different profiles that exists among institutions, all with their own set of advantages and disadvantages. For starters, the primary educational difference between for-profit and non-profit institutions is how revenues are used. For-profit institutions are run by corporations and private entities, so their primary focus is high

profits to distribute among stakeholders, leaving a smaller portion of tuition dollars to reinvest into improving the educational experience and overall education of students (Tomar, 2019).

Their tactics include high tuition prices while targeting students who are financial aid eligible receiving their aid in the forms of loans, those like Black students, women, and adult students (Howarth & Stifler, 2019). First-time students enrolled at 4-year private for-profit institutions received the highest percentage of student loans (70%); compared to those at public (44%); and, private non-profit institutions (58%) (Center for Education Statistics, 2019). There were over one million students, or six percent, enrolled at for-profit institutions in Fall 2017, and Black students made up 29 percent of that population (Ma et al., 2019).

In a recent Brookings study, Howarth and Stifler (2019) evaluated the participation and quality of education at for-profit online institutions, and argued these institutions are failing the students they claim to serve. Two examples of these types of institutions are University of Phoenix and Southern New Hampshire. These recruitment strategies also come with a level of enrollment convenience and financial aid ease, with student hopes of increasing their human capital (Howarth & Stifler, 2019). Despite there not being an abundance of research on why African American students attend for-profit institutions, Howarth and Stifler (2019) drew attention to the disservice online for-profits are giving to their students in the pursuit of increasing their human capital.

Unlike for-profits, non-profit institutions take those same tuition dollars and reinvest them into the educational experience of their students, making educating students their primary focus (Tomar, 2019). Such practices are a demonstration of institutions putting the academic success of their students first, and not investors like for-profit institutions.

Private vs Public Institutions

Private institutions are known for their academic prestige, enrollment selectivity, thus yielding a smaller campus community and smaller class sizes, compared to public institutions having much larger student body (Kerr, 2019). Public institutions receive their funding from federal and state governments placing limitations on their pricing models. Private institutions are more tuition dependent than government dependent, supported by their endowments and other discretionary funds, allowing more flexibility in how those funds are spent. During the 2016-17 academic year, private institutions spent on average about 1.5 times more money per full-time equivalent (FTE) student than public institutions (Ma et al., 2019), allowing these institutions to promote the additional services offered on their respected campuses. However, investment in these services and offerings can lead to increase cost of attendance. Private institutions can also negotiate more with students, offering merit scholarships or institutional grants to mitigate sticker shock, making cost of attendance more attractive to prospective students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), 82 percent of first-time students enrolled at private, non-profit institutions received institutional grants compared to 49 and 32 percent at public and private for-profit institutions respectfully. Compared to public institutions, private institutions can spend more per FTE; however, such practices continue to increase their cost of attendance making them a less attractive option to students who are price sensitive – specifically African Americans. The average published cost at a private nonprofit institution was \$50,000 compared to \$22,000 for public in-state, and \$38,000 for public out-of-state in 2019-20 (Ma et al., 2019). For students that are price sensitive, \$50,000 is likely to have a negative influence on student decision making, all else equal.

In addition to private institutions marketing a higher sticker price and having the ability to award more aid, private not-for-profit institutions are also known for being less diverse. There is mutual benefit for predominately White institutions to invite diversity on campus, or what Harper (2013) refers to as “cross-racial interactions.” For PPWIs seeking to diversify their campus, it is important for the administrators to evaluate the way in which aid is awarded to non-white students and determine what other factors may attract them to other institutions. As the financial benefits of students attending non-for-profit, private, predominately White institutions exist, there are also student success benefits for minority students. Melguzio (2010) discovered there is a positive relationship between degree attainment of minority students and how selective an institution is, finding there was an increase spanning from 8-12%. Another way to put it, the more selective the institution the more likely students are to obtain their degree (Melguzio, 2008; 2010), making a strong argument when addressing the post-secondary completion rates among African American students. In addition to the different institutional types and the benefits and drawbacks, the pursuit for prestige remains a shared goal of all institutions. Which is subsequently also driving their costs of attendance up. The next section will explain why higher education institutions focus more on achieving prestige, and how this pursuit can hinder an institution’s ability to recruit Black students.

Pursuit of Prestige

This section will explain how the constant pursuit of prestige by institutions influences their practices, from setting tuition pricing, to the development of recruitment strategies; which aligns with Bowen’s (1980) revenue theory of cost (RTC) framework. In his recent book, Selingo (2020) reminds us that higher education is a “big” business, and recruitment is about students aligning with the institutional, frequently changing, agenda; and those are the ones that

receive special attention. The influence of prestige and the behavior it can dictate, one could argue hinders the ability of PWIs from recruiting African American/Black students. RTC argues the primary focus of institutions is to increase their prestige and academic excellence by doing whatever it takes to accomplish those goals, which can result in other goals, not considered by the annual *U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges*, receiving less attention. First an explanation of how prestige is measured will be discussed.

Measuring Prestige

With traffic of over 15 million viewers annually during its “Best Colleges” report release, the *U.S. News & World Report (USNWR)* has become one of the main points of reference for educational stakeholders, like prospective students, since its inception in the early 80’s (Diamond, 2012). In addition, these rankings have become the tool colleges and universities use as a way to measure their prestige, leaving them in a constant stage of “striving” (O’Meara & Bloomgarden, 2011). The annual report ranks colleges and universities based on various weighted measures, in effort to generate the list of “Best Colleges.” *USNWR* uses a methodology to calculate the rankings in areas like institutional outcomes, faculty resources, expert opinion, financial resources, student success, and alumni giving (Morse & Mason, 2020). Each category is weighted and have additional sub-categories. Ortagus (2016), acknowledges there is research which identifies the flaws of the methodology; however, the response to the annual report remains high.

Morse (2008) strongly believes institutions make decisions with rankings in mind, targeting the different variables that will yield desired outcomes. Selingo (2020) argues, prestige is simply a perception held by prospective students and their families, one of which institutions try to manipulate to influence its ranking outcomes. Bowen (1980) argues this pursuit of prestige

is driving the cost of attendance, which could be the reason Black students, who are more price sensitive, are choosing institutions other than PPWIs.

Revenue Theory of Cost (RTC)

As the costs of education continues to rise and outpace the rate of inflation, researchers continue to identify the multiple root-causes. Despite there being multiple frameworks, Howard Bowen (1980) and his revenue theory of costs (RTC) continues to be recognized as the economic framework addressing the rising costs within higher education. The foundation of this economic framework is grounded in the idea that higher education institutions will spend all the money it can raise in effort to achieve prestige, academic excellence, and have influence (Wellman, 2010). Bowen's (1980) RTC has been argued as a theory to identify the incentives or motivations of higher education (Kimball, 2014), and is broken out into five 'laws' or 'rules' helping to shape the theory (Kimball, 2014; Matthews, 2013):

1. "The dominant goals of institutions are educational excellence, prestige, and influence.
2. In quest of excellence, prestige, and influence, there is virtually no limit to the amount of money an institution could spend for seemingly fruitful educational ends.
3. Each institution raises all the money it can. No college or university ever admits to having enough money.
4. Each institution spends all it raises.
5. The cumulative effect of the preceding four laws is toward ever-increasing expenditure the incentives inherent in the goals of excellence, prestige and influence are not counteracted within the higher education system by incentives leading to parsimony or efficiency".

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From an economic perspective, RTC presents the ideology that higher education costs will continue to rise as institutions spend as much as it can raise in effort to accomplish rule one, showing a direct relationship between institutional revenues and institutional expenses. From a pursuit of prestige perspective, RTC provides support of the influence college rankings, like *US News and World Report Best Colleges* rankings, have on institutional decision-making. For example, institutions can use selectivity as a way to enroll the students they desire and maximize net tuition revenue. Selectivity is a ranking indicator of the USNWR Best Colleges methodology, which increases demand, allowing institutions to charge students more to attend. As institutions develop recruitment strategies to achieve high rankings and maximize revenue by focusing on the ranking indicators which will help them achieve it, Institutions will do whatever it takes financially to accomplish a determined level of excellence, prestige, and influence. To some researchers, to accomplish the goals outlined through RTC results in a reflection of the quality an institution provides. Melguzio and Chung (2012) argue that institutions have a goal of wanting a student body that is academically prepared and diverse; however, this can be difficult to achieve if recruitment strategies are implemented with focus on the ranking indicators that strive to move up the rankings and maximize net tuition revenue.

As institutions continue to strive for the recognition as one the best colleges or universities, as measured by the annual USNWR *Best Colleges* report, there is a lack of attention to the rankings measuring diversity. The USNWR Campus Ethnic Diversity rankings measures how diverse a campus is based on how many non-White students are enrolled (U.S. News & World Report, n.d.). Although diversity is beginning to be factored into the ranking methodology, consistent enrollment trends suggest colleges and universities continue to benchmark themselves to the rankings that better align with their larger institutional agendas. For colleges and

universities, like predominantly White institutions, seeking to grow its diversity, this metric should be considered by leaders when establishing recruitment strategies. As described by Staryhorn (2009), institutions hold a desire to prepare students for life-long learning, participation in a democratic society, and global citizenship. The next section will explain the benefits of higher education institutions diversifying their campuses and creating diverse learning environments.

Value of Diversity

Highlighted in this section will be the benefits campuses reap by intentionally creating diversity and diverse learning environments. First, research will be presented to address the goal of higher education institutions to grow diversity on campuses and their influence on creating cross-racial interactions. A more in-depth explanation will be discussed showing the benefits of colleges and universities creating cross-racial interactions among students.

Institutions of all types continue to commit themselves to utilizing enrollment as a way to increase diversity (Banks-Santilli, 2014). Understanding that college could be the first-time students experience diversity, Thompson and Cueso (2014) reemphasize Hyman and Jacobs' (2009) argument that colleges and universities have the ability to increase worldliness by providing a diverse environment without students having to travel beyond their campuses. The emphasis on diversity continues to be a focus point within many industries like higher education. This is demonstrated through published mission and vision statements by institutions, expressing their commitment to embedding a diverse and inclusive environment within their campus communities. Despite the growing focus of diversity through these outlets mentioned, there continues to be a participation gap among African American/Black students at PPWIs. Bryk et al. (2017) would attribute this to institutions making decisions and implementing strategies

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without fulling understanding the problem they are seeking to address; what the authors refer to “solutionitis” (p. 24). A user-centric approach allows opportunity to gain the perspectives of those close to the matter, diversifying the perspectives on the issue, leading to the creation of a networked community. In this case, an established networked community can help provide a level of sustainability in the recruitment practices geared toward accomplishing increased matriculation of African American students.

As researchers have studied the influence of frequent cross-racial interactions among students, Saenz et al. (2007) added to it by studying the outcomes related to positive interactions on campuses among different race and ethnicities. Existing research has focused on three types of diversity: structural, curricular and co-curricular, and interactional (Denson & Chang, 2009). Participating in diverse environments on campuses can impact a student's self-efficacy, academic skills, and students' ability to engage with racial and cultural differences (Denson & Chang, 2009). A consistent finding in the research conducted has been the positive effects of diverse environments (Thompson and Cueso, 2014; Hayman & Jacobs, 2009; Saenz et al., 2007; Chang et al., 2006). Hurtado (2005) found positive effects of diversity on student complex thinking skills, retention, cultural awareness, interest in social issues, and support for the diversity initiatives set forth by the institution. Racially diverse campuses help increase the frequency of cross-racial interactions creating opportunities for race issues to be discussed leading to an increase in educational benefits (Saenz et al., 2007). Chang et al. (2006) concluded high cross-racial interactions add education benefits such as students being more open to diversity, cognitive development, and self-confidence, via an increase in: acceptance of different races and cultures; general knowledge; critical thinking ability; and, problem solving ability. All of which, the researchers emphasized such interactions have the highest effect during students'

first year on campus (Cheng et al., 2006). Thompson and Cueso (2014) add, that diverse experiences on campus help lay the groundwork for navigation in the workforce and the global society which consists of people from all different backgrounds. Strayhorn (2008) summarizes existing research findings regarding the benefits of diverse student interactions as the advancement of racial understanding, cultural awareness, openness to diversity, political attitudes, and critical thinking. The educational benefits go beyond the time on college and university campuses, but provide the skills, knowledge, and ability to navigate in a diverse society (Thompson & Cueso, 2014; Saenz et al., 2007), interrupting longstanding segregation trends within society (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Strayhorn (2009) discovered that such interactions for Black men on predominately White campuses were significant as it related to their sense of belonging on those campuses. Strayhorn (2009) also found that White students benefit more from cross-racial interactions at the expense of their non-White peers, as they are the ones providing the education to them, enhancing self-awareness. The desire to educate their White peers has been found to be an influence of why Black students attend PWIs (Freeman, 1999). Such environments and interactions provide opportunity for students to gain perspectives of students that are different from them (Thompson and Cueso, 2014). An institution's ability to promote their diverse campus make-up can influence the college choice decision of Black students attending PPWIs. The next section will present review of literature on the student college choice process, examining the influential factors behind African American/Black student matriculation decisions.

College Choice Process

This section will breakdown the student college choice framework introduced by Hossler and Gallagher (1987), and how it has become highly used among researchers despite other

existing student college choice frameworks. The breakdown will explain all three phases students go through as presented by Hossler and Gallagher (1987), highlighting the factors at each phase influencing student decisions. Supporting research will also be incorporated, explaining how African American students navigate through this model and how their navigation is different compared to their White peers, concluding the importance of understanding how these students navigate in effort to increase enrollment.

Evolution of college choice

"College choice is the process by which college aspirants prepare for and apply to colleges, and college access is the process whereby educators, policymakers, and administrators attempt to ensure that all individuals eligible for and desirous of college admission, and eventually a college education, are able to attain it" (McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997). The student college choice has gained the interest within the industry from all levels, from policymakers to administrators at the institutional level (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). And although there has been an abundance of research conducted around the experiences of African American students on college campuses, less has been on the characteristics of why these students choose the campuses of their choice (Freeman & Thomas, 2002). Over the years, researchers have studied student college choice through different lenses, such as sociological, psychological, and economical, in effort to understand the drivers behind students deciding whether and where to go to college (Bergerson, 2009). From a sociological lens, researchers studied the influence students' individual backgrounds have on their college choice decisions, such as race and ethnicity; parental and peer influence; academic achievement; socioeconomic status; etc. Through the psychological perspective, researchers evaluated the perceptions of students as they interact with institutions and learn the institutions' characteristics, such as cost,

financial aid availability, and curriculum (Bergerson, 2009). Determining if the cost of college is worth the investment, is the economic lens researchers have used when studying college choice, where students compare the costs of attendance offset by the amount of financial aid awarded (Bergerson, 2009). Litten (1982) concluded in his early works, that the navigation of college choice for students differs based on the student characteristics and is essential if institutions seek to improve retention. Given the different lens of which student college choice has been studied has given institutions different frameworks to choose from, establishing a system generating associated matriculation rates. However, these individual frameworks have left gaps within them because they do not include perspectives presented by the others, resulting in the need of a more inclusive framework.

