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The Campus Ministry and the African American College Students' Experience: A Case Study

Tania LaCora Ward

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The Campus Ministry and the African American College Students' Experience: A Case Study

(TITLE)

BY

Tania LaCora Ward

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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2017

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE
ABSTRACT

African Americans surpass other ethnicities in their level of spiritual and religious engagement (Johnson, Elbert-Avilla, & Tulskey, 2005). This is particularly true for African American college students. This engagement though, may be especially important in providing African American students a path to academic success. According to Donahoo and Caffey (2010) “African American students remain committed to church involvement and religious practice, in part, due to the range of individual benefits and supports that those opportunities provide” (p. 79). This study investigated the role of spirituality in African American college students’ achievement; to understand how and why they become involved, and how this involvement impacted their college achievement. This was accomplished through a case study on Apostolic Christians in Today’s Society (ACTS) Campus Ministry, a campus ministry with a predominantly Black congregation. Findings revealed that African American students first become involved after being invited by a friend or peer who was already highly involved in the ministry, and remained involved after having many positive experiences. For many, the ministry took on a family-like role, providing them with a sense of purpose and belongingness, positive affirmations, which led to increased confidence in their academic and social selves, clarified career paths and eventual achievement status in their spiritual identity. Implications for college student affairs, campus ministry and recommendations for future research are also presented.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my spiritual parents, Dr. Andrew Robinson and Wanda Kay Robinson. My college experience has been the best because I was blessed with wonderful mentors as yourselves who provided guidance, encouragement, support, and prayers. The genuine love that you have shown to me as if I was your own flesh and blood child has made a significant impact on my outlook on life. You gave me an opportunity when I did not feel like I had anything to offer to the ministry. You believed in me when I did not believe in myself. Thank you for supporting me as I conducted my research, for giving me feedback and motivation to keep going. Thanks, Mama Kay for always reminding me to “enjoy the journey”. Each time I walked into your office feeling discouraged, you had a positive affirmation to keep me going. Thank you, Bishop, for always reminding me of how you proud you were of me and telling me to get back up every time I fall. This thesis was birthed out of a passion sprouted from serving under your ministry and leadership, and would not be possible without God’s help and your unwavering prayers and support. I love you both dearly!

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Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to my loving husband, Ly’Jerrick Ward. Thank you for your unfailing and enduring support through this process. You were there though the exciting and frustrating times, but you continued to support me and let me know that this is all worth it. You are the best husband that a woman can ask for! Thank you for being patient with me as I spent
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Dr. Chigozurium I Utah. Thank you for being willing to serve on my committee. I remember you telling me during the first phone call about serving on my committee that you wanted me to learn embrace it and learn all that I can through this process. Thank you for taking time out of your day to meet with me whether we were in Java or Starbucks. Those are moments that I will never forget.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

“Spirituality lies not in the power to heal others, to perform miracles, or to
astound the world with our wisdom, but in the ability to endure with the attitude whatever
crosses we have to face in our daily lives, and thus to rise above them” (Mata, 2015, p. 1). This quote echoes the voices of those whose spirituality provides an outlet to cope
with life’s daily struggles; and is true of many college students (Graham, Furr, Flowers,
& Burke, 2001). Though college students cope with adversity in different ways (Walker
& Dixon, 2002; Watt, 2003); for some becoming involved in their campus ministry
(Mankowski & Thomas, 2000) is an important, if not the most important, part of their
college survival (Schubmehl, Cubbellotti, & William, 2009). Some take their
involvement further and become highly involved, taking on leadership roles in their
campus ministry (Young, 2017). The church provides these students with a sense of
community and support that helps them manage through college (Donahoo & Caffey,
2010). However, some researchers have suggested that attending college decreases
religiosity and increases secularization (Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007), while others
cite there is a lack of spiritual development because of its controversial and sensitive
nature to student affairs practitioners, faculty and staff (Capeheart, 2005; Stella, 2003).

Little research has looked at religion and spirituality in college student career
development (Constantine, Milville, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006). However,
researchers are pursuing this subject to a greater degree than before (Anye, Gallien, Bian,
& Moulton, 2013; Rennick, Smedley, Fisher, Wallace & Kim, 2013) leading to greater
insights. For example, Burdette, Hill, Ellison, and Glenn (2009) found that religiously
active students may spend the bulk of their time engaging in church sponsored events, and in environments which promote wholesome fun and support. It is important for higher education administration to understand the role that spirituality plays in the life of its students, especially those who are traditionally at risk, so that they will be better able to assist them.

According to Donahoo and Caffey (2010) “African American students remain committed to church involvement and religious practice, in part, due to the range of individual benefits and supports that those opportunities provide” (p. 79). When students cater to their spiritual needs, they become more proactive and more mindful of their educational obligations leading to better academic outcomes. This is particularly significant for African American students on predominantly White campuses because of the central role that social adjustment and interpersonal climate plays on their satisfaction and success (Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). Lack of social support, lack of a sense of belonging, alienation, and resistance are all factors that hinder the success of African American college students at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) (Ross, Powell, & Henriksen, 2016). Counselors therefore, must be appropriately educated on the operations of these issues so that they may develop effective interventions to assist their African American students achieve success.

I am an African American whose college experience was significantly impacted after becoming involved in a campus ministry at a PWI. I was socially withdrawn, had low self-esteem, and was far away from my family, but the campus ministry helped me find a sense of belonging. Today, I attribute my eventual successful completion of my degree to this involvement. Not only did I become a better student, but a better leader, a
better friend, and an overall better person. Along my journey, I witnessed others go through what may be similar stories to my own. This led me to wonder about the intersection of spiritual development and the college experience.

**Purpose of Study**

Research suggests that experiencing lowered expectations and hostile learning environments can negatively impact academic performance (Benton, 2000). This is particularly true for African American students in college. Prosper (2004) in her research on African American women in pursuit for higher education found that these women deal with micro-aggressions of the stereotype that Black women are incompetent. African American males in higher education are still far behind in terms of completing their post-secondary degree due to lack of academic preparation and alienation in college (Owens, Lacey, Rawls, & Holbert-Quince, 2010). However, as previously discussed, religious or spiritual involvement has been shown to moderate this effect. This study sought to understand if this holds true for a unique population of African American students at a PWI in the rural Midwest. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to investigate the role of spirituality in African American college students’ achievement; to understand why they become involved, how they become involved, and how their involvement impact their college achievement. This was accomplished through a case study of the Apostolic Christians in Today’s Society (ACTS) Campus Ministry, a campus ministry with a predominantly Black congregation. I have been actively involved in ACTS campus ministry for six years where I have served in many leadership roles. This gave me easy access and helped me to establish a rapport with the advisors and participants. I
realize that my positionality can create some potential blind spots and I approached my research with that awareness.

**Research Questions**

This study sought to understand the role of spiritual involvement in the African American student’s college experience at a PWI. The following research questions were formulated:

1. How do African American students get involved in campus ministry?
2. Why do African American students at a Predominately White Institution become involved in the ministry?
3. What impact, if any, does high involvement in the ministry have on the achievement of African American students at a predominately White institution?
4. How does high involvement impact the academic achievement of African American students at a predominately White institution?