The student college choice model introduced by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) presents a general three phase model which students navigate through when deciding whether and which institution they will attend. The model outlines the general influential factors impacting a student's decision, blending the sociological, psychological, and economical perspectives covered individually in earlier research. The framework's ability to capture the lenses of previous research has allowed it to continue to be the foundational framework used by researchers when exploring student college choice (McDonough & Antonio, 1996; McDonough et al., 1997; Freeman, 1997; Pitre, 2006; Bergerson, 2009; Cartledge, Baldwin, Persall, and Woolley, 2015). This three-phase model highlights the stages students go through and the corresponding personal and institutional factors influencing their college enrollment decisions. The model presents two outcomes for each phase students navigate through: student decides to pursue postsecondary education; a choice set is established; and, a choice is made on what

institution he/she will attend, and the second option for each phase is the student deciding not to participate and go a different route.

As the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model continues to serve as the foundational framework, recent research have described such models like this one as linear, identifying that there are other factors that need to be considered when understanding students and their college choice (Tierney & Venegas, 2009; Chen & DesJardins, 2010), and some factors continue to have influence beyond the phase where it is first presented (Freeman, 2005; Harper, 2012a; Williams, 2018). Others acknowledge there is no perfect model due to the complexity of the higher education system, and this model only considers traditional students (Iloh, 2018), not considering non-traditional students, as well as those of different races and lower socioeconomic status (Muhammad, 2008). McDonough and Antonio (1996) identified that influential factors are different according to race, making it important for institutions to understand how their practices can influence student decisions of different backgrounds. Arguments have also been made for the lack of voice from Black students addressing their experiences and what drives their decisions, discovering that these students navigate differently than other students (Freeman, 1997; 1999; McDonough et al., 1997; Williams, 2018). Arguments in alignment with this study address the need to consider the influence of the cultural context when evaluating Black student participation.

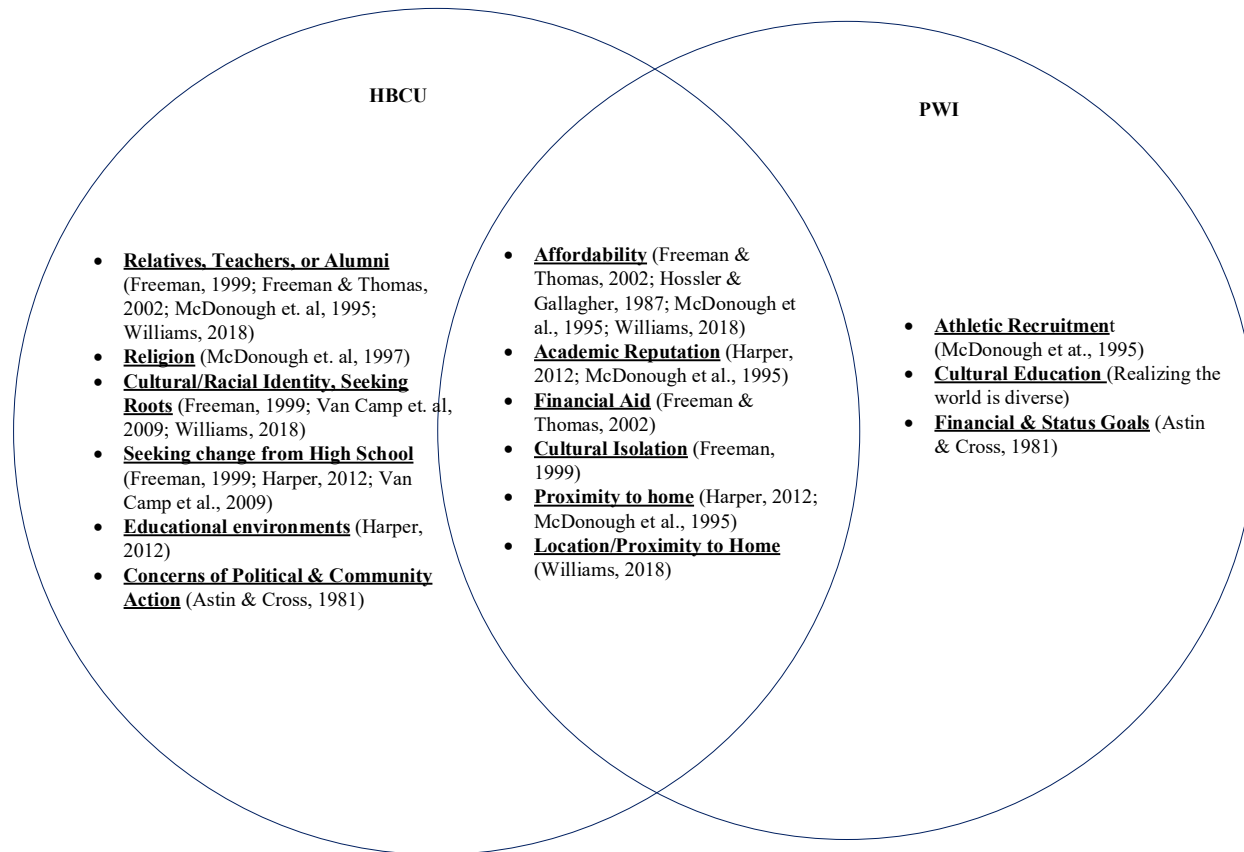
Hossler and Gallagher (1987) acknowledge the lack of attention given to specific student characteristics, however the framework provides foundation and general understanding to researchers of where to start when studying the subject making it applicable to all student types and phases in that capacity. This model coupled with the cultural context of Black students, identified by Freeman (1997; 1999; 2005), McDonough (1997) and Williams (2018), help show

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what needs to be considered when recruiting and matriculating Black students. Figure 1 provides a summarized illustration of what researchers have discovered as factors which influence the college choice of Black students.

Figure 1

Influential Factors of African American/Black Students



The lack of understanding of the historical and structural differences of cultures has led to solutions that are applicable only to the majority (Freeman, 1997), which provides ground for this research of the exploration assumptions and practices of administrators at Citytown University impacting the matriculation of African American/Black students. Table 2 provides a summarized visual of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model, illustrating the three phases, associated factors, and outcomes.

Table 2

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) Three Phase Model College Choice

A Three Phase Model of College Choice			
Model Dimensions	Influential Factors		Student Outcomes
	Individual Factors	Organizational Factors	
Predisposition (Phase One)	-Student Characteristics -Significant Others -Educational Activities	-School Characteristics	1. College Options 2. Search for: other options
Search (Phase Two)	-Student Preliminary College Values -Student Search Activities	-College and University search activities (Search for students)	1. Choice Set 2. Other Options
Choice (Phase Three)	-Choice set	-College and University Courtship Activities	*Choice

Table is a recreation of Hossler & Gallagher (1987) Three Phase Model of College Choice

The following sections will expand on each phase of the model: predisposition, search, and choice, through a blended lens to capture the cultural context previous researchers identify as critical when studying Black students and college choice.

Phase One – Predisposition

Predisposition phase is what Hossler and Gallagher (1987) refer to as a developmental phase. This phase explores the influence of student and school characteristics, significant others, and extracurricular activities have on students choosing to pursue either their postsecondary

options or choose another option. The socioeconomic status (SES) and a student's academic achievements and ability, represent the individual factors researchers use to predict the probability of students exploring their college options. The authors concluded, students coming from a higher SES and higher academic ability, are more likely to pursue college, along with their involvement in co- and extra-curricular activities (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The higher a student's ability, the sooner they are likely to determine their postsecondary decision; however, it is different for Black students as they tend to start the process and complete the process later than their White peers (Litten, 1982). Kim, DesJardins, and McCall (2009) argue these characteristics are not just influences during the predisposition phase but throughout all three phases.

In addition to the student characteristics, another influence during this phase is that of their parents and peers. The greater the encouragement and emphasis on college participation from parents, the more likely the student will consider college; similar, if a peer has postsecondary plans the student is more likely to consider college as well (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). For Black students, Harper (2012a) discovered parents present a non-negotiable expectation of pursuing college, leaving a lasting impression and also influencing persistence once enrolled. Muhammad (2008) shared similar peer influence results to Hossler and Gallagher (1987), as well as supporting Harper's (2012a) findings of a mother's influence is the most significant during this phase of the college choice process. These findings also support Freeman's (2005) argument that dismissing the cultural characteristics leaves a gap in understanding the true influence family plays in the college choice process, specifically for Black students, as they are not as self-prompted as their peers to engage in the college choice process without cultural support. Freeman (2005) makes point to emphasize the difference that exists between family structure (SES), and the parental desire for their child to participate in higher

education. For institutions looking to improve their Black student enrollment, it is important to realize they are also recruiting a prospective student's support system as well.

During this phase, the high school and postsecondary institution play a role in influencing a student's decision. Items such as pre-college experiences available to students, co-curricular and extracurricular activities, the proximity of an institution, as well as the reputation and overall quality high school, all contribute to students deciding on continuing their education. Such access can be challenging for Black students due to attending low-performing high schools with limited resources to provide such experiences. These limited resources also impact the positive influence guidance counselors can have. Belasco (2013) argues counselors are a critical resource for students coming from low SES, because of the counselors' ability to promote college aspirations and aid in the overall college process. The challenge for counselors serving in these schools is the lack of time they have to devote in the college preparation process, which leaves these students at a disadvantage. Counselors can help fill the void for students whose parents do not have the educational experience to help their student navigate the process, but there is a lack of resources in the schools where these counselors are needed most (Muhammad, 2009). Participants of Harper's (2012a) study, shared their negative experience with guidance counselors when seeking direction on what colleges to apply to, discrediting institutions like HBCUs or more elite institutions.

For both counselors and administrators responsible for recruiting, it is important to not focus efforts exclusively on predictive measures but to also consider the influence their culture has which these students navigate daily. Pitre (2006) discovered student aspirations were impacted by student perceptions of their schools' ability to prepare them for college, but concluded Black students still shared the same postsecondary aspirations as their White peers.

Although the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) did not expand on the organizational influences during this phase, as they do in subsequent phases, more attention should be given on this subject to show the influence higher education institutions can have on the aspirations of students, especially Black students, when interacting with them. As the determination is made to pursue postsecondary education, students transition to the search phase where students begin to explore their college options by learning what different institutions have to offer leading to establishment of their choice set.

Phase Two – Search

Once a decision is made to pursue postsecondary education, students begin to solicit and accumulate information from different institutions, allowing the search phase to begin. By the end of this phase, students will have formed a list of institutions to apply to, assuming they did not decide to pursue options other than college. During this phase, the communication strategies used by colleges and universities when interacting with prospective students can be very influential, making this phase where institutions can have a modest influence (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The more information about college and the college process a student receives, the more sophisticated the search can be. In conjunction with their high aspirations to participate in college, Black students can be faced with barriers as the majority are first generational college-goers (Freeman, 2005), leaving access to information critical during the process. Litten (1982) found that longer and less efficient searches occur for students that are African American, of lower SES, and parents with less education. During this phase, it is theorized that parental influence decreases as students become more dependent on other outside influences, but Smith and Fleming (2006) found parents continue to be heavily involved through the search and choice phases for African American students. Although this select group of students go through a

longer search process, does not mean they do not have a desire to attend college; however, it means more of a focus on the role colleges and counselors play within the process is needed to keep these students encouraged and provide support in order to have a more sophisticated search, which Harper (2012a) discovered is not happening for African American students. The male participants who came from public high schools in Harper's (2012a) study shared their guidance counselors often caused "more harm than good," and did not help as much during their college search due to the high student to counselor ratios, but he did unpack that each participant had at least one teacher that influenced their decision to continue their education beyond high school. Student navigation through the college information collection process can become more challenging when the financial aid and affordability factors are in play.

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) used financial aid as an example, mentioning students' lack of understanding around financial aid can influence the student's decision leaving schools out of their choice set. Kim et al. (2009) argued student perceptions and information on college affordability also play a role both during the early and late stages of the college choice process leaving an impact on matriculation decisions. For students who are unfamiliar with the financial aid process, or simply ignorant toward understanding the difference between sticker and net price, can lead to colleges or universities not making a student's choice set, leaving no opportunity for "courtship," (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). When it comes to recruitment efforts at PPWIs, it is important for administrators to understand the relationship between the different types of aid has on matriculation. Low-income and minority students are more price sensitive and make decisions based on this (Kim et al., 2009). Student perceptions on affordability can also influence a student's choice set if they are ignorant to how to interpret costs. Hossler, Hu, and Schmitt (1998) had two important findings: the more information provided on cost of

attendance, the decrease in price sensitivity; and, if students felt their family could afford the education, there was a decrease in price sensitivity. The more information and insight students are provided during the search, students will be able to establish a strong choice set, emphasizing the importance of the interaction between institutions and students. How this information is presented can not only have an impact on recruitment and matriculation, but also on retention as Harper (2012a) and Chen & DesJardins (2010) point out. Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, and Sanbonmatsu (2012), suggest students understanding the financial aid process continues to be important to prevent students from missing out on aid opportunities which can relieve the financial burden. The complexity presented by the financial aid process, can be believed to why participation is so high among Black students at for-profit institutions because of the ease in applying they are able to provide. Researchers have found that it is not just costs that influence the choice set, though a strong component, but there are non-financial influencers as well.

Academic reputation is a common institutional characteristic that Black students look at when establishing their choice set, along with the proximity of the institution to their home (McDonough et al., 1997; Harper 2012a; Williams, 2018). The influence of alumni has been discovered by researchers studying HBCU college choice (Freeman, 1999; Freeman & Thomas, 2002; McDonough et al., 1997; Williams, 2018). For Black students, cultural identity plays a role in whether they decide to enroll at a HBCU or PWI. Researchers found students who attended predominately White high schools either were more inclined to attend HBCUs as a way to seek change from what they were used to (Freeman, 1999; Van Camp, Barden, Sloan, Clarke, 2009; Harper, 2012a), or were seeking their cultural identity (Freeman, 1999; Van Camp et al., 2009; Harper, 2012a; Williams, 2018). In addition to costs, Black students are inclined to attend PWIs due to athletic recruitment (McDonough et al., 1997), and some students had a desire to

educate the non-Black community of their culture (Freeman, 1999). A more recent finding from Williams and Palmer (2019) discovered the current political climate following the 2016 presidential election influenced the enrollment choice of Black students as they evaluated the potential campus climate. This can be important for PPWIs as they seek to recruit and matriculate Black students. HBCUs utilize their alumni to aid in recruitment as well. Through a CRT lens, specifically the interest convergence tenant, Harper (2009) argues institutions should align their interests with focus around student success, especially for Black male students that are recruited to play sports.

As highlighted in both the predisposition and search phase, there are other influential factors beyond costs which Black students consider when selecting a college or university, and this is important for administrators to realize, as financial resources become strained, there are other strategies that could be utilized to influence matriculation. The intent of Freeman's (1997) seminal research was to understand the influences attracting Black students to HBCUs and PWIs, arguing that with this understanding administrators would be able to enhance their recruitment efforts of these students. During the choice phase, institutions have the highest influence as they seek to be the college or university a student enrolls (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987).