**Significance of Study**

African Americans surpass other ethnicities when looking at their level of spiritual and religious engagement (Johnson, Elbert-Avilla, &Tulsky, 2005). Comprehending how campus ministry involvement impacts the achievement and personal welfare of African American students will enable universities to develop means to better serve and provide clear communication for these students. Furthermore, institutions can collaborate with campus ministry as part of a multi-layered plan to increase African American students’ retention. African American students are still behind in terms of determination and completion rates of post-secondary degrees (Baber, 2012).
Baber (2012) in his research on African American college students attending a PWI asserted that institutions must work intentionally to build better relationships with African American students to better meet their needs. He also found that racial tension and perceptions are barriers for African Americans’ survival at those institutions. In the early. To add to that, PWIs are struggling in their recruitment and retention efforts of African American students (Simmons, Lowery-Hart, Wahl & Mcbride, 2013). One major factor that deters African American males from completing their secondary educational degree is alienation from the dominant culture which discourages them from persisting at a PWI (Perrakis, 2008). However, for African American students, an environment where they are valued and encouraged can be crucial to them remaining at the university (Schubmehl, Cubbellotti, & William, 2009). Some have found the campus ministry to be their outlet during times of tension and adversity at a PWI. Campus ministries and university administrators can collaborate to provide effective services to African American students. In addition, the university could involve campus ministries in their planning and goals.

**Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

I placed certain limitations on the scope and breadth of the study to ensure that it could be conducted in the allotted time. Furthermore, I selected the case (ACTS Campus Ministry) because of my familiarity with it. This allowed me easy access to, and increased rapport with participants. Considering my role in the case as the researcher and peer of the participants; the participants were selected to reduce conflicts of interest. Only individuals who were at the same level with or above me in the ministry’s leadership were interviewed. Utilizing participants who are in subordinate positions may have led
them to only provide information that they felt were desirable. While this threat to the
trustworthiness of the data may have been minimized, this same decision also meant I
was very familiar with the stories of some of the participants. This could have resulted in
blind spots that could have led to my failure to probe for more detailed descriptions
because of the assumption that I already knew their story. However, I remained aware of
this potential limitation, and made sure to probe for additional information often.

With regards to limitations, this study focused on ACTS Campus Ministry, only
one of the ministries on campus; therefore, the results may not be transferable to all
campus ministries on the campus or at other PWIs (Yin, 2003). In addition, one of the
unique features of case study research is investigating current phenomena; yet a large
proportion of data was obtained from the participants who were asked to recall their past
and present experiences.

**Definitions of Terms**

The terms listed below are an attempt at operationalization, which helps in the
conceptual understanding of the terms as interpreted by this research (Nenty, 2009).

**Achievement.** The ability to successfully navigate through life despite challenges
and adversities.

**ACTS.** Acronym for Apostolic Christians in Today’s Society. ACTS campus
ministry is a subsidiary of Christ ministries Inc., and registered student organization
(RSO) at EIU. ACTS campus ministry is a ministry for students of all walks of life to be
strengthened in their walk with God through fellowship, reading the bible, attending bible
studies, Sunday services, and other activities sponsored through the ministry. ACTS is
pastored by a husband and wife pair, both employed at the university.
**African American.** An individual of African descent who was born in the United States.

**Campus Ministry.** A religious organization established on college and university campuses to help provide a community where spiritual growth and religious values are being emphasized.

**College experience.** The emotional, intellectual, social, physical, cultural and spiritual experiences that college students embark on.

**Cultivating Minister.** An individual undergoing ministerial training towards a master of divinity.

**Religion.** This refers to “the degree to which individuals adhere to the prescribed beliefs and practices of an organized religion or a higher power” (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006, p. 228).

**Retention.** Continued participation at the university by semester throughout the four years of college.

**Self-Efficacy.** Refers to peoples’ judgements about their abilities to complete a task (Hsieh, Sullivan, Guerra, 2007).

**Spirituality.** Spirituality reflects a person’s personal encounter with the sacred and is associated with developing life’s meaning, recognizing one’s purpose in life, and forming a personal relationship with the sacred or God (Donahoo & Caffey, 2010).

**Spiritual involvement.** Actively participating in faith increasing activities such as reading the bible daily, prayer, participation in bible studies and regular church services.
Summary

African Americans tend to be more religious than any other race or ethnicity due to the history of hardships they have experienced (Bennett, Chance, & Williams-Johnson, 2013; Johnson, Elbert-Avilla, & Tulsky, 2005). Spirituality has served as a foundation for support and encouragement for them (Chaney, 2008). On-Campus ministry has been shown to result in positive outcomes for college students who become involved in it; African American students particularly may benefit from involvement in campus ministry because, they feel a sense of belonging (Mattis & Jagers, 2001). The next chapter elaborates on spirituality and religion in human history, spirituality and religion in higher education, spirituality and religion in African American students, history of ACTS campus ministry, and the theoretical frameworks that support this study.
CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

This chapter provides a review of the literature on the topics of spirituality and religion in human history, spirituality and religion and the difference between the two, the emergence of spirituality and religion in higher education, African Americans and spirituality and religion, and spirituality and religion in college students, and a brief history of the case study, ACTS Campus Ministry. It also explains and describes the theoretical frameworks that were guided the study.

Spirituality and Religion in Human History

Research suggests that religion and spirituality are both subjects of growing interest in higher education (Keonig, 2009; Post & Wade, 2009). Although religion and spirituality are often thought to mean the same thing, the following paragraphs attempt to distinguish the two concepts.

Spirituality. Spirituality is not a new phenomenon; its root dates back to the fifth century during the early church and after the New Testament times (Sheldrake, 2013). Later, other religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism adopted the term and applied it to their religious beliefs (Sheldrake, 2009). There are multiple ways in which scholars define spirituality. McIntosh (2015) defined it as, “reliance—especially in difficult times--on a power greater than self, an awareness of purpose, and a lens through which we perceive the world” (p 18). Sheldrake (2009) described a spiritual person as “someone within whom the spirit of God dwelt or who lived under the influence of the spirit of God” (p. 2). In fact, he stated that spirituality was used to describe the Christian life (Sheldrake, 2013). According to Paloutizan and Park (2014) “In the early English,
spirituality was used positively to connote a personal and effective relationship with God” (p.26). Today it remains a prevalent subject of research among scholars (e.g.; Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2015; Chickering & Gray, 2008). In this research, spirituality is defined as an individual’s personal relationship and experience with God.

**Religion.** Spirituality and religion are often used together, and by some interchangeably, but it is important to note the difference. Some would agree that they are spiritual, but not religious and vice versa; however, both terms carry a distinct meaning. Whereas the former deals with an individual’s inner experience with a higher power beyond themselves, the latter relates to an individual’s beliefs and doctrine based on their faith community (Capeheart-Meningall, 2010). Constantine, Lewis-Coles, Miville and Warren (2006) defined religion as “the degree to which individuals adhere to the prescribed beliefs and practices of an organized religion or a higher power” (p.228). Wielhouwer (2004) referred to religion as “a set of beliefs, behaviors, and practices revolving around what is considered sacred; is primarily concerned with group beliefs and practices, instead of those individuals; and aids in the search for existential meaning” (p.769). More recently, Krok (2015) noted that “religiousness is a broad concept that encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioral characteristics” (p.249). Furthermore, Krok (2015) viewed one of the functions of religion “to provide individuals with a sense of meaning and of purpose, through which they can form a coherent view of their lives and the world” (p.1). In one study, researchers found that older religious adults found a greater sense of purpose and meaning in life, and were more apt to participate in spiritual activities with others (Krok, 2015).
**Spirituality and Religion in Higher Education**

Christian spirituality has been known to play an intrinsic role in establishing character and leadership amongst students at higher education institutions (Hartley, 2004). The original purpose for institutions of higher education was to pursue the truth; this included universities such as Harvard, Yale, Brown, Chicago, and Stanford (Poe, 2002). The establishment clause mandates that public institutions remain neutral in regards to religious beliefs and activities (Lowery, 2004). After War World II, institutions derailed from the knowledge that Christian faith had once provided (Poe, 2002). Poe also adds that one complaint of secular education is that religion inflicts a regulation on education. Thomas Jefferson’s vision was for universities to train leaders for public administration, law, and law enforcement however, the common good was fostered in the values of democracy and civic responsibility enveloped by a deep moral sense, and a spiritual connection (Bugenhagen, 2009).

According to Laurence (2003), “Our culture is beginning to move beyond the secular, mechanistic, a moral model that has caused so much alienation” (p. 6). This move beyond secularization is a result of the response to the growing acceptance of religious diversity in the U.S. (p. 1). The study of spirituality has been integral in a new higher education movement (Subbiondo, 2012). There has been a pattern in recent history for institutions of higher education to evade issues of religion by conserving a secular environment (Hartley, 2004; Zajonc, 2002). The issue of integrating religion and spirituality into higher educational institutions has been a controversial one since the 13th century (Zajonc, 2003). Some believe spiritual development is extremely important to developing the whole student in today’s college setting (Capeheart-Meninghall, 2010).
Likewise, faculty and administrators are discovering the possibilities of implementing spirituality into their work. They find them helpful in teaching, research, and student life. Subbiondo (2012) found that implementing the spiritual commitments of students in classes and campus events can enhance education.

Although spiritual inclusiveness is becoming important on college and university campuses, there is still some speculation and reluctance to delve deeper into the topic (Speck, 2005). Students are taught at an early age to not discuss spirituality in an educational setting and thus, the topic is not addressed as important to the student’s life (Speck, 2005). However, when it comes to African American students’ academic success, spirituality and reliance on a higher power can enhance these students’ persistence in higher educational settings (McIntosh, 2015).

**Spirituality and Religion in African Americans**

Spirituality has deep roots within the life and experiences of African Americans (Wheeler, Ampadu & Wanguri, 2002). Many scholars attribute the deeper level of spirituality among African Americans to the early years of slavery (Baer & Singer, 2002; Giger, Appel, Davidhizar & Davis, 2008; Wheeler, Ampadu & Wangari, 2002). African Americans were oppressed and treated harshly then, but they were uplifted through their spirituality (Johnson, Elbert-Avila & Tulsky, 2005). During the slavery era, spirituality served to re-affirm and encourage African Americans in areas such as self-esteem, identity, and their outlook on life (Chaney, 2008). In addition, spiritual traditions served as a source of strength for African Americans, leading them through hardship, struggle, and turmoil that plagued them mentally and physically (Wheeler, Ampadu & Wangari, 2002).
Spirituality is a vital component in African American culture (Johnson, Elbert-Avila & Tulsky, 2005). Whether they referred to it as religiosity or spirituality, many “embrace a faith experience that informs and influences their lives” (Stringer, 2009, p. 329). In her study on African American’s perspectives on spirituality and religion, Chaney (2008) found that African Americans believe that religiosity is closely related to action, and involves effort on their part. For example, one participant in her study stated

Religiosity, simply put means to do something over again in the same fashion. It may not have anything to do with God. For example, someone may watch a television program religiously, but that doesn’t mean that they even believe in God” (Chaney, 2008, p. 211).

In a recent study, Harley and Hunn (2014) sought to understand how hope and spirituality helped youth survive while living in dangerous environments. They interviewed 16 African American youth from low-income families living in Columbus, Ohio. Results revealed that praying and attending church gave the youth hope during times of trouble.

One of the main institutions that impacts the life of African Americans both personally and as a whole is the church (Chaney, 2008). It impacts them not only spiritually, but also emotionally, physically, and psychologically. Scholars credit the Black church for providing the space for African Americans to voice their opinion and to be strengthened together as a community. Spirituality is not just a religious organization for African Americans, but it is a part of their lifestyle (Mattis & Jagers, 2001). African Americans express their spirituality in different ways such as prayer, bible reading, or attending church services, and according to Johnson, Elbert-Avilla, and Tulsky (2005), “participate more often in organizational (attendance at religious services) and
nonorganizational (prayer or religious study) religious activities and endorse higher levels of intrinsic religiosity (personal religious commitment) than do Caucasians” (p.712).

Spirituality is linked with psychological health as well (Perdue, Johnson, Singley, & Jackson, 2006). Often the aspect of spirituality is neglected in the treatment of African Americans; however, several studies have found that spirituality plays a pivotal role in assisting African American patients while coping with illnesses (Giger, Appel, Davidhizar, & Davis, 2008; Holt, Schultz, Caplan, Blake & Southward, 2011; Perdue, Johnson, Singley, & Jackson, 2006). Research on both physical and mental health has indicated that spirituality might function as a protective construct (Staton, Stevens-Watkins, & Oser, 2013, p. 1246). Particularly, nurses have noticed the importance of spirituality in enhancing the health outcomes for African Americans (Giger, Appel, Davidhizar, & Davis, 2008). Stringer (2009) sought out to understand the impact of spirituality and religion on 15 incarcerated African American women. She investigated how those women coped with balancing the role of a mother and a prisoner. She found that incarcerated mothers use religiosity and spirituality to alleviate stress and tension while trying to play the role as a mother and prisoner. In addition, she found that, “religion and spirituality appear to be a source of strength and agency, allowing incarcerated women to interpret their experiences as mothers from a spiritual perspective (p. 342).” In a more recent study, conducted by Holt et al. (2012) on the role of spirituality on African American’s who coped with cancer, provided similar results. They found that religiosity and spirituality are important aspects that enable African American cancer patients to cope through treatments and survive cancer.
**Spirituality in African American College Students**

Colleges and universities often do not address the spiritual lives of their students, especially at secular institutions where spiritual matters are considered to be personal matters (Rennick, Smedley, Fisher, Wallace, & Kim, 2013). Research has suggested, there is less importance placed on the religious values, more curiosity about God, and less religious activity is prevalent during college (Madsen & Vernon, 1983). Furthermore, there is a significant decrease in the participation in religious service among college students (Hill, 2009).

A small number of studies have been piloted on African American college students and spirituality (Donahoo & Caffey, 2010; Mattis & Jagers, 2001; Patton & McClure, 2009). Bennett, Chance, and Williams-Johnson (2013), conducted a study on the impact of religious commitment and motivation on African American male academic achievement and found that motivation and academic achievement of African American males were greatly impacted by their religious commitments while in college. Spirituality is a major part of the lives of most African Americans (Mattis & Jagers, 2001). They are also more likely to be highly involved in religious organization, when compared to other races and ethnicities (Bennett, Chance, & Williams-Johnson, 2013).

Scholars have noted that African American women tend to be more spiritual than African American men; however, both groups often turn to spirituality as a way to cope with the stressors and challenges of college life (Watt, 2003). Constantine, Gainor, Miville, Lewis-Coles and Warren (2006) found that “Spiritual and religious activities, such as praying, reading the bible, and attending church, provided specific concrete activities by which African American college students might alleviate academic and
career related stress” (p 228). The church environment provides a safe space for African American students to express themselves while being spiritually and mentally uplifted (Donahoo & Caffey, 2010).