Phase Three – Choice

As aspirations have transitioned from the gathering of information on different institutions leading to the establishment of a list of colleges and universities students desire to enroll in, it is now time for a choice to be made. In alignment with recent research, this choice phase is still being influenced by the factors of the previous phases, demonstrating that navigation of student college choice is not linear. During this phase institutions have the strongest influence in the student's matriculation decision. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) refer to this as the "college and

university courtship activities,” allowing institutions to provide their final recruitment push. As part of the courtship, more interaction between the institution and student occur. Confer and Mamiseishivili (2012) found the interaction and experience minority students had while on campus visits influenced their decision, leaving opportunity for institutions to demonstrate how their campus is the best fit for them. The perceived campus environment can determine if a student chooses an HBCU or a PWI. In his study of Black male students, Harper (2012a) found students exclusively selected HBCUs based on the institution’s reputation of its ability to provide a supportive educational environment for Black students. Williams and Palmer (2019) found students chose an HBCU because of the potential campus climate following the 2016 Presidential election. These examples show the influence campus interaction has on the Black student matriculation decision. In addition, researchers have discovered affordability continues to play a significant role in the participation in higher education for African American students (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Freeman & Thomas, 2002; Williams, 2018). As the costs of higher education continues to rise, it is assumed prospective students are going to be more attracted to the institution offering the lowest cost, leaving price to be an element which influence prospective students (Lassila, 2010). One could argue that in order to receive the best price, students must first understand how to navigate the search and choice phase of the college choice process. Tierney and Venegas (2009) point out, not only does academic ability impact a student’s amount of aid, but also the lack of applying for aid despite being eligible is a present role in students missing out on aid. This highlights student perceptions on higher education affordability, thus influencing their persistence.

As institutions continue to seek to develop an academically prepared and diverse student body, financial aid is a way to accomplish it (Melguizo & Chung, 2012). Given their high

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influence during this phase, colleges and universities can structure attractive aid packages to entice students to matriculate. As mentioned in the earlier section, the ability to structure attractive packages is easier for private institutions than public institutions. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) point out, for White students, financial aid influenced their choice set from moving one school from one ranking to another (for example, a school being number three on a student's choice set, to then moving to number one after receiving more aid), demonstrating a shift in financial aid policy being awarded more on merit than a need base (Chen & DesJardins, 2010).

Financial aid is viewed as the means to minimize the financial burden for students seeking to attend the college or university of their choice (Hypolite & Tichavakunda, 2019). Given the increase in postsecondary costs, college affordability continues to be a major barrier, among others, for minority students (Long & Riley, 2007; Chen & DesJardins, 2010). The mix of attending low performing K-12 schools and the postsecondary institutions attended attribute to the financial burden because of the lack of financial resources available to them (Baum, 2019). As American education is still challenged in providing equal educational opportunities for minorities and lower income students, research has been conducted to understand the complexity of financial aid and its effects on students of different demographics matriculating and graduating college (Chen & DesJardins, 2010). Others, like St. John, Paulsen, and Carter (2005) examined the impact different financial aid types have on the different race and ethnicity, finding that grants strengthen the persistence of African American students more than their peers. As government subsidies like Pell Grants, government loans, and work-study programs have not fully recovered since the Great Recession (Kelderman et al., 2019), institutions have had to adjust their strategies through aid types they can control, like tuition discounting.

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Tuition discounting is a practice used for several reasons, such as raising the institution's academic profile, encouraging the enrollment of diverse students, or to increase net tuition revenue (Gianneschi & Pingel, 2014). It's important to understand the impact of these practices on cost and affordability for the same students they are seeking to recruit. Their lower receipt of government subsidies, have led to private institutions having a mature tuition discount practice and more flexibility compared to public institution (Lassila, 2010). This leaves institutional aid to be the most dominant source of aid at private nonprofits (Ma et al., 2019). Private institutions provide higher levels of grant aid and are aware of the affordability challenges of low-income minority students face (Melguizo & Chung, 2012), allowing them to leverage their flexibility to craft attractive aid packages. According to NCES (2019), Citytown University distributed over \$32 million in institutional grants and scholarships to 100 percent of its student body; in comparison to a local, state, public school with a similar enrollment, awarded less than \$3 million to 36 percent.

In their study on the influence of financial aid packages, Melguizo & Chung (2012) found private institutions were giving more aid in the form of grants to high-achieving, low-income minority students compared to public institutions. Their findings also highlighted a positive relationship between the amount of institutional aid and the institutions selectivity. Although receiving a high amount of institutional aid, Melguizo and Chung (2012) noted students were still needing to borrow money even after the presented financial aid package, leaving one to conclude affordability plays a larger role than prestige for these students at private, selective institutions. Although students are offered more institutional aid from private nonprofit institutions, tuition and fees have increased at a higher rate than other institutions (Ma et al., 2019). This has left students whose family income was below \$70,000 with a higher unmet need

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at private nonprofit institutions totaling an average of \$20,000 compared to \$28,000 at for-profit private and \$14,400 at public (Baum et al., 2019). At Citytown University, the net price was \$24,000 during the 2018-19 academic year (NCES, 2019). Understanding these numbers, shows the high level of unmet need can result in price sensitive students – like low-income and minority students – deciding to enroll at a college or university that is more cost effective.

As the type and amount of aid influence the matriculating decisions of minority students, Confer and Mamiseishvili (2012) argue, "...admissions counselors should inform students of aid that is available, encourage them to apply, and make sure deadlines are met" (p.12). With no evidence supporting why African Americans attend for-profit institutions at a higher rate (Howarth & Stifler, 2019), the assumption can be made that applying for financial aid is easier at for-profit institutions than nonprofits leaving it as the only justification for the high participation of Black students at for-profits. If administrators at PPWIs seek to increase the matriculation of Black students, their recruitment practices need to be modified to have a stronger influence at each phase of the college choice process. A user-centric approach will aid in the modification of these practices, as it focuses on the engagement of all relevant actors within the system. For the choice phase, where the organizational influence is greatest, institutions must find ways to make attendance more affordable, or find other ways to demonstrate why he/she should attend said institution as financial resources become more limited.

As the research continues to show the strong relationship between financial aid packages and student enrollment decisions, especially as costs continue to increase, administrators should not forget the factors which serve as influences during the other phases of the college choice model. The student college choice model is not linear (Tierney & Venegas, 2009), and the factors driving decisions continue to serve as influences beyond the initial phase they are introduced.

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For African American students, family continues to serve as an influence from the predisposition phase through the choice phase. In addition, the information on institutions gathered during the search phase (i.e. costs, campus environment, seeking change from high school, etc.) help lead to the final choice during phase three. As PPWIs seek to improve their recruitment practices to increase the matriculation of African American students, administrators must first understand the outcomes the current system is currently yielding. These outcomes are currently represented through published reenrollment data; however, to better comprehend the practice which influence such data requires a deeper approach. Thus, this research seeks to use Bryk et al.'s (2017) user-centric approach to guide the implications of how institutions like Citytown University can use research to improve their matriculation of African American/Black students. As Harper (2009) reminds us that in order to get more educators and administrators to participate in the change a tangible return on their investment must be presented. After review of the literature, the following research question will be the focus of this study in effort to understand the enrollment outcomes at a particular PPWI: how do the assumptions and practices of administrators influence the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students at a PPWI?

Chapter 3 Methods

This section outlines the methods used for this study, beginning with a restatement of the problem at the focus of this research. In addition, the research site – Citytown University – is described to demonstrate why it was ideal for this study, capturing its student demographics and geographic location. Following, will be presentation of the research question, and how the data were collected. Descriptions of the participants, and how the data were analyzed will conclude the chapter.

The Central Law of Improvement states, “Every system is perfectly designed to deliver the results it produces” (Langley et al., 2009). The purpose of this study was to explore the assumptions and practices driving the recruitment system at a private, predominately White institution (PPWI), and its influence on the matriculation of African American/Black students. A qualitative approach allowed for greater understanding around these assumptions and practices through the voices of those embedded within the system. To expand, this study highlighted the alignments and misalignments that exists when recruiting African American/Black students to a PPWI, in comparison to existing research which has consistently identified influential factors behind these students’ college choice decision, as presented in Chapter 2. In addition, the findings of this research were intended to not only inform those directly responsible for recruiting students, such as admissions counselors, financial aid officers, and enrollment management administrators, but also finance administrators, high school guidance counselors, senior administrators, policymakers, and other college choice researchers. The data from this study came from a blend of higher education administrators who serve in a student-facing capacity and had direct recruitment influence representing departments like admissions and financial aid. The data were collected through a series of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews.

This chapter presents the methodology utilized for this study. The following sections reiterate the enrollment problem which exist at PPWIs among African American/Black students, and specifically at Citytown University. In attempt to apply improvement science framework, specifically a user-centric approach, participants in this study were those apart of the recruitment system. In addition, subsequent sections will outline how the data were collected and analyzed using improvement science research tools (e.g. fishbone diagrams).

Statement of the Problem

In this section, the problem surrounding African American enrollment at PPWIs and the gap within existing research of addressing this problem through a user-centric lens is presented providing emphasis and validity to this research.

As enrollment projections show a decline across all institution types, especially those in the North East, trends also show an anticipated increase in African American and Hispanic students. White student enrollment is projected to decrease 6%; African American and Hispanic students are expected to increase 8% and 14% respectively, between 2017-2028 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). This enrollment shift intensifies the competition among colleges and universities as they seek ways to buck the trend. One way to mitigate the declining trend is to focus recruitment efforts on non-traditional students. For PPWIs, this means becoming more aggressive in their efforts of recruiting and matriculating non-White students, specifically African American students.

Although there has been an abundance of research conducted around the experiences of African American students on college campuses, less has been on the characteristics of why these students choose the campuses of their choice (Freeman & Thomas, 2002). In addition, limited research exists exploring the administrative assumptions and practices at colleges and

universities that influence these college decisions. Existing studies generally identify the influences institutions have on student college choice, but do not go into great depth about how such influences can be applied to enhance practices and meet enrollment goals. When exploring the student college choice, research has been expanding with a focus on the African American student college choice, concluding these students navigate differently. Price sensitivity and affordability have been linked to playing a large role in their college decision, which has led to high levels of financial aid being awarded to these students. However, items like family, campus climate, alumni, and seeking to educate their non-Black peers are among additional factors which influence Black student college choice (Freeman, 1999; Freeman & Thomas 2002; McDonough et al., 1995; Williams, 2018). There has been a lack of attention given by the existing literature, through an improvement science lens, exploring the alignment between recruitment practices among administrators and the utilization of student-known, research-based factors which influence student enrollment decisions in those practices. This gap provides ground for this research to understand the assumptions influencing the existing recruitment practices among administrators yielding current enrollment outcomes, recommending a user-centric approach be utilized.

Through this study, I was able to determine whether the assumptions and practices demonstrate understanding of what factors influence African American student college choice, leading to provide recommendations of how practices can be enhanced utilizing a user-centric approach to increase the enrollment among this demographic of students. Additionally, the research aided in the capturing the perspective of administrators as to why African American students are choosing institutions other than PPWIs. Moreover, this study could ignite opportunity for more research exploring student college choice, African American student

participation at PPWIs, and administrative practices related to college choice and recruitment. As a PPWI, Citytown University is a perfect candidate for this study.

Research Site

Citytown University is a pseudonym used to describe an institution located in the North East located in western Pennsylvania. The institution is a four-year private, predominately White institution, educating approximately 10,000 students with only five percent identifying as African American/Black, and over 80 percent White. This institution is known for being founded on serving the underserved, specifically immigrants. The institution has become very vocal in their goals of wanting to create diverse and inclusive environments on its campus. Such efforts, coupled with a low diverse population, specifically of Black students, provides ground for this research to explore why strong diversity efforts are not reflective among the African American student population.

Research Question

In effort to better understand the administrative assumptions and practices at a PPWI which influence the outcome of low African American enrollment, the following research question guide this study:

How do the assumptions and practices of administrators influence the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students at a PPWI?

Data Collection

A breakdown of the instruments and tools that were used to collect the data of this qualitative study are presented in this section, detailing specifically how the collection will be done.

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As an administrator at the research site who works collaboratively across divisions and departments, I also served as the research instrument for collecting the data. The essential tool for the collection of the data for this qualitative study was the use of a series of semi-structured, individual, in-depth interviews. Each participant provided consent and understood the objective of the interview, conducted virtually utilizing virtual conferencing platforms such as ZOOM. The first interview was 60 minutes with the participants responding to a series of open-ended questions addressing the recruitment assumptions and practices at Citytown University. A follow up session occurred shortly after the initial interview, allowing the participants to confirm my understanding of their responses during the initial interview. This also gave participants the opportunity to clarify and, or add to a response he/she provided.

All interviews were recorded, with consent from participants, to help provide another layer of accuracy in capturing their responses. The series of open-ended questions addressing their assumptions and practices when it comes to recruiting Black students were developed off the foundation of what existing research has already identified as factors influencing these students' college choice. This aided in highlighting the alignment or misconceptions within current practices. The goal of the open-ended questions was to probe more into the "why" behind the assumptions and practices allowing the root-cause to the problem to be identified. These prompted questions allowed for organic dialogue to occur between the researcher and participant. In addition, personal notes were taken during and immediately following each interview while thoughts were fresh, making additional mention of body language, facial expressions, etc. Such observations can be critical given this could be the first time some of the participants are asked to share their perspectives and opinions of the work they do.

Participants

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The participants of this study are described in this section, describing each of them, and why they were qualified based on their duties and experiences at Citytown University. These qualified participants were embedded in the system, and their voices provided perspective into the assumptions and practices.

In effort to align with the user-centric approach introduced by Bryk et al. (2017), the participants of this study were selected based on their current role in student recruitment at Citytown University according to their department, title, and duties. The use of participants from varying, but related, areas allows a diverse perspective and insight to be gained through the interviews. Often times, embedded practices are determined by senior leadership with very minimal input from the actual people executing those practices, Bryk et al. (2017) describe this behavior as “solutionist” in this case. As a result of such dictated practices, those actually performing the tasks – in this case the admissions and financial aid counselors – develop an “I’m just doing as I am told” mentality leading to years of a system generating the same results. Thus, the data collected captured the perceptions of participants of the recruitment system and its outcomes.

There was a total of 6-8 participants for this study, consisting of enrollment management professionals who currently or recently – within the last six months – worked at Citytown University within the enrollment management group (i.e. admissions and financial aid) and could speak specifically to the assumptions and practices around recruitment. Although working within the same division, participants currently or previously held a variety of roles such as: vice president, assistant vice president, manager, director, or counselor within the division. In addition, the diversity of the participants will also apply to their race/ethnicity and years of service at Citytown University to add additional perspective to assumptions influencing the

practices. Each participant was reached out to via email communication outlining the purpose of the study, why he/she was selected, the structure of the study, and acknowledging that their participation is voluntary, and identity will be confidential. Since both groups fall under the same division, allowing the identity to be more identifiable as the participants become more senior, I made an effort to determine a way to keep their identity anonymous while still addressing the research question. The participants will be consulted on the descriptions used to describe them, as an additional measure to protect their confidentiality.

Data Analysis

This section will explain how the collected qualitative data were analyzed in effort to synthesize responses leading to the conclusion supporting the research question focused around this research.

Responses from the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded to help identify common themes as they related to the research question, categorizing them relating to assumptions and practices. Follow-up interviews were also conducted as a way to validate the collected data, and provide participants to expand on their responses shared during the initial interview. To organize the data collected from the interviews, a fishbone diagram was utilized to highlight emerging themes and patterns among the participants. Utilization of the fishbone diagram provided visibility into the key factors and their associated details which emerged from conversation when analyzing a problem (Bryk et al., 2017, pp. 68).

Emerging themes allowed further analysis into existing gaps between known African American student factors and the current practices and assumptions of administrators. Participant responses that stood out or identified as significant to the research question were called out and used to help emphasize its significance. Questions asked during the interview focused on existing

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assumptions and practices of enrollment management professionals as it relates to the factors known to influence African American students, but presented in a way to allow participants to share their perception of the question. Such responses were grouped based on the factors in attempt to illustrate the misalignment. This will be illustrated in a matrix-like form showing the individual factors and each participants response.

Chapter 4 Findings

This chapter addresses the findings and provide analysis of the data collected from the semi-structured interviews, highlighting the themes that emerged as a result. Participants were administrators who currently work at Citytown University within the enrollment management group (EMG). The chapter will be structured with an introduction of the methodology used to capture the data and the lens which they were viewed, while also restating the research question and the data that were gathered to address the research question. Subsequently, an explanation of the emerging themes will be covered, concluding with additional observations made during the data collection exercise.

Introduction

To address the research question at the center of this study, this chapter describes the findings and provide analysis of the data. Participants engaged in individual semi-structured interviews, where they responded to a series of prompted, open-ended questions in effort to capture their perspectives into the “why” of the research question at the focus of this study. Despite not being able to interview all actors within the recruitment system, the consistent perspectives shared by the six (6) participants allowed a general conclusion to be reached regarding administrative assumptions and practices within EMG at Citytown University. By way of the participants’ responses, this chapter will provide better understanding of the perceived assumptions currently influencing the administrative recruitment practices yielding consistently low African American/Black student matriculation.

The data collected for this study were analyzed through an improvement science lens, utilizing a fishbone diagram to organize the data. Appendix D illustrates how the fishbone diagram was used as an organizational tool to group the responses of the participants with the

themes that emerged supporting the research question. Capturing the responses of the participants via the transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews, allowed emerging themes to stand out and be addressed. Once synthesized, the following themes emerged as a result: (1) Institutional Self-Perception; (2) Addressing Affordability; (3) Lack of Diversity; and, (4) Lack of Interest. Institutional Self-Perception was perceived by the participants as how the institution views itself compared to how others view them, creating a blind spot to potential opportunities to improve enrollment outcomes, specifically of African American/Black students. Participants perceived affordability as a key factor influencing the enrollment of African American/Black students, while also pointing out how Citytown University's cost of attendance is comparable relative to other local institutions, yet there are no practices in place to promote its affordability to these students. Participants also acknowledged the lack of diversity that exists, specifically the lack of diversity among the multiple facets of the university, which can have a negative impact on recruitment. All of these themes manifested the concluding theme described as Citytown University's lack of interest in improving the enrollment of African American/Black students.

The findings of the research will be presented in three parts describing the aforementioned themes described by the perceptions of the participants; outlining the associated assumptions; followed by examples of how the perceived assumptions influence the institutional practices; concluded with an explanation of how practices can be improved through an improvement science lens. These perceived behaviors impact the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students at Citytown University. First, a description of the participants will be done, demonstrating how their role within the system made them ideal for this study.

Participants

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Qualifying participants of the research study either were currently employed at Citytown University or had worked there within the past six (6) months, specifically within the enrollment management group (EMG). In addition, participants currently hold or held positions responsible for recruiting prospective students. Such responsibilities included but were not limited to: (a) interacting directly with prospective students; (b) reviewing, accepting, rejecting of student applications; and/or, (c) oversight of the overall admissions process and practices including financial aid. Succeeding paragraphs provide an overview of the participants who were interviewed for this research study.

Participants 1, 2, 3, and 6 are experienced employees within the financial aid office. All four participants described themselves as “closers” or “second line recruiters” when it comes to the student recruitment process. Such descriptors reflect the participants’ interactions with students after a student is accepted, but not yet matriculated at Citytown University. The participants take pride in the responsibility of working with students and their families to discuss affordability options once they are accepted with plans of matriculating. This group is also responsible for distributing need-based aid, contrary to members of the admissions team who distribute merit-based aid. All of the participants within this group were very clear about this distinction. Participant 2 described the mindset best of this type of actor, “...you know we’re on that need side of the equation, right. [We] just, just kind of operate in that world...”. These participants were ideal for this study given their role in promoting and aiding in the affordability of students, playing a more significant role in the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students because of their level of price sensitivity.

Participant 4 is part of the admissions department identifying as a recruiter of prospective students. Responsibilities include but were not limited to, reviewing applications, traveling to

different high schools, explaining the application process, promoting Citytown University and all of its offerings from living on campus, clubs and organizations, to the basics financial aid. What stood out was the mention of the way Citytown University assigns its students to its recruiters. It was shared, at Citytown University, the assignments of recruiters are based on academic program interest compared to geographic territories. Participant 4 expressed the current recruiter assignment practices can impact the student recruitment process in a negative way, causing confusion to prospective students of not knowing who their assigned recruiter is. The responsibilities of Participant 4 demonstrate the critical role played during the college navigation process of students, and specifically of African American/Black students as the research shows these students navigate differently.

Participant 5 serves as one of the actors who collaborates with members of the EMG team to help set forth recruitment efforts of students. This made the participant ideal given their direct involvement in formation of recruitment strategies influencing practices.

All of the participants were asked the same open-ended questions during the data collection process, and questions not asked during the initial interview were asked during the follow-up interview, providing opportunity for the participant to share their thoughts on the specific subject. This also aided in validation of the themes that emerged throughout the course of the interviews, which are characterized and expanded upon in the next section. Although each participant was given the opportunity to address all the questions, not every participant shared their perception related to the identified themes that emerged. Table 3 illustrates which participants provided a response(s) supporting each of emerging themes.

Table 3

Participants' Response Checklist

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Themes	Institutional Self-Perception	Addressing Affordability	Lack of Diversity	Lack of Interest
Participants				
Participant 1	x	x	x	x
Participant 2	x	x		x
Participant 3	x	x	x	x
Participant 4	x	x	x	x
Participant 5	x	x	x	x
Participant 6	x	x		x

As illustrated above, all six (6) participants had something to share regarding the influence of the institution's self-perception, and addressing affordability, as well as, the perception of there being a lack of interest in improving the matriculation of African American/Black students. And only four of the six made mention about the lack of diversity as a factor influencing the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students. Table 4 shows all of the abbreviated responses of participants as they relate to the specific themes. Appendix E can be referenced for a detailed table of the full responses of each participant related to each theme. Not included would be any miscellaneous responses that may have been used to strengthen a particular claim.

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Table 4

Participants' Summary Responses by Theme

	Themes			
	Summary Response(s): Institutional Self-Perception	Summary Response(s): Addressing Affordability	Summary Response(s): Lack of Diversity	Summary Response(s): Lack of Interest
Participants				
1	"...stuck in the eighties model...where...people were into the excessive brand name...that's no longer the case." (P-1)	"And it seems to me that none of our students know about it [specific aid options]..." (P-1)	"...They feel that the majority of students don't understand their backgrounds..." (P-1)	"...I don't know. I don't have a lot of details for that, cause I think that's more admission's space." (P-1)
		"...if you compare [Citytown University's] financial aid package to some of these other schools, we're going to come in at the same cost." (P-1)	"It's so ingrained in the White culture that we know it all." (P-1)	
2	"[Citytown University's origins that was to help the poor immigrants...I think that's carried through and Citytown University's mindset." (P-2)	"So it's just reinforced in us this idea of need, need, need." (P-2)		"...the obvious thing is ultimately it is to about getting more students, or enough students...they realized diversity, economic, socioeconomic is one of the things people look for in a school." (P-2)
		"...we have to reorient ourselves...but in our mind...that FAFSA score is something that we just kinda based on in our lives." (P-2)		"... 'Are we recruiting people that are from different backgrounds?'" (P-2)

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		"...when you look at net cost and net averages we're right there...I think people aren't looking at [it]..." (P-2)		"...I don't know...it's hard to say, cause I'm not there..." (P-2)
		"I often wonder if students, you know, from [lower socio] economic backgrounds, as well as any backgrounds, are writing us off, our type of institution...just because of that [price]." (P-2)		
		"...I think we could brag a lot more about it." [value of Citytown University] (P-2)		
		"...a lot of these people probably shut the door on [Citytown University] because they just thought, you know, it's too expensive." (P-2)		
3	"I think we are one of the best valued institutions out there..." (P-3)	"Um, and we try to verify that we are affordable and comparable to most schools..." (P-3)	"...we've always tried to market for diversity or families..." (P-3)	"...we have a new initiative...and that's where we're really going to market to these students." (P-3)
		"...for the first time ever, we now post the strategy for academic scholarships on the admissions website..."(P-3)	"...when they walk on campus, they want to see the faculty and staff more diverse..." (P-3)	
		"...our goal is to go out and help the ones that don't know how to ask..." (P-3)	"...we've tried so many different proposals and it just doesn't reflect the increase." (P-3)	

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4	<p>"...I think like on paper things look good...Um, but if you actually experience it as a student, you don't really see the same type of story being told." (P-4)</p>		<p>"...they don't see people like them. They come to campus and they see a whole bunch of White people..." (P-4)</p>	<p>"...I will get a type of reaction of, 'Well, there are bigger fish to fry at this point.'" (P-4)</p>
	<p>"...they're comfortable, so if it's not broke, don't fix it."(P-4)</p>			<p>"I think there would be some pushback..." (P-4)</p>
5	<p>"My assumption would be that we perceive ourselves a bit differently than those outside perceived us." (P-5)</p>	<p>"...we want to counter the perception of cost." (P-5)</p>	<p>"...And it's like everyone goes around, like, it's a parade...." (P-5)</p>	<p>"I don't know, Black students are separated and considered outside of just general racial and ethnic diversity." (P-5)</p>
	<p>"And if you don't share that same perception internally, you would not really be in a position to, to change it or to do what would be necessary to change it." (P-5)</p>	<p>"I think that money is a challenge." (P-5)</p>	<p>"And I think until you can have those kinds of honest conversations [talking about race]..." (P-5)</p>	<p>"...AVPs and VPs meet with Management and Business...what they believe to be a reasonable goal based on university's objectives..." (P-5)</p>
	<p>"...we take a lot of steps to try to counter the cost perception." (P-5)</p>	<p>"...affordability and cost of attendance has always been the primary reason given for not enrolling..." (P-5)</p>	<p>"...people are so afraid to say, 'I need a Black student'..." (P-5)</p>	
	<p>"well, that won't happen here'... 'we've weathered other storms</p>		<p>"...it's important to enroll a diverse class every year...but also</p>	

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	and we've come out okay'... 'we're immune to the shifts that occur off the [Hill].' Whereas in reality you're not." (P-5)		[important] to survive as an institution." (P-5)	
	"...if you always put a positive spin on things, you don't notice the bad stuff." (P-5)		"I think that we are aware that we need to do a better job of recruiting Bland and African American students..." (P-5)	
			"...that hurts us a little bit not having that perspective [non-White] at the table where the decisions are being made..." (P-5)	
6	"...I think we, we perceive the university as we are doing what we should be doing to, to live out the mission..." (P-6)	"I think...family or friends, um, have been told that...a private school is probably...unreachable...[and] is so expensive." (P-6)		"...I'm not given that information of what their strategy is or was..." (P-6)
	"I'm a hundred percent sure that president [name removed], you know, his plan is to try and go back to that mission..." (P-6)	"in reality, our net price could be completely in line." (P-6)		"...there isn't a separate marketing plan for recruiting Black students. I don't think..." (P-6)

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	<p>"...if you build it, they will come...But they're not coming...I mean, they, they are...but what's the demographic of those applications?" (P-6)</p>			
	<p>"... [Citytown University] kind of tends to go on, you know, word of mouth... which you can't really rely on anymore." (P-6)</p>			

The next section expands on each of these themes, by characterizing and calling out specific data points which support each of them.

Characterization of Themes

During the data collections process, the six participants were asked a series of open-ended questions, utilizing a semi-structured interview tool to capture their perspectives addressing the assumptions and practices of administrators which influence the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students. The use of a fishbone diagram was used to organize and summarize the data collected, providing opportunity for the identified themes to emerge. This section characterizes the themes that emerged from the data collection process. Table 5, below, characterizes each theme, and provides visual of summarized responses of participants associated with each theme. To review the full responses of the participants, refer to Appendix E.

Table 5

Characterization of Themes

Theme	Characterization	Excerpts Supporting the Theme
Institutional Self-Perception	Participants shared insight of how they believe the institution views itself compared to how it's viewed by others leading to existing assumption and practices.	"...stuck in the eighties model...where...people were into the excessive brand name...that's no longer the case." (P-1)
		"[Citytown University's origins that was to help the poor immigrants...I think that's carried through and Citytown University's mindset." (P-2)
		"I think we are one of the best valued institutions out there..." (P-3)
		"...I think like on paper things look good...Um, but if you actually experience it as a student, you don't really see the same type of story being told." (P-4)
		"...they're comfortable, so if it's not broke, don't fix it."(P-4)
		"My assumption would be that we perceive ourselves a bit differently than those outside perceived us." (P-5)
		"And if you don't share that same perception internally, you would not really be in a position to, to change it or to do what would be necessary to change it." (P-5)
		"...we take a lot of steps to try to counter the cost perception." (P-5)
		"'well, that won't happen here'... 'we've weathered other storms and we've come out okay'... 'we're immune to the shifts that occur off the [Hill].' Whereas in reality you're not." (P-5)
		"...if you always put a positive spin on things, you don't notice the bad stuff." (P-5)
		"...I think we, we perceive the university as we are doing what we should be doing to, to live out the mission...it depends on who you talk to." (P-6)
		"I'm a hundred percent sure that president [name removed], you know, his plan is to try and go back to that mission... but where I wonder, [where] did it go?" (P-6)
		"...if you build it, they will come...But they're not coming...I mean, they, they are...but what's the demographic of those applications?" (P-6)

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		“... [Citytown University] kind of tends to go on, you know, word of mouth...which you can't really rely on anymore...” (P-6)
Addressing Affordability	Participants perceived affordability as a key factor influencing the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students. They also addressed the challenge of Citytown University's ability to clearly communicate how affordable the institution is, compared its competitors, to price sensitive prospective students.	“And it seems to me that none of our students know about it [specific aid options] ...” (P-1)
		“...if you compare [Citytown University's] financial aid package to some of these other schools, we're going to come in at the same cost.” (P-1)
		“So, it's just reinforced in us this idea of need, need, need.” (P-2)
		“...we have to reorient ourselves...but in our mind...that FAFSA score is something that we just kinda based on in our lives.” (P-2)
		“...when you look at net cost and net averages we're right there...I think people aren't looking at [it]...” (P-2)
		“I often wonder if students, you know, from [lower socio] economic backgrounds, as well as any backgrounds, are writing us off, our type of institution...just because of that [price].” (P-2)
		“...I think we could brag a lot more about it.” [value of Citytown University] (P-2)
		“...a lot of these people probably shut the door on [Citytown University] because they just thought, you know, it's too expensive.” (P-2)
		“Um, and we try to verify that we are affordable and comparable to most schools...” (P-3)
		“...for the first time ever, we now post the strategy for academic scholarships on the admissions website...”(P-3)
		“...our goal is to go out and help the ones that don't know how to ask...” (P-3)
		“...we want to counter the perception of cost.” (P-5)
		“I think that money is a challenge.” (P-5)
		“...affordability and cost of attendance has always been the primary reason given for not enrolling...” (P-5)
“I think...family or friends, um, have been told that...a private school is probably...unreachable...[and] is so expensive.” (P-6)		
“in reality, our net price could be completely in line.” (P-6)		