Another matter of concern for students, especially African American students, as they go away to college is having a sense of belonging. According to Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, and Salomone (2003) a student who has a sense of belonging will become more committed to the university and continue their educational endeavors. Mattis and Jagers (2001) found that spirituality was associated with feelings of connectedness to others among African American adolescents. This included extended family, neighbors, and peer. Some African American students rely on the church and their individual spirituality to give them a sense of belonging, and in return they feel a part of the university community and committed to the university as well as their studies even more (McIntosh, 2015). In a study conducted by Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007), it was found that students who are more integrated with faculty, academics, and social life tend to have a higher sense of belonging. As the spiritual lives of African American students are fostered and enriched while in college, it results in many positive outcomes for them intellectually, spiritually and academically (Holland, 2014).

History of Apostolic Christians in Today’s Society (ACTS)

The genesis of ACTS Campus Ministry emerged in 2003 as a recognized student organization (RSO) on Eastern Illinois University’s (EIU) campus by Alexis Powers. Alexis was a member of New Life Apostolic Church (NLAC), under the leadership of her pastor, Bishop/Dr. Andrew Robinson when she envisioned ACTS RSO. However, the RSO remained inactive until April 2007, when Dr. Robinson and his wife, Wanda Kay
Robinson, chose to resign from NLAC. They felt a great burden to help students maintain their faith at EIU, where Bishop Robinson had served as a faculty member in the Department of Communication Studies since 2005 and where his wife also worked from 1997. They resurrected the ACTS RSO and established ACTS Campus Ministry as satellites under Christ Ministries, Inc., a not-for-profit organization they founded in 1989. The vision of Alexis Powers had finally materialized under the leadership of the Robinsons.

Dr. Robinson felt impressed that God would do a “new thing”, that ACTS would be a ministry completely different than traditional ministries. The “new thing” involved helping to revitalize or maintain the spiritual life of college students while at a secular university. Spirituality serves a vital purpose and has been of recent interest among many undergraduate students as noted by scholars (Hill, 2009). Numerous lay members from NLAC followed the Robinsons to ACTS in order to support their new passion and vision, many of who were seasoned Christians and extremely devout in their faith. The Pentecostal/charismatic style worship immediately began attracting students to join, particularly minority students.

The Robinson’s adhere to servant leadership theory and apply the strengths-based approach of appreciative inquiry to help ACTS students discover their purpose and develop their skills. As servant leaders, motivated by genuine love and care for their followers, they aid students in goal setting and becoming their best in all areas of their lives. Their strengths-based approach focuses on the good qualities and what individuals do well, rather than weaknesses or inadequacies. They do this through heavy student creativity and involvement, allowing students to take ownership of the ministry. With the
Robinsons’ guidance, students work in numerous ACTS ministries: servant leadership volunteer, audio/video, hospitality, mentoring, dance, praise singing, social media, and so on. Students develop leadership, communication, time management, relationship building, and many other skills, plus nearly all improve their grade-point-average, especially those who become deeply involved in ACTS. ACTS has also contributed to the retention rate at the university, for a great number who were considering transferring or simply dropping out decided to stay and others even stay for graduate school or find jobs nearby, so they can stay involved in ACTS.

Several couples have formed, became engaged, and eventually married while at ACTS. Dr. and Mrs. Robinson frequently conduct relationship sessions or seminars to help students become better informed on how to find the right mate. Dr. Robinson often tells the students at ACTS “In order to find the right person, you must first be the right person for someone else” and “You can’t soar like and eagle if you hang with turkeys.” With these statements, he emphasizes the importance for students to be their best and to associate with people who make them better. He also stresses that they can know they have found the right person when they have found someone who makes them better in every way—e.g., spiritually, personally, and professionally.

**Cultivating Ministers Training Program.** In January 2013, the Robinsons began training young men and women who felt the call to preach. The program soon developed into the Christ Ministries School of Divinity. Some core courses include pulpit ministry, pastoral counseling, administrative leadership, Pentecostal theology, and ministerial ethics. The first nine students, all African American, six men, and three women, graduated from the program on August 23, 2015, earning their Master of
Divinity degrees and receiving ordination into the ministry. A husband and wife from the program are now pastors of ACTS Campus Ministry at the University of Illinois (UIUC), five are assistant pastors with ACTS at EIU, and two are in graduate school at UIUC and helping with ACTS at UIUC. A second cohort of four African Americans and one Caucasian, three men and two women, began immediately after.

The Robinsons envision an ACTS Campus Ministry in every public university. ACTS at UIUC formed August 30, 2015, and ACTS at the University of Southern Indiana began during January 2016. They use two models for establishing new ACTS: 1. Install graduates from Christ Ministries School of Divinity and 2. Work with a local church near a university that can provide a well-trained and ordained minister as a pastor of an ACTS. This brief history of ACTS highlights the main focus of the ministry and will allow you to understand from the viewpoint of the students who were deeply involved in the cultivating ministers training program.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by four concepts and theories: spiritual identity development, Erikson’s identity vs. identity confusion, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and Bandura’s Self-Efficacy theory.

**Spiritual Identity Development.** William James’s early work in identity development placed an important emphasis on spirituality as a major aspect of one’s personality. A sense of spiritual identity may be achieved by reflecting upon these spiritual interactions, teachings, and experiences through the process suggested in our tentative model. Poll and Smith (2003) suggested that there are four stages of spiritual identity development, *pre-awareness* of spiritual identity, *awakening* of spiritual
awareness, \textit{Recognition and reconstruction} of fragmented memories into consistent themes, and integration of spiritual memories and experiences into a spiritual identity with concomitant changes in behavior. Stage 1, pre-awareness, occurs when an individual view themselves as a spiritual being in a relationship with God. A person at this stage does not consider themselves to be a spiritual person because they lack the experience which contributes to being identified as a spiritual person. Stage 2 occurs when an individual has a crisis which erupts the spiritual aspect in their life. They then began to look at things through a spiritual perspective. For example, when a young child watches their parents’ divorce, as they get older they may blame God out of their anger. The third stage occurs when an individual has multiple spiritual experiences upon in which they can reflect. For example, an adolescent attending a Catholic high school, who is currently enrolled in morality classes, may begin to relate what they are learning to a message heard in a church setting as a child. The fourth stage occurs when an individual embraces their spirituality through seeking a relationship with God and begins to communicate with others in a way which reflects their spiritual life. As a result they incorporate their spirituality into every other aspect of their life. Poll and smith (2003) asserted

\begin{quote}
Although, individuals widely differ in their current perceptions of God due to their previous experiences, our model affirms that spiritual experiences reveal God to the individual, and the more individuals come to know God, the more they see themselves as His children, created in his image” (p. 134).
\end{quote}

They also suggest that “by reflecting upon spiritual experiences from the past and by projecting such experiences into the future through faith, individuals are able to feel continuity and constancy of their spiritual selves as eternal beings” (p. 133). However, if
an individual’s environment is incongruent with how they view God, they may alter their beliefs based and what they see. This may result in friction in the way they view God, which doesn’t help them to develop their spiritual identity. For example, if a child who is taught that God loves everyone and treats everybody kindly, watches her father abuse her mom, she may have a skewed view of her father and may be led to believe that God doesn’t love her father because he has hurt her mother. Another example is a person struggling to be kind to those who bully them, may not agree with their spiritual beliefs that they should treat everyone with kindness.

**Erik Erickson’s Identity versus Identity Confusion.** Erickson described the concept of identity versus identity confusion, the fifth stage of his larger theory of psychosocial development (Waterman, 1982). Erickson described eight psychosocial stages which he believed that all humans experience at some point in their lifetime. He theorized that individuals begin the process of searching for their true identity during adolescence. It is during that time when individuals begin trying new things dissimilar to what they were taught in the home or even a school, in order to discover who they really are. Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2013) described identity as including comfort with body and appearance, comfort with gender and sexual orientation, a sense of one’s social and cultural heritage, a clear self-concept and comfort with one’s own roles and lifestyle, a secure sense of self in light of feedback from significant others, self-acceptance and self-esteem, and personal stability and integration (p. 68).