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		<p>"... They feel that the majority of students don't understand their backgrounds..." (P-1)</p> <p>"It's so ingrained in the White culture that we know it all." (P-1)</p>
Lack of Diversity	Participants perceived the low representation of African American/Black people on campus at multiple levels (student, faculty, and administration populations) leaves African American/Black students uninterested in Citytown University.	<p>"...we've always tried to market for diversity or families..." (P-3)</p> <p>"...when they walk on campus, they want to see the faculty and staff more diverse..." (P-3)</p> <p>"...we've tried so many different proposals and it just doesn't reflect the increase." (P-3)</p> <p>"...they don't see people like them. They come to campus and they see a whole bunch of White people..." (P-4)</p> <p>"...And it's like everyone goes around, like, it's a parade...." (P-5)</p> <p>"And I think until you can have those kinds of honest conversations [talking about race] ..." (P-5)</p> <p>"...people are so afraid to say, 'I need a Black student'..." (P-5)</p> <p>"...it's important to enroll a diverse class every year...but also [important] to survive as an institution." (P-5)</p> <p>"I think that we are aware that we need to do a better job of recruiting Black and African American students..." (P-5)</p> <p>"...that hurts us a little bit not having that perspective [non-White] at the table where the decisions are being made..." (P-5)</p> <p>"...I don't know. I don't have a lot of details for that, cause I think that's more admission's space." (P-1)</p> <p>"...the obvious thing is ultimately it is to about getting more students, or enough students...they realized diversity, economic, socioeconomic is one of the things people look for in a school." (P-2)</p>
		<p>"... 'Are we recruiting people that are from different backgrounds?'" (P-2)</p> <p>"...I don't know...it's hard to say, 'cause I'm not there..." (P-2)</p> <p>"...we have a new initiative...and that's where we're really going to market to these students." (P-3)</p> <p>"...I will get a type of reaction of, 'Well, there are bigger fish to fry at this point.'" (P-4)</p>
		<p>"... 'Are we recruiting people that are from different backgrounds?'" (P-2)</p> <p>"...I don't know...it's hard to say, 'cause I'm not there..." (P-2)</p> <p>"...we have a new initiative...and that's where we're really going to market to these students." (P-3)</p> <p>"...I will get a type of reaction of, 'Well, there are bigger fish to fry at this point.'" (P-4)</p>

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		"I think there would be some pushback..." (P-4)
		"I don't know, Black students are separated and considered outside of just general racial and ethnic diversity." (P-5)
		"... AVPs and VPs meet with Management and Business...what they believe to be a reasonable goal based on university's objectives..." (P-5)
		"...I'm not given that information of what their strategy is or was..." (P-6)
		"...there isn't a separate marketing plan for recruiting Black students. I don't think..." (P-6)

As illustrated in the table above, Table 5 used summarized responses of the participants to capture the themes that emerged. Although these themes emerged from the perceptions of the participants, Bryk et al.'s (2017) user-centric approach argues the voices of these participants are important when seeking to improve a system. The subsequent sections expand on each of the themes in greater detail, explaining how each theme supports the research question.

Institutional Self-Perception

Of the multiple themes that emerged as a result of the semi-structured interviews, how the institution perceives itself resonated from the participants' responses. This section will provide characterization to the emergence of the institutional self-perception theme and how it influences the assumptions and practices of its administrators impacting the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students.

Institutional self-perception is defined in this research study by the shared perceptions of participants and how they believe the institution views itself compared to how it is viewed by others, in turn impacting the recruitment of African American/Black students. To support this, participants perceived the institution to believe there is no problem with the enrollment numbers of African American/Black students, thus no issues with the current recruitment practices in place. Consequently, these assumptions are reflected in practices demonstrated by the institution generating the perfectly designed outcomes the system currently produces. Participant 4 also perceived the institution of believing nothing is wrong with current practices, leaving no need to change, sharing, "...they're [Citytown University] comfortable, so if it's not broke, don't fix it." However, participants feel the system is broken and should be addressed. The reality is, according to the perceptions of the participants, existing practices are broken and need fixed. Participant 1 believes the institution is, "...stuck in the eighties model...where...people were

into the excessive brand name...that's no longer the case." Participant 6 added, "... [Citytown University] kind of tends to go down on, in you know, word of mouth...which you can't really rely on any more." To add to it, Participant 6 shared the belief of the institution operating under the philosophy that existing recruitment strategies are effective, but when enrollment numbers are explored, an imbalance among race/ethnicity becomes apparent. Participant 6 specifically stated, "...if you build it, they will come...I mean, they, they are [students matriculating] ...but what's the demographic of those applications?"

Although the participants were able to share their perceptions of how they believe the institution views itself, it was not easy for any of them to conjure – what they believed – was the best response. When asked during the follow up interviews to describe how Citytown University perceives itself, participants found this question to be difficult to answer, utilizing extended pauses to gather their thoughts before providing a response. The consensus drawn from their responses is, Citytown University believes it is meeting expectations of living out the university mission. However, a couple participants felt that it was hard to provide a generalized response and such beliefs vary by person, as not everyone demonstrates their commitment to the mission. Participant 6 said, "That's hard, um... *[long pause]* I think we perceive the university as we are doing what we should be doing, to live out the mission. Um... *[another long pause]* I think it depends on who you talk to." Participant 2 expressed the beliefs of the institution as a whole has continued to live out the mindset it was founded on, of serving the underserved, that being poor immigrants who migrated to the area. Participant 2 shared, "[Citytown University's] origins that was to help the poor immigrants...I think that's carried through and [is] [Citytown University's] mindset.

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Contrary to the shared responses of the participants on how they believe the institution views itself, all of the participants made a point to acknowledge their believed perceptions others have of Citytown University and how those perceptions influence the interest and enrollment of African American/Black students. The perception of being an “expensive,” and a “rich, White school” came up multiple times, indicating they are the reasons why Black students are not matriculating at Citytown University. This level of divide between perceptions explains the current results of the recruitment efforts because if the institution – more specifically those setting the agenda - feels they are performing at or above par in this effort, the perception of others will have minimal influence on changing the necessary outcomes. Participant 5 did not seem optimistic on practices changing if the institution is unable able to see the perception of others, stating, “And if you don’t share that same perception internally, you would not really be in a position to, to change it or to do what would be necessary to change it.” When wanting to expand on historical practices of the institution and why they do not change much, Participant 5 described the perception of Citytown University’s mindset as it relates to enrollment trend changes by saying, “Well, that won’t happen here’...’we’ve weathered other storms and we’ve come out okay’... ‘we’re immune to the shifts that occur off the [Hill].’ Whereas in reality you’re [Citytown University] not.” This description really provided a sense of the institution being closed minded to the need of changing because the institution feels there is nothing to change and their success will remain consistent. As Participant 5 also indicated, “...if you always put a positive spin on things, you don’t notice the bad stuff.” An example of this is the way the institution presents its students demographic by race/ethnicity. There has been an increase among non-White students; however, when analyzed by race, specifically African American/Black numbers have remained unchanged. What is publicly communicated is an increase in diversity,

but what's not communicated is Citytown University's challenge to increase African American/Black students. All of this to say, a couple participants do believe that the institution is making a better effort to acknowledge the negative perceptions of others and counter those perceptions.

Despite the perceptions of others outside of the institution being costly, it is believed the institution is trying to counter the perceptions of others and become clearer in their messaging to communicate who Citytown University really is, as captured by the responses of Participants 5 and Participant 6. Participant 5 indicated that there is a disconnect between how the institution views itself compared to other, "My assumption would be that we perceive ourselves a bit differently than those outside perceive us." Participant 5 added that the institution is intentional about countering the outside perception, sharing, "...we take a lot of steps to try and counter the cost perception." Participant 6 shared, "I'm a hundred percent sure that President [name removed], you know, his plan is to try and go back to that mission." It will be important for the institution to keep in mind as they strive to counter perceptions, will be to make sure to deliver on their messaging once the student matriculates. Participant 4 shared, "...I think on paper things look good...Um, but if you actually experience it as a student, you don't really see the same type of story being told." Although this research study specifically focuses on the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students, the student experience once matriculated is just as important given its potential impact on retention, and should be considered for future research.

Citytown University's assumption of being more successful at increasing diversity despite the stagnant enrollment of Black students, has simply allowed the systemic practices to remain unchanged toward the effort in improve the matriculation of African American/Black

students. It also addresses the research question that is at the focus of this study. Examples of how these practices have remained unchanged would be its lack of transparency around affordability for price sensitive students, specifically African American/Black students; and, its lack of acknowledging its low diversity at various levels of the institution. Participant 3 stated, “I think we are one of the best valued institutions out there...” This shows the disconnect between Black students being able to understand the value being offered by Citytown University. The subsequent sections will further describe how these practices are believed to influence the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students.

Addressing Affordability

The characterization of the addressing affordability theme will be explained in this section. Although affordability is a factor that continues to impact the recruitment and matriculation of all prospective students, this theme specifically addresses its impact on African American/Black students. This theme is framed in a manner to illustrate how the institution, despite knowing the high price sensitivity of African American/Black students, intentionally presents its affordability to attract African American/Black students.

The topic of college affordability continues to be one of the main discussions within higher education, and it is no different at Citytown University. Consistent with existing research, all six participants perceived that price sensitivity and affordability steer Black students away from Citytown University. “I think...family or friends, um have been told that...a private school is probably...unreachable...[and] is so expensive,” said Participant 6. “I think that money is a challenge,” expressed Participant 5, who also shared, “...affordability and cost of attendance has always been the primary reason given for [African American/Black students] not enrolling...”. Although the response by Participant 5 has been supported by evidence yielded from surveys

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conducted by administrators at Citytown University, it was also shared by Participant 5 that survey responses from students also reveal that these students end up attending institutions that have an equal or greater net price. These findings resulted in further exploration of what is causing African American/Black students to view Citytown University as out of reach because of its cost, if they are attending institutions that are more expensive.

One of the possibilities that became apparent during the data collection process is the perceived ignorance of Black students toward the understanding of the financial aid process. The participants of this research study who currently work in the institution's financial aid office, agreed that affordability is an influential factor of the Black student college choice process, but also made a point to express how affordable Citytown University is compared to other institutions. Participant 1, "...if you compare [Citytown University's] financial aid package to some of these other schools, we're going to in at the same cost." "...in reality our net price could be completely in line," said Participant 6. Participant 2 even believes that the institution does not do a well enough job of promoting its value, saying, "...I think we could brag a lot more about it." Adding, "...when you look at net cost and net averages we're right there...I think people aren't looking at [it]...".

This has left the institution focusing on changing this perception and concentrating on transparency and helping prospective students see how affordable Citytown University is, as pointed out by both Participant 3 and 5. Participant 3 shared insight into Citytown University's efforts to become more transparent as it relates to affordability, "...for the first time ever, we now post the strategy for academic scholarships on the admissions website. We've never, we never did that in the past...And we're starting to publicize this stuff...we we're trying to get this

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information out of, 'Hey, we are affordable.'" Participant 5 said, "...we take a lot of steps to counter the perception of cost."

Despite believing these students do not fully understand the admissions process, and the financial aid process specifically, the institution does not do anything to promote or demonstrate how affordable it really is, leaving Black students to miss out on aid opportunities increasing the potential and perceived financial burden if they do attend. Participant 2 expressed worry that students who are more price sensitive, like African American/Black students, turn away because of the sticker price alone, eliminating the opportunity for the institution to compete for these students, or what Hossler and Gallagher (1987) call "courtship". In addition, Participant 1 alluded that students who ask the right questions during the admissions process are more likely to get more attention and support by counselors. Students who are unfamiliar with the process, are left at a disadvantage because they do not know what questions to ask due to the presented complexity of the process. However, Participant 3 shared, under the direction of new leadership, there is a goal to begin making it a practice to initiate conversation with students who may need clarity with understanding their financial aid packages. This is all a part of Citytown University's "affordability campaign," as explained by Participant 3. Under this campaign there is a push to address the concerns highlighted by some of the participants outlined above, to let prospective students know Citytown University is affordable regardless of what the general perception may be. Through an improvement science lens, the strategies around Citytown University's new "affordable campaign" should make sure the campaign addresses all of the information that prospective students may not think to ask due to their lack of understanding familiarity with the admissions process. In addition, there was nothing shared of how the affordability messaging will be directed toward the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students.

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Participant 2 believes, the financial aid actors, need to realign their mindsets and think beyond just need and FAFSA outputs.

Currently, practices of Citytown University include the lack of publication of available aid opportunities African American/Black students may be eligible for, except for program specific awards which are published and promoted by the individual school and programs separately. This is counter to the what is done for other non-White students. Citytown University has recently created, published, and offered full scholarships to eligible Hispanic students with high academic ability. Although there are scholarships available for non-White students, none are published publicly that are specific to Black students, like the institution's empowerment funds geared toward Black students. This is counter to the affordability promotion by the institution to recruit Hispanic students. Such practices speak to Citytown University's intentionality to focus more on recruiting students who identify as Hispanic or Latino/a/x, leaving other non-White, like Black students, sticker shock and questioning whether or not the institution is really affordable.

Another example of Citytown University's lack of addressing the affordability concerns impacting the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students, has been the historical behavior of how financial aid is awarded. Participant 3 described the process as a "big secret" and was handled on a case by case basis. This behavior resulted in the lack of publication of available merit scholarships. Participants acknowledged that the lack of transparency around affordability, coupled with lack of understanding the admissions process, hinders African American/Black students' ability to see past the sticker price and realize the actual net cost. Participant 2 perceives it as, "I often wonder if students, you know from [lower socio] economic

backgrounds, as well as any backgrounds, are writing us off, our type of institution...just because of that [price].

There are two aid opportunities that are non-program specific, which can be offered to eligible Black students; however, they are not widely promoted and not even posted on any of the admissions or financial aid pages. Participants believe if they were to be published, students would be more enticed to apply because of the impact the extra aid could make on their net tuition price. Participant 1 shared how difficult it can be to award aid at times, stating, "And it seems to me that none of our students know about it [specific aid options], you know, like I'm amazed that I have to chase people down every year...So in my view, I should have to pick...the most deserving, [but instead,] I'm chasing around, you know, another 20 kids trying to give away money." This example is another demonstration of how the lack of advertisement of financial resources available to Black students is a direct reflection of the nonexistent desire to increase the enrollment of this demographic of prospective students.

Citytown University's belief of being affordable is demonstrated through their focus of awarding aid to existing students to support retention efforts, compared to recruiting. The current practices in place will only continue to produce the low African American/Black student enrollment, especially with financial aid awarding efforts focused more on retaining students than recruiting, leaving ethnic diversity on campus also low. In support of the research question of this study, the assumption of doing well at enrolling African American/Black students at Citytown University, one could argue, has influenced its recruitment practices, like strategies around how affordability is addressed or promoted, in turn is impacting the matriculation outcomes of these students. The next section expands on the lack diversity on campus at Citytown University, and how it too impacts the recruitment and matriculation of Black students.

Lack of Diversity

To expand on the themes discussed thus far, the lack of diversity also emerged as a theme and will be characterized in this section. Participants shared their perceived impact diversity can have on the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students. Participants' responses speak to the different areas of which diversity lacks at Citytown University from the student body, to the instructors teaching courses, to the administration, all of which will be discussed in this section.