Not everyone will be accepted by others for who they are. Erickson believed that those who are unsuccessful in finding their own identity during adolescence will not develop
mature interpersonal relationships with others as they grow older; as a result, they feel confused about who they are.

James Marcia expanded on Erikson’s identity and described four identity statuses: *Identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium,* and *identity achievement.* Identity diffusion is when an adolescent has not made a commitment because they are unaware that they can make choices for themselves. Identity foreclosure is when an adolescent has the desire to make a commitment, but they have not experienced a crisis that prompts them to make a decision. For example, a student who is not sure what major to choose in college may be more prone to their parents’ advice rather than deciding on their own. Identity moratorium is when a crisis has emerged in the adolescent’s life, but they have not yet made a commitment, they are exploring the options in front of them. Identity achievement is when an adolescent has experienced crises and has made a firm commitment based on something they value and therefore has found a sense of identity based on that commitment. The four identity statuses do not have to happen sequentially and is different from Erik Erikson’s identity verses identity confusion because Marcia believed that an adolescent’s identity is shaped by a time of crisis and the commitment they make as a result of that crises (Davey, 2014). Although, Marcia described these during the adolescent phase, the principles are applicable to young adults as well.

**Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.** This research was also informed by Maslow's hierarchy of needs developed by Abraham Maslow (Poston, 2009, Maslow, 1994). Maslow sought to understand what motivated people to obtain their needs (McLeod, 2014). He believed there are five needs essential to all humans; if the first need is unmet,
then an individual cannot proceed to the next. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is arranged into a pyramid shaped figure, highlighting needs in order of most basic and essential to most complex yet important. The first need that must be met according is an individual’s physiological needs which include water, homeostasis, food, and sleep. These needs are also called the deficit needs. The second level is the need for safety, which includes shelter, protection, stable environments, and order. The third level is the need for love and belonging. According to Poston (2009), when an individual’s desire to build meaningful relationships with others becomes an important goal, they develop a sense of belonging. Individuals whose sense of belonging needs are met are more likely to have a high self-esteem, which is the next level of the hierarchy (Poston, 2009). Maslow would argue that psychological issues that people struggle with are a result of experiencing low self-esteem. The last need on the hierarchy is the need for self-actualization. This term was first used by, Kurt Goldstein (Maslow, 1943). The need for self-actualization rest upon all the other basic needs being met first. It is when an individual has become what he has the potential to be; therefore, he is fulfilled (Maslow, 1943). At this level, an individual is comfortable with whom they are; they are more focused on becoming a better person who can contribute to society in a positive way (Poston, 2009). An individual’s spiritual growth would be considered to play a role in self-actualization. However, there is not much research or evidence to support the need for self-actualization being reached (Maslow, 1943). It is important to note that each of these needs must be maintained and developed in order for a person to have stability. These needs are essential to all humans, regardless of race, gender, socio-economic background, or age.
**Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy.** Perceived Self-efficacy is defined as, “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that effect their lives. (Bandura, 1994). Bandura posits that there are four different sources that influence an individual’s efficacy; mastery experiences, vicarious experiences provided by social models, social persuasion, and reducing people’s stress reactions and altering negative proclivities (Bandura, 1994). As an individual begins to experience success and failures in life, their self-efficacy will increase unless they only experience success and no failures. By enduring through major difficulties, they will learn the importance of effort and as a result improve their self-efficacy. The second way that self-efficacy is enhanced is through vicarious experiences through social models. When a person can see someone else similar to them become successful, it gives them hope that they too can succeed. Thirdly, social persuasion is a way to help build self-efficacy. Social persuasion emphasizes that individuals are persuaded by what other people say about them and therefore encouraged to improve their behaviors because of the positive feedback. Lastly, by reducing stress reactions and altering negative proclivities. Stress is known to decrease performance and how people view themselves.

**Summary**

Although people define spirituality and religion differently, both are important as individuals begin to seek something that is more powerful than themselves. Spirituality and religion are both interesting topics for researchers today. Public colleges and universities do not place an emphasis on the spiritual life of their students (Capeheart, 2005), however, spirituality specifically is very important to the life of some college
students, especially African American students. African Americans were known to use their spirituality during the days of slavery to give them hope. African American college students turn to spirituality as a means to cope with various struggles. Some African American students struggle academically and socially at predominately white institutions. However, campus ministry is one agent that is available on college campuses to help African Americans maintain their spirituality and find a sense of connectedness.
CHAPTER III

Methods

This chapter describes the methods that were used to conduct the study. The study sought to understand how campus ministry involvement impacted the college experience of African American students deeply involved in it. The following paragraphs will further discuss why a qualitative approach was chosen for this study, the research site, instrument, data collection, and treatment of data, and data analysis for this study.

Design of the Study

A qualitative triangulation retrospective single-case study approach was used to conduct this study. Case studies are instrumental for training in fields such as medicine, law, business, and the social sciences (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015) and one typically includes the study of one particular person, concept, or event (Fraenkel et al., 2015). According to Yin (2003) “The case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events- such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, international relations, and the maturation of industries" (p.2). Case studies help in research when asking questions such as "why" and "how". Specifically, "how" and "why" questions are more explanatory and likely lead to the use of case studies, histories, and experiments as the preferred method. They also require no control over the behavioral outcomes of events and focuses on contemporary events (Yin, 2003). However, this study utilized a modified case study approach, because of its heavy reliance on participants’ retrospection.

Fraenkel et al. (2015) posits that “A researcher who conducts a retrospective interview tries to get a respondent to recall and then reconstruct from memory something that has
happened in the past” (p. 450). The case study approach is appropriate for this study though, because the ACTS campus ministry is the “case” being studied, and the conduction of the study is not expected to alter its impact. The qualitative method was used because it allowed the researcher to get an in depth understanding of the experiences of the participants and to understand the impact of campus ministry on the education and retention of these participants. The researcher conducted one on one interviews with individuals who have become ordained ministers as a result of being deeply involved with ACTS campus ministry. The triangulation approach included one on one interviews with each ordained minister, archival record of ACTS campus ministry, and a personal reflection of an ordained minister.

Participants

The participants were purposely selected based on their participation in ACTS campus ministry. They included five African Americans who were highly involved in ACTS campus ministry at Eastern Illinois University (EIU) at the time of data collection and recently graduated (within one year) from Christ Ministries School of Divinity and Eastern Illinois University. Along with student interviews were interviews with ACTS Campus Ministry advisors. The sample comprised of two females and five male’s females, ranging in ages between 23 and 28 years. All participants resided in Illinois, and all came to the institution to obtain an educational degree. Three currently reside locally, while working and serving as assistant pastors to ACTS campus ministry. Participants also included the current leadership of the ministry.
Research Site

The research site is a predominately White midsized Midwestern university located in the rural Midwest. At the time of data collection, the student population was about 7,640. The institution offers bachelors, masters, and specialist degrees. The gender make-up includes approximately 40% male and 60% female students. The student graduation and retention rate are well above state and national averages. The current graduation rate is 59%, and the freshmen retention rate is 77.8%. There are currently five campus ministries. This site is the best location for this study because it is the place where the students have been involved in campus ministry and completed their undergraduate degrees.