Lack of diversity is described as the participants perception of the low representation of African American/Black people on campus at all levels of the campus – students, faculty, and staff. The absence of black representation was assumed by some participants as a factor which influences the recruitment and matriculation decision of prospective Black students. Existing research has unpacked that students seek to see resemblance of themselves on campuses, influencing their enrollment decision (Freeman, 1999; Van Camp et al., 2009; Harper, 2012a; Williams, 2018). The lack of diversity puts the university in a position to assume they know the needs of Black students; which Participant 1 has discovered, is something the institution is unsuccessful at. Participant 1 described a conversation with a student, where the student who expressed Citytown University's belief that it understands and knows the needs of Black students, but in reality, they do not because these students are never engaged to share their needs, demonstrating a lack of cultural understanding. Through a user-centric approach, the institution would want to hear the voices of its students to improve both the recruitment practices and ways of which it serves students once matriculated. Although this is a shared example of a story from a current student at the time, this can leave one to believe the lack of cultural awareness by the university is also demonstrated in their recruitment practices through application of a cookie

cutter approach assuming all students are the same. Participant 4 expressed the impact lack of diversity is presumed to have on prospective African American/Black students because when they visit campus, “they don’t see people like them. They come to campus and they see a whole bunch of White people...”. Agreeing with Participant 4, Participant 3 indicated the belief, that when they [prospective African American/Black students] walk on campus, they want to see the faculty and staff more diverse...”.

When it comes to the diversity among students, Participant 4 shared historically there has been no diversity among the student ambassadors who engage with prospective students during the search phase of the college navigation process. For many students this interaction with ambassadors is the first of multiple they will have with the university. These ambassadors serve in a role that is designed to represent the university. This lack of representation can leave non-White, specifically Black, students who are seeking diversity empty, resulting in a negative outlook on the university. Participant 4 did make a point to acknowledge progression in this practice, as EMG is seeking more diverse representation within its ambassador group. The belief is, by having a more diverse representation in this specific role, will help promote the diversity that exists on the campus. Nevertheless, until that representation is present, the lack of diversity on campus will continue to influence the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students, proving answers to the research question surrounding this study. Given the lack of diversity, specifically the representation of people that identify as African American/Black, questions around the institution’s practices quickly followed to gain a better understanding of how the aforementioned assumptions, influence existing practices of trying to improve diversity enrollment.

When it comes to the institution's current practices and the current non-White enrollment trends, "...it's like everyone goes around, like, it's a parade..." as mentioned by Participant 5 when describing how the institution responds to the overall diversity enrollment growth year over year. However, it was quickly pointed out that the details behind the diversity enrollment growth is never scrutinized or discussed to see the stagnant trend of African American/Black students, which shows the lack of attention or desire toward recruiting these students. Participant 3 did address the fact of multiple attempts to develop new strategies to recruit Black students, which have never resulted in an increase in matriculation, and from Participant 4's perspective was no clear reason why Citytown continues to see these consistent outcomes. Through exploration of wanting to understand more on why it has historically been so difficult to recruit Black students, Participant 5 had a lot to share on this subject, starting with the institution's inability to have conversations around race. Sharing, "...until you [generally speaking about the institution] can have those kinds of honest conversations [talking about race], changing the trends will remain difficult. It was acknowledged by this participant, the perception that Citytown University needs to do a better job of recruiting African American/Black students, but again it comes down to having the honest conversations, as highlighted above, in addition to finding the balance between efforts to increase diversity and institutional survival. Specifically stating, "...it's important to enroll a diverse class every year...but also [important] to survive as an institution." As outlined in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, institutions are striving for prestige which drive their behavior in hopes of increasing their rankings. Diversity on the other hand is not a strong enough indicator impacting institutional rankings, though it should be for institutions like Citytown who desire to grow diversity. Although the lack of diversity is still a concern among the actors within the system, despite the institution's self-perception on recruiting Black students, the participants are

hopeful of the change in practice that will be set forth under the new leadership responsible for EMG.

Participant 3 provided insight into the internal practices that are changing under the new leadership, where recruitment strategies and goals are shared with a larger audience outside of admissions and EMG including, academic advisors and members of the multiple schools across campus, with hopes of increasing recruitment collaboration. All participants also emphasized the importance of collaborating with partners, both on and off campus, highlighting the university's director of diversity and inclusion as a key ally in better understanding how to serve non-White students.

Of the all of the data collected to address the lack of diversity, it was the response of Participant 5 that stood out the most, when discussing the impact of current practices on the current results. It was expressed, "...if you've got a bunch of White people making that decision, like that's a perspective that is missing [that of the prospective students the institution is claiming to support]. So, I feel that hurts us [Citytown University] a little bit not having that perspective at the table where the decisions are being made." This response can be viewed as critical through an improvement science lens, because there is no direct input in the development of strategies of those that closely related or have the closest connection with the students, in this case African American/Black students. Without these voices, the institution will continue to assume it knows what is required to recruit African American/Black students, and will continue to produce the same results. A user-centric approach is need to be considered and implemented if the goal is to improve the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students, which appears to be a direction the new EMG leadership looks to move in. However, the next theme demonstrates this desire does perceive to exist, thus no change is likely to occur.

The ensuing section presents the final theme addressing Citytown University's overall lack of interest in recruiting and matriculating African American/Black students specifically, which has left its recruiters feeling less empowered to provide recommendations of how to increase the enrollment of these students.

Lack of Interest

This research study explores the assumptions and practices of administrators and the influence both have on the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students at PPWIs. All of the participants provide responses which hovered around the perception of there being no specific strategy around increasing the matriculation of African American/Black students, and according to the data collected, this is due to a lack of interest by Citytown University. This section will use the responses of the participants to illustrate how this theme evolved.

Conducting the interviews in a face to face format provided opportunity for me to not only record the responses of the participants to the open-ended questions, but also the ability for me to observe how they responded paired with their body language. Throughout the course of the interviews, when paying attention to the tone and delivery of the responses, all participants showed a level of disappointment in the enrollment trends shared of African American/Black students at Citytown University. This disappointment coupled with the responses given to the question addressing the factors which influence African American/Black students to not enroll at Citytown University peaked my interest as the researcher to explore deeper. This led to a follow up question about feeling empowered to share their ideas of how to improve the matriculation of these students. The follow up question served as a way to deeper explore why the actors within the current recruitment system who believe to know why Citytown University has been

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unsuccessful at recruiting and matriculating Black students; and, who are unsatisfied with the results the said system is producing, would not recommend changes to current practices and assumptions to yield better results. In addition, it was a way of validating whether or not Bryk et al.'s (2017) user-centric approach is currently embedded in the development of recruitment strategies.

In response to the follow up question of, "Do you feel empowered enough to present these recommendations to your direct supervisor or senior leadership?", participants expressed their confidence in sharing with their peers; however, believe progress would bottle neck at the next level of leadership. Participant 4 shared, the belief that the peers within the department would share the same level of disappointment if presented the data trends; but, pointed out the potential of pushback by the next level of leadership due to the low priority of this enrollment strategy. specifically, Participant 4 shared, "...my peers, people in the same level as me and even my associate directors will be gung ho for it...I think there would be some pushback on, 'Well, we can't focus on that right now, we have to focus on other things.'" This participant expressed no fears in bringing up the concern surrounding the enrollment data and sharing ideas of how to improve the systemic outcomes, but felt strongly about those ideas falling on deaf ears leading to no desire to change to the existing recruitment practices. Examples of priorities that would fall ahead of the recruitment of African American/Black students were: focus on meeting/exceeding numbers from last year; focusing on spring enrollment numbers; to name a few. This lack of empowerment highlighted can show Citytown University's specific low level of interest in increasing the matriculation of African American/Black students. This can be believed to be attributed to how the institution views itself, or the perceived success, in this space. It can also be

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believed, establishing strategies to recruitment African American/Black students will not help the institution achieve its overarching goals that were identified above as more high priority items.

During follow up interviews, all the participants were also asked to describe the recruitment strategy(ies) of the institution and to specifically identify where the recruitment of African American/Black students fell within the strategy(ies). Participants made it clear that there are no strategies specific to the efforts of recruiting and matriculating more Black students. Participant 3 did indicate on multiple occasions that the institution has tried different recruitment strategies through the years in effort to attract more Black students, but have been unsuccessful. When asked to provide a specific example of those practices, it was recommended to reach out to the division's marketing team – of whom was not a participant of this study. Participants 5 shared there is no specific strategy on how to recruit African American/Black students outside of the institution's overall goal of increasing racial and ethnic diversity. Also sharing that, historical data serves as the primary driver of establishing goals and strategies, set at the senior leadership level (AVPs and VPs) and the counselors are just given target to achieve. Participant 4 gave a very direct answer when asked to describe the specific recruitment strategies of Black students, "Um, there really is no strategy if you want a direct answer."

Participant 3 was the only participant that was able to provide insight of specific recruitment strategies related to African American/Black students. It was shared by the participant the practice of Citytown University purchasing leads of students who are eligible for specific aid and scholarships as a way to target these students. On the other hand, Participants 1, 2, and 6 were unable to point to any specific goals focusing on African American/Black students. With Participant 3 being the only one who could speak to specific practices, showed the disconnect between the senior leadership team – those setting the recruitment goals – and the

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actors within the system who are boots on the ground, while also showing how low of a priority increasing the matriculation of African American/Black students is at Citytown University. This also can attribute to how Citytown University perceives itself as described under the Self-Perception section, of the institution believing no problem exists when it comes to recruiting Black students, thus no specific goals are established, leaving recruiters not to feel empowered or inclined to present recommendations of how to grow this demographic of students, or any demographic outside the traditional population for that matter. These practices are counter to a user-centric approach.

In effort to answer the research question driving this study, Citytown University demonstrates a practice of not having specific goals to recruit African American/Black students, leaving the system to continue to have their student body made up of three to five percent African American/Black. The next section speaks to the additional observations made during the conducting of this research.

Additional Context Observations

In addition to the themes addressed in the sections above, there were additional observations made during the data collection worth addressing. To start, all of the participants expressed their disappointment in the enrollment trends shared of African American/Black student enrollment spanning the past 18 years. These trends called out the pattern at Citytown University's African American/Black student enrollment which has remained steadily between 3-5% during this time. Participant 3 shared historical context around the recruitment efforts of African American/Black students, speaking to the multiple attempts to increase this demographic of students, but have been unsuccessful. It was surprising to hear all of the participants bring up on multiple occasions the importance of collaborating with members outside of EMG, and how it

is needed, believing such collaboration plays a critical role in the recruitment of Black students. The collaboration that stood out the most was the relationship between EMG and the university's Office of Diversity and Inclusion. The importance of the partnership came across as unclear of whether EMG relies on the department to recruit Black students or if EMG feels the partnership is needed to help in the development of strategies that would entice Black students to consider and eventually matriculate at Citytown University. Through the improvement science lens this study was viewed, one can hope the latter.

When participants were asked if they felt empowered enough to share their concerns around the enrollment trends of Black students, along with their recommendations on ways to improve it, they all said yes but felt the bottle neck occurs at the next level of decision making. This lack of collaboration is counter to the user-centric approach Bryk et al. (2017) encourages as a means to improving systemic outcomes. My observation and experience tell me Citytown University desires to have more ethnic diversity on campus and would welcome more Black students. But, I believe those desires are more rooted in its self-perception and pursuit of institutional prestige, than the actual educational benefits of having a diverse and inclusive campus environment. This would align with the interest convergence tenant of Critical Race Theory described in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. When discussing the foundation which the institution was founded on – serving poor immigrants – Participant 2 shared his beliefs that the institution's scholarshiping practices have influence on the type of students that it recruits. Using the example of having academic scholarships targeting high SAT/ACT scores, recruitment efforts are going to be focused on students from more affluent high schools, with more resources because they yield higher standardized test scores. Such practices demonstrate the agenda and strategy set forth by administration to target and meet its recruitment goals; unfortunately, there

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are no strategies to better recruit African American/Black students to in effort to increase the enrollment of this demographic of students in place. Another reason not mentioned in previous sections about this lack of strategy can be the perception that the institution has given up on trying to increase the matriculation of African American/Black students. As mentioned by Participant 3, the institution has tried multiple strategies to try and recruit Black students, however, the numbers have never changed. Given the trends of Black student enrollment at Citytown University remaining unchanged for almost 20 years, could be interpreted as the institution feeling as though there's nothing left that can be done to attract Black students, and now seeking diversity elsewhere.

The timing of the collection of this data, allowed participants to share both the historical and current assumptions and practices due to the recent change in leadership within the division – EMG. Each of the participants shared how the practices are changing for the better; however, there was no mention of changes occurring in effort to matriculate more Black students. Bryk et. al (2017) emphasized the importance of a user-centric approach in effort to improve systemic outcomes. If Citytown University has a goal of increasing the enrollment of African American/Black students, it needs to acknowledge the current outcomes are unacceptable, and be willing to modify its practices utilizing the insights and recommendations of those closest to the students it wishes to recruit, in this case the admissions and financial aid counselors. The benefits of a user-centric approach provide opportunity for collaboration with people and groups most familiar with African American/Black students behavior, allowing EMG to become better equipped at recruiting these students.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

Discussion of the Findings

The purpose of this research study was to explore the influence administrative assumptions and practices have on the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students at private, predominately White institutions (PPWIs). Using qualitative methods, analyzed through an improvement science lens, 6 administrative actors within the recruitment system at Citytown University were interviewed to gain their perspectives into the existing assumptions and practices at this institution. The data collected during these semi-structured interviews revealed four main themes addressing the research question at the focus of this research study. The themes that emerged were: (1) Institutional self-perception; (2) Addressing affordability; (3) Lack of diversity; and, (4) Lack of interest.

Institutional self-perception was perceived by the participants as how the institution views itself compared to how other perceive the intuition. The self-perception is what participants believed influence the assumptions and practices at Citytown University. When it comes to the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students, participants believed the institution is satisfied with the enrollment numbers of this demographic of students, thus practices do not demonstrate an effort to increase this demographic despite believing to know why these students do not matriculate (i.e. affordability).

Affordability was identified as a factor that influences the matriculation of African American/Black students at Citytown University. Despite knowing this, participants believed the institution still has a challenge presenting just how affordable it is compared to Citytown University's competitors. Lack of diversity was identified as another perceived influential impacting the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students. Specifically,

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participants believed the lack of diversity at all levels of the institution from students, faculty, and staff. It was perceived the lack of Black representation turns these students away from the institution. Due to the belief that Citytown University is satisfied with the current enrollment trends, specifically the enrollment of African American/Black students, has led to less intentions of developing strategies to increase the enrollment of this demographic of students. These perceptions shared by the participants led to a follow up question being asked around the specific recruitment strategies of African American/Black students at Citytown University, concluding there are none.

With the enrollment cliff quickly approaching, PPWIs, specifically Citytown University, should consider reevaluating their existing assumptions and practices in effort to increase diversity on their campus by becoming more intentional in their recruitment efforts of African American/Black students. Bryk et al. (2017) presents six guiding principles on how to effectively evaluate and improve the outcomes of a system, utilizing a user-centric approach. These principles can be applied to higher education, specifically at Citytown University and their recruitment process, to improve outcomes. The principles are:

1. Making the work problem-specific and user-centered.
2. Focus off various performance.
3. See the system that provides the current outcomes.
4. We cannot improve what we cannot measure.
5. Use disciplined inquiry to drive improvement.
6. Accelerate learning through networked communities.

The subsequent, sub-sections will explain how Citytown University, and other PPWIs can apply these principles to increase the matriculation of African American/Black students.

To summarize the principles above in correlation to this research study, Citytown University and other PWIs who desire to grow their African American/Black student population, must first identify their current enrollment trends of this demographic as a problem and be willing to engage with key actors within the recruitment process when developing new strategies. As part of making the problem specific, Citytown University must also acknowledge and accept the outcomes the current recruitment practices are yielding. Through the progression of developing strategies to improve the recruitment outcomes, specific to African American/Black students, the institution may use the enrollment trend data published on its website as a way to hold themselves accountable and be willing to accept feedback from others on how to continue to improve in this area. The more a user-centric approach is utilized, the faster a networked community can be established allowing scalability across the higher education industry.