Instruments

Researcher. The researcher is the single most important instrument in qualitative research. Unlike quantitative research where the researcher is not as important, in qualitative studies, the researcher is the means by which the data is interpreted and analyzed (Xu & Storr, 2012). I the researcher was well aware of how my personal experience could play a role in the interpretation of data. In order to reduce personal biases, my thesis advisor looked over my analysis to ensure inter-rater agreement. I was heavily involved in the campus ministry myself and this impacted how I constructed the research protocol and interview questions. My positive experience helped to shape this research and made me wonder what impact it had on the participants. I was deeply invested and empathized with the participants’ answers because of this. I was aware of my potential biases and how they can impact the design and my interpretation of the
findings. I had to be open minded to listen to the complexity of their experiences of the participants and not project my own positivity.

**Semi-structured interviews.** Data was collected via semi-structured interviews with each individual ordained minister and church leaders involved in ACTS campus ministry. Interviews lasted from about 30 minutes to an hour. Questions included “how did you get involved in ACTS campus ministry?”, “Describe your journey?” How did your involvement in ACTS campus Ministry impact you as a person? (See Appendix A). To glean more in depth responses one-on-one interviews were the selected means to collect data. Interviewing is one of the most effective ways of approaching qualitative studies (Fraenkel et al., 2015). It allows the interviewer to collect important facts and thoughts that could not be easily be understood by observation, but to also see emotional and behavior responses to such answers; they allow the interviewee the space to elaborate truthfully and the interviewer to ask follow up questions to get clear and accurate answers (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

**Artifacts.** Artifacts and other publicly accessible historical document were collected from ACTS campus ministry website, online articles about the ministry, and other appropriate documents.

**Data Collection**

The interviews took place during the summer at a location selected by the participants. The longest interview lasted 50 minutes, and the shortest was 30 minutes. Interviews were conducted using the interview protocol (see Appendix A). To accurately obtain the information from participants, permission was requested for them to be audio or video recorded. Then participants were asked to sign an informed consent document
(See Appendix B). During the interview participants’ verbal and non-verbal behaviors were also noted.

**Data Analysis**

Once all the interviews were transcribed, and a separate copy for each interview was printed, the data was coded. Codes are tags or labels that are used for assigning meaning to portions of data” (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. 434). After discussion with my faculty advisor, we decided that thematic coding would be the best method given the nature of study. An excel spreadsheet was created to help organize the themes that arose from each participant interview. The researcher started with the first transcript, and read it right through to get a feel for the participant’s story. Next, it was read a second time, this time to discover any interesting chunks that may be important. A code was given to each chunk. As the reading progressed, new chunks were either added to existing codes are new codes were created. This process was repeated for each transcript. Once all the transcripts were coded, the researcher with consultation with her committee chair tried to discover themes across participants. The meaning of each theme was discussed then a name which captured the essence of the theme was selected. Only significant themes were retained and reported. The transcripts from the leaders were approached differently. They were used to obtain descriptive information and to set the context for the case study. They were also used as a means of triangulating the data from the student participants.
Treatment of Data

The interviews were handled as noted by IRB. Each interview was saved on a cellular device and will be deleted after three years after the study has been published. There were copies printed for each interview before data analysis. Along with the interviews being stored on a cellular device, they were also saved on an usb drive for a more reliable storage source.

Summary

This study used a qualitative approach to inquiry, more specifically the case study approach. The case was a campus ministry with a majority African American membership. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the five student participants and with the two White advisors of ACTS campus ministry. This chapter presented a detailed description of the research design, research site, participants, as well as the methods and procedures that were utilized for data collection, analysis and treatment. The next chapter presents the findings.
Chapter IV

Findings

This chapter summarizes the findings from qualitative analyses conducted on data obtained from the case study of Apostolic Christians in Today's Society (ACTS) Campus Ministry, at a Midwestern four-year institution. Part of the triangulation study included interviews of the advisors of ACTS Campus Ministry. The advisors shared their perspectives on the impact of the campus ministry on the lives of the students who were highly involved. ACTS Campus Ministry, a subsidy under Christ Ministries Inc. became a registered student organization in 2003. However, services began in 2007 under the leadership of a husband and wife team who worked at the institution. According to ACTS’s Bishop Andrew Robinson,

…the purpose of the ministry is to help students maintain their religious faith and spiritual connection to God during their college years. ACTS Campus Ministry serves as a spiritual covering and support to students while they attend college. Some of the ways in which we do this is by hosting weekly worship services, bible studies, and social activities for students, by interacting with others who share their faith in God (Personal communication, September 28, 2016).

I wanted to gain an understanding of the role of spiritual involvement in the African American student’s college experience at a Predominately White Institution. More specifically I sought to answer the research questions: why do African American students at a predominately White institution become highly involved in the ministry? What impact, if any, does high involvement in the campus ministry have on the achievement of African American students at a predominately White institution? And, how does high
involvement impact the achievement of African American students at a predominately White institution? Triangulation was achieved by obtaining data from individuals who were highly engaged in the ministry, as well as ministry leaders, and ministry artifacts.

Profile of the Participants

Data were obtained from two types of participants: student and ministry advisors. All the student participants identified as African American. They were all highly involved in ACTS Campus Ministry; having graduated with their masters of Divinity in August of 2015 after being enrolled in a 2.5 year Cultivating Ministers Training Program under the leadership of the ministry’s advisors geared towards teaching students more in depth about the bible and work of the ministry. The advisors, a husband and wife team were White. The participants chose a pseudonym, to protect their identity (Crow & Wiles, 2008).

Carter. Carter is an African American student who graduated from the institution, then stayed to further his education in a two-year master’s degree program. Carter was an active member who sought out others to invite to be part of it. After becoming an ordained minister from the cultivating ministers program, he was installed as an assistant pastor to the campus ministry. He was raised up in the church by his parents and having a father who is a pastor served as a positive influence on Carter’s life. Carter met his wife while working off-campus at a nearby company and the two of them are highly involved in the campus ministry together.

James. James also graduated from the institution. He was taught the importance of spirituality at home by his mother who took him to church every Sunday. James was invited to take part in the campus ministry by another member who was highly involved,
then he began to blossom. After graduation, James began working at a company in a surrounding city while staying involved in the campus ministry. Recently, James was accepted into a master’s program at the institution. James serves as an assistant pastor to the campus ministry while working full-time and going to school part-time.

**Joe.** Joe became active in campus ministry after being invited by a member who was already highly involved. Joe was raised up in a home where spiritual values were not emphasized frequently, though his parents attempted to have a bible study in the home once. Joe graduated from the institution with his bachelor’s degree, and shortly after began working at a nearby company. Joe met his wife at a bible study at the campus ministry. Joe also serves as an assistant pastor to the campus ministry.

**Kelly.** Kelly graduated with her master’s degree from the institution. She was not raised in a home where spirituality was taught or encouraged, but after being involved in a Christian sorority in college, Kelly began her spiritual journey. Kelly and her husband Randy were both already married upon arriving at the institution and got heavily involved in campus ministry while Kelly was completing her master’s degree. Kelly and her husband Randy now serve as pastors to an ACTS Campus Ministry at a nearby institution where they both work full time.

**Randy.** Randy graduated with his master’s degree from the institution. Randy was inspired because of his father’s spiritual transformation; and he observed this as a child. Randy was raised in the church and knew about God, but had not yet experienced a personal relationship with God until college. Randy, like his wife, was also involved in a Christian sorority where he was introduced to the campus ministry. After attending a few times, Randy made a commitment to attend every Sunday. Randy and his wife Kelly
were both highly involved in the ministry and after their ordination from the Cultivating Minister’s Program, they were installed as pastors to a campus ministry at a nearby institution where they already held jobs.

The First Encounter

Student participants were asked to describe their journey with ACTS. More specifically, they were asked to describe how they got involved. The researcher was also interested in their initial response to the ministry. Two major themes that emerged centered on Invitation by Friend or Affiliation through Sorority and Fraternity. Another theme that arose was the Ministry’s Outreach.

**Invitation by friend.** James, who was raised in the church and taught the importance of having a relationship with God, was initially searching for a church home during his freshmen year of college. He initially went with a friend who lived in his residence hall, but after forming a relationship with one of the involved students who already attended the campus ministry, he became more inclined to attend the Sunday services and take part in the ministry. He pointed out:

> Because that person had ended up becoming my friend around that time. We used to play basketball and all of that at the gym and stuff. He seemed like a good person, and he was always talking about this ministry. So, because I knew somebody that went there and it seemed like it was working for him, I thought I’d go....

Joe’s initial encounter to the ministry was also influenced by a member who was already highly involved in the ministry. Though Joe was not raised up in church, he felt a
connection with the student who reached out to him, so he gave the ministry a try. This is what Joe had to say about his initial encounter:

I was invited by a colleague, who was attending ACTS Campus Ministry, and he had already been involved in church, and he hung out with me as well. We had the same class together. We hung out with each other and developed a friendship; the more I hung out with him, the more I got to know him and the more we got to relate. Because he reached out to me in that aspect of things to get to know me, it made it easier for me to even attend despite me not having a church background.

Though James and Joe were both invited by the same person they had different reasons for why they decided to attend ACTS Campus Ministry. James’ mother taught him to attend church prior to him attending college, but Joe had no church background. However, that one persistent member of the ministry made a huge impact on their lives by befriending them; they bought into it, and decided to give it a try.

**Invitation by Other Affiliate.** Kelly and Randy are husband and wife who were attending graduate school during their experience with ACTS Campus Ministry. They both were leaders in their Christian sorority and fraternity organizations on campus. Kelly was in graduate school pursuing her master’s degree, and had not found a church home yet. Randy had already graduated with his bachelor’s degree and was living with his wife Kelly, but he had not had a church home either, though he knew the importance of attending church. Kelly and Randy’s experience of how they got involved with ACTS Campus Ministry was unlike James’s and Joe’s initial encounter. Kelly recalled her initial encounter:
I started a chapter with my sorority, and on Sundays we would always go to one of the incoming member’s churches and ACTS was the church that one of the girls went to. So, that was my first experience going to ACTS, and then after that, I hadn’t had a church home, and I really wanted to go to church, and I really liked ACTS campus ministry, so I chose to continue to attend, which grew into more and more.

Randy’s journey to ACTS for the first time, was through his fraternity:

The Lord had pressed it upon my heart to start a chapter in my fraternity, and one of the components of membership was that we go to worship together. Some people who were going through the process went to ACTS, so we attended, and it went real well.

The participants experience with ACTS through invitation of friends and sorority or fraternity affiliation was the beginning of a new journey of building their relationship with God.

Ministry’s Outreach. Some of the strategies ACTS uses to reach out to students are through various outreach methods such as email invitations, postcards in the mail to all the residence halls, and informational tables throughout the semester.

Carter’s father is a pastor. He played a pivotal role in his son’s initial encounter with the ministry. He was actively seeking a church home for his son. Carter was a transfer student from a nearby community college and attended the University’s open house. ACTS had an informational table set up to greet new families and students. Carter's father had attended this open house with him and met one of the members of ACTS who gave him an information card for his son. Carter stated:
The person who told me about ACTS was my father and it was because when we were going to orientation, he was looking for a church for me. Someone, who I do not know, informed him about ACTS and he brought back this card and I knew that I would check it out.

Despite Carter being a transfer student, and being raised in a spiritual home, it was important to his father that he found a church to attend while he was away at school. Attending church was a given for Carter, so he decided to check it out after his father informed him. Figure 1 is an example of a flyer distributed by ACTS, and would be similar in some ways to the one that Carter's father came across.

![Figure 2. An Example of an ACTS Campus Ministry Flyer](image)

**Continued Engagement**

Once students had their initial encounter with the ministry, what were their motivations for continuing beyond that first encounter, i.e. why did they return? In order
to gain an understanding of the factors that led to continued engagement, participants were asked to explain why they returned to the campus ministry after the first time. Three themes of why participants continued to become to attend or engage were due to the *Family Atmosphere* and the *Sincerity and Affection of the Leaders*, and *Sense of Purpose*.

**Family Atmosphere.** Having family support is a critical factor to students being successful in college (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005). For African Americans, spirituality and religion are at the core of the family because it infuses them with a greater power beyond themselves (LittleJohn-Blake & Darling, 1993). For the students involved in this ministry, they depended on that familial support from the church leaders, peers, and other church members. The campus ministry provided the intimate and safe space for sharing, and provided a sense of belongingness reminiscent of family. Joe was seeking something to fill a void that had been left from his temporary abandonment of the spiritual foundation of his childhood. ACTS provided that fulfillment for him:

I just needed some sense of encouragement, something I was looking for, some void that needed to be filled. I did find that the void was a spiritual foundation that I had been taught when I was young, but I never really gave heed to it until I attended ACTS campus ministry.

Joe further described the support he received:

I just remember all the college students being there and it was an intimacy that we shared. We shared struggles and personal things with each other. My first few times were really good, I felt like I belonged there, I felt a sense of belonging, I
felt that I mattered. We call each other sisters and brothers at ACTS; we are a body in Christ.

James looked forward to his weekly experience with ACTS where he was treated like family:

It ended up being a place where I could go to church and consider a church home and family. I felt that one of the best parts of my week was going to the campus ministry, because I always got to be around people that treated me like family even though they didn’t know me like that.

Donahoo and Caffey (2010), conducted a study to explore what impact spiritual involvement has on African American students, and among the findings were the family support they receive which encourages them in their studies. The advisors can attest to what the participant’s shared. In response to why participants continued to get involved with the ministry, Mable responded:

We promote that family atmosphere and they feel connected and they not only have our praise and encouragement, but they have the praise and encouragement of their peers, their brothers and sisters. So, it’s really that family atmosphere; I think it makes them feel safe, you know and secure on a college campus.

Students appreciated the family atmosphere so greatly that they anticipated being back together with people who made them feel like they mattered. The support from a spiritual family and love has been key to the continued commitment of the students to the growth of their spirituality and their campus ministry involvement.

Sincerity and Affection of the Leaders. Larry Spears (2010) described characteristics of a servant leader and included in that description was the importance of
leaders demonstrating empathy and commitment to the growth of people. When a leader sincerely desires to understand another’s perspective by showing empathy, they are more willing to take heed to what they have to say. Another important aspect of the impressions of the campus ministry is the care portrayed by the leaders. This was evident in ACTS through the mind of Carter who said “After encountering Pastor’s genuineness, I knew this was the place for me.” Joe similarly expressed, “I felt like the leaders really cared. They always just wanted me to come back. They never did anything to keep me away. It was always just a care.” James affirmed:

The pastor and his wife were dedicated to us even though they didn’t know us. They were so committed to helping us to be better people, helping us to grow in our spiritual walk and I guess that made it easier for me to want to commit in my own personal relationship with God and personal areas that I knew I was struggling in.