Contribution to the Field

This study explored the administrative assumptions and practices that influence African American/Black students at PPWIs. With the cliff quickly approaching, higher education institutions have been challenged with finding ways to minimize the impact. This is even more important for predominately White institutions (PWIs), given the anticipated decline of their traditional student pool, White students. As the decline in White students is on the horizon, there's a projected increase in the participation among non-White students, specifically African American/Black and Hispanic students. This research study used existing research to present why PWIs should focus on recruiting non-White students, specifically African American/Black students, highlighting the benefits of increasing diversity. Participating in diverse environments on campuses can impact a student's self-efficacy, academic skills, and students' ability to engage with racial and cultural differences (Denson & Chang, 2009). In addition, the study provided

insight into the area's recruitment actors should consider when establishing recruitment strategies geared toward African American/Black students.

As the demographic of traditional college-going students continues to change, institutions are faced with demonstrating their agility, specifically relating to their recruitment practices, if they seek to reduce the impact to the "cliff."

Implications for Education

The participation of African American/Black students in post-secondary education is projected to increase, despite the overall decline anticipated as a result of lower birth rates and the ripple effect from the Great Recession. The participation of African American/Blacks at PPWIs has historically been low, and even lower at Citytown University, leaving these institution types in a position to reevaluate their recruitment strategies in effort to lessen the impact of the cliff. Utilizing data from fall 2018 to examine the enrollment of Black students at PPWIs specifically, Table 1 shows African American/Black students made up about 9% of the total population at not-for-profit, 4-year PPWIs, while making up almost 14% at for-profit PWIs – the highest among participation at all other institution types. If higher education institutions, specifically predominately White institutions (PWIs), seek to lessen the impact of the cliff and increase their non-White student population, they should understand that there are additional factors need to be considered when recruiting these students. As illustrated in Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) student college choice model, institutions have an influence at every phase on the college choice process. Acknowledging these additional factors requires institutions to be willing to learn more about these students, and one of the best ways to do that is by utilizing a user-centric approach and gaining insight from key actors within the system who are culturally knowledgeable.

Limitations

Although the data collected for this study yielded findings addressing the research question, limitations were still present. When it came to the participants, there was no representation of senior leadership representing Enrollment Management Group (EMG). This lack of representation left a voice and perspective of a senior leadership unheard. However, I do believe different themes would have emerged or have been characterized differently, had there been more senior leadership representation due to their heavy influence on the strategy and agenda setting. This provides opportunity for additional research to be conducted to further explore the “solutionitis” that exists at Citytown.

In addition, there was only one participant representing the admissions office. According to the data collected for this study, participants outside of admissions felt actors within Admissions would be able to shine more light on questions around recruitment strategies.

Another limitation to this study believed to impact the participation of this study was the timing of when the invitation to participate was sent out. Members within EMG had been transitioning to working for a new vice president, who had started less than six months prior to invitations being sent. Coupled with the transition in leadership, there was also the enrollment challenges presented by the global pandemic brought on by Covid-19. The pandemic forced institutions, including Citytown University, to re-strategize on ways to recruit students, as well as deliver education to its existing students. These challenges caused an increase in workload, which are assumed to have impacted the number of participants. Had the study been conducted during a different time of year, I believe there would have been more than six participants.

Despite the limitations to this research study, the six participants were all able to speak to the assumptions and practices influencing the recruitment and matriculation of African

American/Black students at Citytown University. All participants possessed all the desired characteristics needed for this study, including working at Citytown University and being a key actor within the recruitment systems. The data collected from the participants helped highlight the implications for the higher education industry as a whole and its leaders. The next section speaks to the leadership implications.

Implications for Leadership

As leaders within higher education continue to be forced to reevaluate their recruitment strategies, it is important for them to remain aligned with the institution's goals and vision related to the students it strives to serve. The cliff, coupled with the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, has led to a shift in the growing demographic of prospective students within higher education. Covid-19 specifically, has led to institutions modifying their admissions requirements (e.g. becoming test optional for prospective students) providing opportunity for PWIs to target a new demographic of students outside of their traditional target group, like Black and first-generation students. Modifying existing practices in response to Covid-19, has demonstrated institutions' ability to be more agile by adjusting to current times in effort to still achieve enrollment goals. Such agility shows intentionality of institutions to meet their enrollment goals in effort to minimize the negative impact brought on by a global pandemic. Similar agility can be done when responding to the enrollment cliff, which has been on the horizon prior to Covid-19, by modifying practices to recruit students outside of their traditional recruitment strategies.

Covid-19 has taught us that colleges and universities intentionally change their practices to align with what they believe will help them achieve their institutional goals like prestige and enrollment numbers; however, if this is true, assumptions regarding the value and importance of seeking African American/Black students have been minimized to other initiatives believed to

accomplish the same goals and possibly others. This research does not just advocate for the opportunity and access of African American/Black students at PPWIs, but argues why their participation at these institutions is needed. As institutions are encouraged to pursue prospective students outside of their traditional demographics, understanding the student college choice will become important. This research showcased how African American/Black students navigate the student college choice process differently than their White counterparts, along with the influential factors that should be considered when recruiting this demographic of students.

The findings of this study revealed that the actors within the recruitment system at Citytown University believed affordability to be the main driver to why African American/Black students do not matriculate at Citytown. For leaders looking to change African American/Black student enrollment outcomes, it is important that leaders also consider what researchers have found to be additional factors which influence these students' matriculation decision, as illustrated in Figure 1. This illustration synthesizes the factors that researchers have found to be the similarities and differences of whether Black students matriculate at a HBCU or a PWI. Affordability is one, but as shown in the diagram, there are others as well. Incorporation of these factors into the recruitment strategies at PWIs may improve the matriculation outcomes at these institutions. To gain a sense of which HBCU factors to incorporate, higher education leaders should ensure they are engaging the right actors in the process of developing their recruitment strategies through a user-centric approach described by Bryk et al. (2017).

Utilizing the six principles presented by Bryk et al. (2017), Citytown must first make the problem specific and user centered, by acknowledging the consistent low matriculation of African American/Black students is an issue, and determine who the right actors within the system are to engage as part of the improvement. It is also important for leaders to keep in mind

the goal of improving the matriculation outcomes of these students is to generate quality outcomes as this the user group is defined and new strategies are implemented. With this comes leaders seeing the system for the results it produces, and the importance the of having measurements in place to validate the outcomes. When it comes to matriculation, leaders may naturally gravitate to existing enrollment data; however, as the proper actors are engaged, other effective measurement tools may resonate. Implementing that the last two principles of Bryk et al.'s framework, must continue to use discipline inquiry to drive the improvement by asking the right questions specific to the identified problem. The creation of networked communities will aid in accelerated learning among actors curating a culture improving matriculation among Black students.

Although this study focuses on the assumptions and practices of administrators, and their influence on the recruitment and matriculation of African American/Black students at a PPWI, it is recommended for leaders at Citytown University to also have a plan in place for how they will support these students once they matriculate. As the improvement process continues, there are opportunities to collaborate with other researchers at Citytown University who have conducted research on African American/Black students, specifically around these students' sense of belonging and experiences. Such collaborations will allow deeper investigation into the recruitment and student success of African American/Black students, providing additional recommendations for improvement. This study recommends leaders at PPWIs, like Citytown, to leverage the opportunity presented by Covid-19 and hit the reset button, and reevaluate their recruitment strategies around African American/Black students through utilization of a user-centric approach, leading to the establishment of a networked community. This study argues, the

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voice of important actors in the recruitment system should be heard in effort to improve the outcomes.

EXPAND on the how Bryk's work should be utilized.

As the demographic of college eligible students continue to shift, PWIs are going to be forced to decide if they are going to modify their recruitment practices to attract those of the growing demographic, or simply continue to recruit the same way they know how, generating the same results they currently are producing.

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Appendix A

Study Recruitment Emails Template #1 – Invitation Email

To: [Potential Participant]
From: Chase Loper [loperc@duq.edu]
CC:
Subject: Invitation – Participation in Enrollment Study
Attachment(s): Study Information Sheet

Dear [Potential Participant Name],

My name is Chase Loper and currently a doctoral student in Duquesne University's Educational Leadership program in the School of Education. I am reaching out with hope that you would be willing to participate in a study sharing your experience of recruiting African American/Black students at your University. Based on your experience, this study seeks to understand your perception to why enrollment among African American/Black students has remained stagnant year over year. The purpose of the study is to learn how the assumptions and practices of administrators influence the recruitment of African American/Black students at private, predominantly White institutions (PPWIs). The results of the study will be used to provide recommendations to improve the recruitment practices to increase the matriculation of African American/Black students.

There are no personal benefits or consequences for participating in this research study. However, your participation will benefit this study by helping university administrators understand how current assumptions and practices have influenced the enrollment outcomes of African American/Black students; and, aid in improving the recruitment practices of African American/Black students at your university.

Please respond to this email confirming your interest in participating in this study. Once participation is confirmed, I will send a follow-up email to schedule a 60-90 minute, one on one interview, which will be held virtually via ZOOM. With your permission, interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. Prior to the interview, you will select a pseudonym, which will replace your name and maintain your confidentiality.

Thank you in advance for considering participating in this study.

Chase Loper
Doctoral Student
Educational Leadership, School of Education
Duquesne University

Appendix A

**Study Recruitment Emails
Template #2 – Refusal Email**

To: [Potential Participant]
From: Chase Loper [loperc@duq.edu]
CC:
Subject: RE: Invitation – Participation in Enrollment Study
Attachment(s): Study Information Sheet

Dear [Potential Participant Name],
This email serves as acknowledgement of your decision not to participate in this research study.
Your consideration to participate is greatly appreciated.

Thank you.

Chase Loper
Doctoral Student
Educational Leadership, School of Education
Duquesne University

Appendix A

Study Recruitment Email Template #3 – Acceptance Email

To: [Potential Participant]
From: Chase Loper [loperc@duq.edu]
CC:
Subject: RE: Invitation – Participation in Enrollment Study
Attachment(s): Study Information Sheet

Dear [Potential Participant Name],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study regarding the recruitment of African American/Black students at your university. As mentioned in the initial invitation email, I would like to schedule a 60-90 minutes virtual interview with you. Please respond with three (3) days and times of when you would be available to meet (evenings and weekends are acceptable as well).

It is important to note, your participation in this study is completely confidential. The data collected will be securely kept on password-protected computer, leaving the principal researcher (Chase Loper) and those authorized by Duquesne University's IRB, will have access to the study's materials. Although the data collected from the meeting may be shared and presented to a broader audience, your identifying information will not be revealed.

Please review and complete the attached consent form. This form gives permission to the principal researcher (Chase Loper) to use the data collected during the interview for the purposes of this study. You can withdraw from participating in this study at any time.

Thank you again for accepting this invitation to participate and I look forward to meeting. Please reach out with any additional questions you may have.

Thank you.

Chase Loper
Doctoral Student
Educational Leadership, School of Education
Duquesne University

Appendix B

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: Administrators' Influence on the Enrollment Decision of African American Students at Private, Predominantly White Institutions

INVESTIGATOR:

Chase Loper
Director, Shared Services
Doctoral Student
School of Education
loperc@duq.edu
XXX-XXX-XXXX

ADVISOR:

Rick McCown, Professor, School of Education
XXX-XXX-XXXX (cell) e-mail: mccown@duq.edu

SOURCE OF SUPPORT:

This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in the School of Education at Duquesne University.

STUDY OVERVIEW:

As the higher education industry continues to face decline in enrollment due lower birth rates, rising attendance costs, and the general outlook on the value of postsecondary education, enrollment trends show an upward trend in the participation of both African American/Black and Hispanic students. Historically these students do not participate at private, predominately White institutions (PPWIs) at the same rate as they do at other institution types. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be engaging in a 60-90 minute, one on one interview with the principal investigator. Questions asked during the interview, will explore your assumptions and practices regarding the recruitment of African American/Black students. The interview will be held virtually via ZOOM, and also recorded. There will be a total of 6-8 participants for this research study.

PURPOSE:

You are being asked to participate in a research project that is investigating the assumptions and practices of administrators which influence the recruitment of African American/Black students

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at your institution, a private, predominantly White institution (PPWI). Your responses during the interview will be utilized to provide recommendations to administration on how recruitment practices can be improved to increase enrollment of African American/Black students.

In order to qualify for participation, you must:

- Currently be employed or recently employed at “Citytown University” within the enrollment management group (EMG). If recently employed, must have worked at the institution within the last six (6) months.
- Currently or recently hold/held a position that is connected to the recruitment of prospective students within EMG.

PARTICIPANT PROCEDURES:

If you provide your consent to participate, you will be asked to do the following:

- You will be asked to allow me to interview you. There will be one (1), but no more than two (2), 60-90-minute virtual interview conducted on ZOOM. Each interview will be conducted individually between you and the principal investigator. Open-ended questions will be asked by the principal investigator during the interview. Interviews will be recorded and the audio will be transcribed to aid in the analysis of the data collected. No questions will be provided prior to the initial interview.
- If necessary, a second interview will be conducted to provide opportunity for you and the principal investigator to discuss the accuracy of responses provided during the first interview, as well as provide opportunity for you to expand on any responses.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study, but no greater than those encountered in everyday life. There are no personal benefits or consequences for participating in this research study. However, your participation will benefit this study by helping university administrators understand how current assumptions and practices have influenced the enrollment outcomes of African American/Black students; and, aid in improving the recruitment practices of African American/Black students at your university.

COMPENSATION:

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

There is no cost for you to participate in this research project.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your participation in this study, and any identifiable personal information you provide, will be kept confidential to every extent possible. Your name will never appear on any survey or research instruments. The data collected from the one on one interviews will be tabulated with a unique participant identification number. All electronic forms and study materials will be kept secure. All materials, including any recordings will be kept confidential by being secured on a

ADMINISTRATORS' ASSUMPTIONS AND PRACTICES

password-protected computer. The transcribed materials will also be secured on a password-protected computer, removing any of your identifying information. All hand-written will be typed and secured electronically on a password-protected computer. The hand-written notes will be shredded. Any printed versions of the de-identified transcriptions used to analyze data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. In addition, any publications or presentations about this research will only use data that is combined together with all subjects; therefore, no one will be able to determine how you responded.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

You are under no obligation to start or continue this study. You can withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence by the day of your scheduled interview. If you decide you no longer want to participate in the research study, you will need to send an email to the principal investigator indicating your desire to no longer participate. Any data collected up to the time of withdrawing will be deleted from the password-protected computer.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

A summary of the results of this study will be provided to at no cost. You may request this summary by contacting the principal investigator and requesting it. The information provided to you will not be your individual responses, but rather a summary of what was discovered during the research project as a whole.

FUTURE USE OF DATA:

Any information collected that can identify you will have the identifiers removed and be kept for use in future related studies, and/or provided to other researchers. The information may be used in future publications, presented at conference and/or meetings, which under such circumstances your identity will not be revealed.

COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS

The procedures outlined in this form aligns with the University's COVID-19 and IRB policy.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read this informed consent form and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, for any reason without any consequences. Based on this, I certify I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that if I have any questions about my participation in this study, I may contact Chase Loper; XXX-XXX-XXXX; loperc@duq.edu or Rick McCown XXX-XXX-XXXX; mccown@duq.edu. If I have any questions regarding my rights and protections as a subject in this study, I can contact Dr. David Delmonico, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at 412.396.1886 or at irb@duq.edu.

**This project has been approved/verified by
Duquesne University's Institutional Review Board.**

By responding to the email this form was included in, indicating your acceptance to participate, indicates your voluntary consent to participate in this study.

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Intro: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study about the recruitment of African American/Black students. This interview is anticipated to last 60 to 90 minutes and you are under no obligation to continue with this study. You can withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence. This interview will be recorded, and any identifiable personal information you provide, will be kept confidential to every extent possible. Your name will never appear on any survey or research instrument used for the sake of this research study. All materials used for this study, including the recording of this interview will be kept confidential and de-identified on a password-protected computer. Before we proceed, do you have any questions about this interview?

Are you ready to proceed?

Despite continuous efforts to increase the diversity of the undergraduate student body at Citytown University, the proportion of undergraduate students who identify as African American or Black (AA/B) has not increased since, at least, Fall 2011 as you can see in the displayed table [reference the table at the end of this appendix as what will be shared with the participant].

Opening Question – As we get started, would you mind describing how you view yourself within the system of recruiting undergraduate students?

Primary Question 1: With reference to the table I've shared, do you think the lack of success in increasing the proportion of AA/B students in our undergraduate student body is a problem that deserves attention?

Probe: Why do you think it is (or is not) a problem?

Primary Question 2: What do you think are the most important factors that prevent AA/B from matriculating at Citytown University?

Probe: Can you give me a specific example?

Probe: Can you say more about why that factor influences our ability to attract and enroll AA/B?

Primary Question 3: Can you compare and contrast the recruitment of AA/B students and White students? [are we treating AA/B students differently than White students]

Probe: Do you consider the cultural context when recruiting? [possible probe if culture is not mentioned]

Probe: Can you give me an example of how cultural context is considered when recruiting AA/B students? [possible probe if an example is not given]

Probe: Focusing specifically on AA/B students, can you identify institutional agendas that drive recruitment efforts?

Probe: Focusing specifically on AA/B students, how have recruitment agendas changed in recent years?

Primary Question 4: How might recruitment practices be changed to increase the proportion AA/B undergraduate students at [Citytown University]?

Probe: Why do you think that change would yield an increase in AA/B undergrads?

Probe: What are the hurdles (obstacles) that your change idea might encounter?

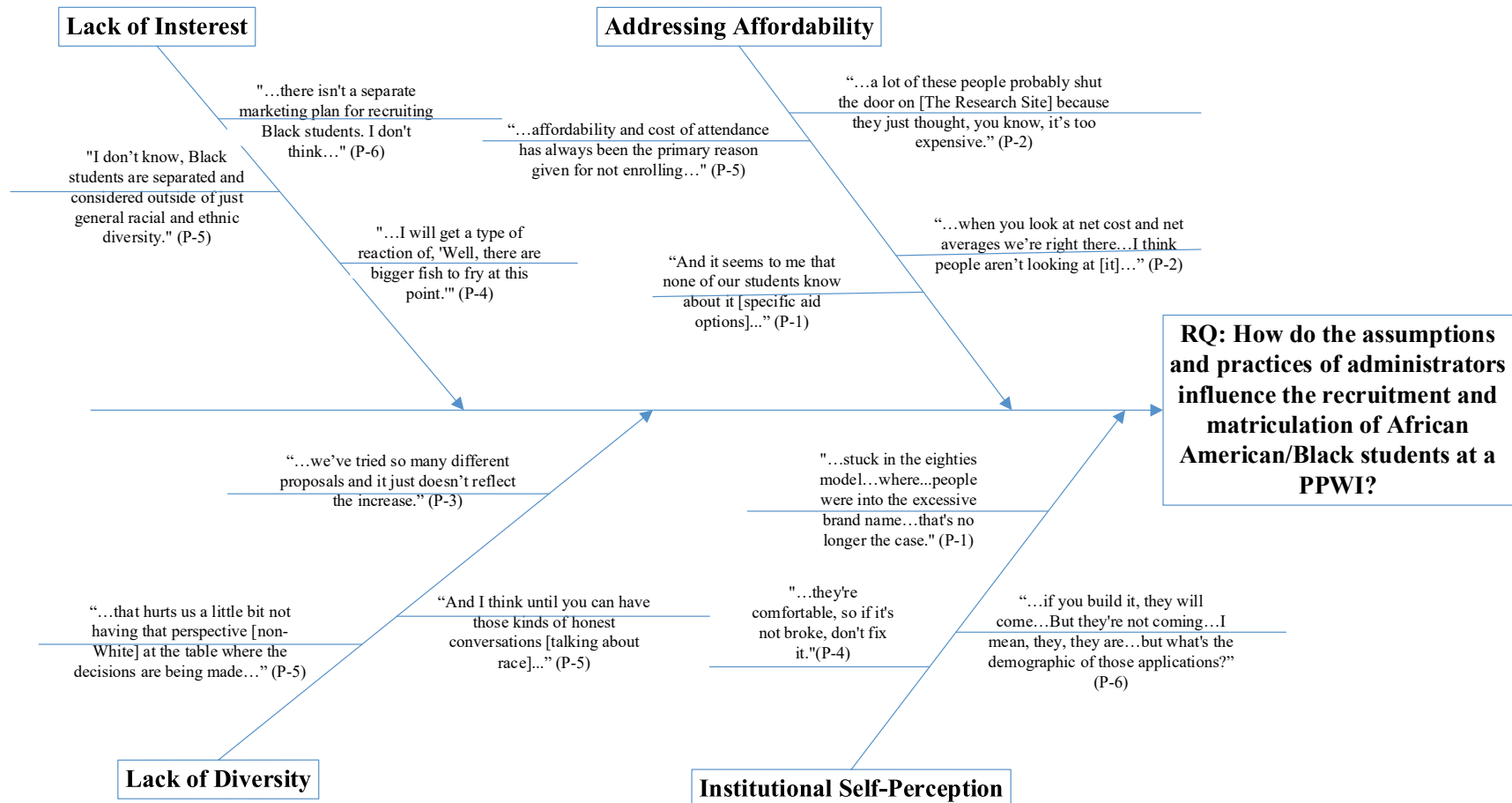
Concluding Question: Is there anything that I have not asked you that you feel is important considering our recruitment practices regarding AA/B students?

**Historical Enrollment Trend Comparison of White and African American/Black Students
FALL 2003-SPRING 19**

Term	White	African American/Black
FA03	78%	4%
FA04	76%	4%
FA05	75%	3%
FA06	74%	3%
FA07	73%	3%
FA08	76%	4%
FA09	85%	4%
FA10	80%	4%
FA11	80%	5%
FA12	80%	5%
FA13	80%	5%
FA14	80%	5%
SP15	80%	5%
FA15	79%	5%
SP16	80%	5%
FA16	79%	5%
SP17	79%	5%
FA17	79%	5%
SP18	79%	5%
FA18	78%	5%
SP19	78%	5%

Appendix D

Fishbone Diagram



Appendix E

Participants' Full Responses to Themes

Themes	Institutional Self-Perception	Addressing Affordability	Lack of Diversity	Lack of Interest
Participants				
1	<p>"...that's a hard question to answer because I do think that we're in the midst of transition...I think that for a long time, you know, [Citytown] might've been stuck in the eighties model, you know, where, you know, people were into the excessive brand name, you know, um, when we have it, when we have a waiting list, um, that's no longer the case."</p>	<p>"And it seems to me that none of our students know about it [specific aid options], you know, like I'm amazed that I have to chase people down every year...So in my view, I should have to pick...the most deserving, [but instead,] I'm chasing around, you know, another 20 kids trying to give away money."</p>	<p>"...the feedback I'm getting is they feel very unsupported. They feel that the majority of students don't understand their backgrounds, why they have to do, you know, certain things the way that they do."</p>	<p>"...I don't know. I don't have a lot of details for that, cause I think that's more admission's space."</p>
		<p>"Money is in the top five [of influential factor]...but not the final nail in the coffin...if you compare [The Research Site's]</p>	<p>"It's so ingrained in the White culture that we know it all."</p>	

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		financial aid package to some of these other schools, we're going to come in at the same cost."		
2	"...[The Research Site's] origins that was there to help the immigrant poor, you know, um, the families of immigrants to get them to school and things like that. And so I think that's carried through and [Citytown's] mindset."	"So, it's just reinforced in us this idea of need, need, need."		"...the obvious thing is ultimately it is about getting more students, or enough students...they realized diversity, economic, socioeconomic is one of the things people look for in a school."
		"...we have to reorient ourselves..but in our mind...that FAFSA score is something that we just kinda based on in our lives."		"So even if we're on that kind of perfect enrollment, they [senior leadership] would still be looking and saying, 'Are we recruiting people that are from different backgrounds?'"
		"...when you look at net cost and net averages we're right there...I think people		"...I don't know...it's hard to say, 'cause I'm not there..."

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		aren't looking at [it]..."		
		"I often wonder if students, you know, from [lower socio] economic backgrounds, as well as any backgrounds, are writing us off, our type of institution...just because of that [price]."		
		"Um, my goodness. I think we could brag a lot more about it." [value of The Research Site]		
		"But I just feel like...a lot of these people probably shut the door on [The Research Site] because they just thought, you know, it's too expensive."		
3	"I think we are one of the best valued institutions out there..."	"Um, and we try to verify that we are affordable and comparable to most schools...I just, I can't understand it because we do go out	"...we've always tried to market for diversity or families that, uh, um, are lower in, in the, uh, overall need, you know, like our Pell	"...we have a new initiative...these lists of different categories where we can get a list of names [names that align with

ADMINISTRATORS' ASSUMPTIONS AND PRACTICES

		there and market, we do go out there, um, and, uh, you know, focus, we really do focus on those.	Grant eligible students and also our male students.	recruitment strategies like increasing diversity]...and that's where were really gonna market to these students."
		"...for the first time ever, we now post the strategy for academic scholarships on the admissions website. We've never, we never did that in the past...And we're starting to publicize this stuff...we we're trying to get this information out of, 'Hey, we are affordable.'"	"...when they walk on campus, they want to see the faculty and staff more diverse, and you know when they don't, that may be a cause of concern. But you look at our location and everything like that and the surrounding areas, I mean we can increase our diversity."	
		"...our goal is to go out and help the ones that don't know how to ask..."	"...we've tried so many different proposals and it just doesn't reflect the increase."	
4	"You know, like I think like on paper things look good...Um, but if you actually experience it as a student, you don't		"I think also when they do visit...they don't see people like them. They come to campus and they see a whole bunch of White people..."	"...I will get a type of reaction of, 'Well, there are bigger fish to fry at this point.'"

ADMINISTRATORS' ASSUMPTIONS AND PRACTICES

	really see the same type of story being told.”			
	“...they're comfortable, so if it's not broke, don't fix it.”			“...my peers, people in the same level as me and even my associate directors will be gung ho for it...I think there would be some pushback on, ‘Well, we can’t focus on that right now, we have to focus on other things.’”
				"Um, there really is no strategy if you want a direct answer."
				"So at [The Research Site] the do it [determining goals] based on the year prior."
				"If you were to ask...like what our priorities are, I would say it's not on anybody's list."

ADMINISTRATORS' ASSUMPTIONS AND PRACTICES

<p>5</p>	<p>“My assumption would be that we perceive ourselves a bit differently than those outside perceived us.”</p>	<p>“...we want to counter the perception of cost.”</p>	<p>“I always find that interesting...I know that a lot of times we kind of come out...and say like ‘x’ percent of our incoming classes [are] nonwhite...And it's like everyone goes around, like, it's a parade that like, we have thought we have accomplished this something and you can break down those numbers down in different ways and, and begin to realize that like, it's kind of stagnant here...but we celebrate that stagnation. I think sometimes, uh, and we kind of disguise it as, uh, as success.”</p>	<p>"I don't know, Black students are separated and considered outside of just general racial and ethnic diversity."</p>
	<p>"And if you don't share that same perception internally, you would not really be in a position to, to change it or to do what would be</p>	<p>“I think that money is a challenge.”</p>	<p>“And I think until you can have those kinds of honest conversations, like, I don't know how you get, I don't know how you skip that</p>	<p>"We look at historical data, um, you know our AVPs and VPs meet with Management and Business, and they come to an</p>

ADMINISTRATORS' ASSUMPTIONS AND PRACTICES

	<p>necessary to change it."</p>		<p>part and then get to the point where you're able to become more attractive as an institution to the students that you're, that you say that you want to enroll."</p>	<p>agreement upon what they believe to be a reasonable goal based on univervisty's objective..."</p>
	<p>"In general, like in our shop, we, like, we take a lot of steps to try to counter the cost perception."</p>	<p>"...affordability and cost of attendance has always been the primary reason given for not enrolling at [The Research Site], but at the same time, we also see research that says that students who don't enroll at [The Research Site] still enroll at either higher cost public institutions or private institutions."</p>	<p>"Um, I think there is an issue too, that people are so afraid to say, 'I need a Black student', 'I need a Black, current [The Research Site] student to our team.'"</p>	
	<p>[When having to adjust recruitment practices] "And there's always been an attitude of like, 'well, that won't happen here' ... 'we've</p>		<p>"...on one hand it's important to enroll a diverse class every year for the overall wellbeing of the institution, and all of the benefits that come with that, but</p>	

ADMINISTRATORS' ASSUMPTIONS AND PRACTICES

	<p>weathered other storms and we've come out okay'... 'we're immune to the shifts that occur off the [Hill].' Whereas in reality you're not."</p>		<p>also [important] to survive as an institution."</p>	
	<p>"...if you always put a positive spin on things, you don't notice the bad stuff."</p>		<p>"I think that we are aware that we need to do a better job of recruiting Black and African American students...and in general non-White students because the population is moving that way."</p>	
			<p>"...if you've got a bunch of White people making that decision, like that's a perspective that is missing. So I feel that hurts us a little bit not having that perspective at the table where the decisions are being made..."</p>	

ADMINISTRATORS' ASSUMPTIONS AND PRACTICES

6	<p>“That's hard. Um, I think that, you know, I think that we want to believe that, you know, we're catering or not catering, I wouldn't say catering, but that we are, um, God, this is hard. Um, I think we, we perceive the university as we are doing what we should be doing to, to live out the mission. Um, and I think it depends on who you talk to.”</p>	<p>“I think... family or friends, um, have been told that... a private school is probably... unreachable... [and] is so expensive.”</p>		<p>"Couldn't even tell you... although I'm part of the enrollment management group... I'm not given that information of what their strategy is or was..."</p>
	<p>“I'm a hundred percent sure that president [name removed], you know, his plan is to try and go back to that mission... but where I wonder, [where] did it go?”</p>	<p>“in reality, our net price could be completely in line.”</p>		<p>"...there isn't a separate marketing plan for recruiting Black students. I don't think..."</p>
	<p>“...people know [The Research Site] and they'll, they'll, they just know, and they want to come here... we just, you</p>			

ADMINISTRATORS' ASSUMPTIONS AND PRACTICES

	<p>know, if you build it, they will come...But they're not coming...I mean, they, they are...but what's the demographic of those applications.”</p>			
	<p>“I think based on history, um, [The Research Site] kind of tends to go on, you know, word of mouth and, um, their name to attract students...which you can't really rely on anymore with the change of how, um, savvy students are...”</p>			