The leaders of the ministry emphasized the importance of showing empathy and care when asked about why students continue to become involved in the ministry. The advisor explained:

I always tell every person this especially in the church and our campus ministry, you cannot find your divine purpose and what you’re supposed to do in life without loving people. Everything has to be motivated by love for people, and so you know because the will of God for our lives always involves people, some way were going to be able to make a positive impact on the lives of others when we do discover our divine purpose. So, you know we say, “You’ve got to love people”, because people don’t care to know what you know until they know how much you
care, and then when they know how much you care, they care to know what you know”. So, love is the key motivator, everything we do, everything we promote, the key motivator #1 influencer is love.

Knowing that the leaders cared made such an impression on the students that they looked forward to attending the Sunday services and weekly events.

**Sense of Purpose.** James described how he kept engaged with the ministry because it provided him with new sense of consistency, and kept him out of trouble:

It made it easy for me to keep coming and to want to be a part of what was going on; and it kept me out of trouble as well because it gave me something to do on a committed level, and it always gave me something to look forward to, whether it were the events or things of that nature and bringing consistency in my life where it didn’t exist.

Joe described his reactions by sharing how he discovered his purpose in life, “I learned that I am going to be an individual who helps other people reach their goals and aspirations and serve as a person who can really help out other people”.

This notion of purpose was echoed by the Bishop, who believed that it went hand in hand with loving others, “I always tell every person this especially in the church and our campus ministry, you cannot find your divine purpose and what you’re supposed to do in life without loving people”. He continued, “some way we’re going to be able to make a positive impact on the lives of others when we do discover our divine purpose.”

**The Impact**

Students discussed why they returned to ACTS and how their involvement impacted other areas of their college experience. I was interested in understanding how
their high involvement impacted other areas of their lives such as social, academic, and personal. The three most common themes were the Development of Leadership Skills, Increased Academic and Social-self Efficacy, and Vocational Identity Development.

**Development of Leadership Skills.** One goal of student affairs professionals is to assist in the leadership development of students through in-class and out of class experiences (Flowers, 2004). ACTS campus ministry serves as an avenue to help cultivate those skills in the students that attend the ministry and decide to become involved. This was evident through some of the participants’ responses. For example, James stated:

> I think what got me involved was just seeing how open the leadership was in allowing young people to have positions of help in the ministry. They allow us opportunities to assist in things; whether it is to come in early to pray, whether it is sometimes the previous nights there were movie nights so there would be popcorn on the ground. So, we have an opportunity to get some cleaning up before service start and also to participate in the many functions that the ministry had and initiatives.

Joe added that “ACTS campus ministry is a great place for training up leaders and people are really finding out what they want to do with their careers.” Kelly also echoed that by saying “I am going from being a hearer of the word to a doer of the word, in a sense of doing the work of the ministry and not just attending church.” This relates to what the advisors had to say about how they encourage their students to get involved:

> I think that one of the greatest things in our students is that we constantly stress that we believe in them and if we find something that they enjoy doing, some type
of service in the ministry, like working with the sound or praise dancing or singing or whatever they want to do. We just try in some way to enhance that and let them know that we believe in you and we want you to use your talents and your gifts. We realize that they’re not perfect, sometimes they make a lot of mistakes, like my wife mentioned, they may fail miserably during the week, but we want them to keep coming back. We try to keep them involved even though they’re not perfect.

Students went from listening to the word of God to taking part in the duties of the ministerial work because they were inspired by the leaders’ commitment and dedication to the ministry and to their relationship with God. As a result, they developed the necessary skills to equip them in the ministry and their future career paths. See Figure 2 for examples of leadership involvement of the students.

**Increased Academic and Social Self-Efficacy.** With student retention being one of the top issues that concerns higher education today, self-motivation has been found to be integral to students continuing to pursue their academic and personal goals and remaining at the institution (Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007). Bandura (1994) posits that "A strong sense of self-efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways" (p. 1). African American students who were highly involved in the ACTs campus ministry experienced increased convenience in their ability to execute the behavior and skills that are associated with being a good student. Others also benefitted by increase confidence in social situations. For Joe, it was not an easy walk in the park however, after leaving bible studies he adapted a new perspective on school. He expressed:
It [involvement in ACTS] really helped me to keep positive about myself, to stay positive, and to also grow with other students, and learning from other students and seeing what they go through and how they were able to achieve certain goals in their lives, it really gave me the determination to not give up. My classes, they actually got slightly better. My grades and how I viewed my assignments and how I viewed my homework and everything. I began to look at it much better. Like I said, it was less likely for me to give up, to have a negative mindset in school. I had a positive mindset, though it was challenging. The advice that was given at the bible studies for example, pastor would preach on being slothful and the bad things that can come from procrastination and those different kinds of subject areas. They gave me confirmation and energized me to not be lazy. I was less likely to give up as I was involved with leadership at ACTS.

James became more apt to participate in class discussions and developed meaningful relationships with his professors. This opened the opportunity for him to get into graduate school with a scholarship awarded to him from the department in which he decided to pursue his master’s degree. He shared:

In classrooms, I would participate more, I would be quick to answer questions if I knew the answer, not to be a know it all, but because I didn’t care what others thought. I wanted to, you know, try to answer them. I really built relationships with a lot of the professors and I talked with them. I really enjoyed my professors that I had and a lot of the professors aren’t even in the grad department, but I had such a good experience with the professors and just talking with them, and I think that helped put my name out there so I kept communication with a lot of teachers
even when I was pursuing my masters and even while I was trying to get into the program and to get it funded. When I made that change in major and when I decided to be a part of the cultivating minister program that semester I had a 4.0 and I was on the dean’s list and that was the first time I ever had straight A’s and made the dean’s list.

Carter gained more discipline, he stated, “discipline actually showed me that if I prioritized my time correctly, I could actually achieve more than most people who are simply talented because I am consistent and I work hard.” For Kelly, it helped her to stay grounded in her studies. She stated that, "it just kind of made me more grounded."

Despite academic challenges, students were able to conquer them by having the support needed along the way.

Lack of confidence is very common among students. If they do not believe in themselves, then it is more difficult to accomplish their desired goals (Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007). During the interview, Joe expressed how his confidence increased as he got more involved in the ministry and learned more about himself. He asserted:

I think it gave me sense of inner confidence in myself. I lacked a lot of confidence in myself even before being involved in ACTS. I would always question what I was good at. It gave me a sense of identity.

Like Joe, James initially lacked confidence in himself:

I was just not confident in myself. I don’t think I was confident in myself because I cared too much about how other people viewed me or at least how I perceived them viewing me. I think that it all starts back to the experience that I had in ministry by just being bold, and willing to find that confidence in who I was, I
was able to establish that consistently in myself. I believe that took me to a whole
other level in confidence.

The advisors’ reaction to why they believed students become more engaged in the
ministry supported this by saying:

I think what causes them to go deeper into ACTS and become more involved, and
more connected and committed is that we do encourage them to be the best that
they can be and by being the best that they can be they feel better about
themselves and they find out that you know man, going out and getting drunk and
partying and things like that, they may say “I feel so horrible about myself, but
when I come to church and I’m able to make a positive impact in worship to help
others as well.” They then begin to develop themselves as leaders and as good
citizens; we constantly promote good citizenship and being women and men of
their word as well.

In addition to this, the advisors shared two examples of student’s who were highly
involved in their ministry and how their Academic/self-efficacy was impacted as a result
of the leaders believing in them:

Well, there is a young man that have went through our ministry that was actually
going to be kicked out of school because his GPA was so low, less than 1.0. He
was pretty much living out of his car and just destitute and completely away from
God, away from his family, relationships just broken all the way around in his
life. He was backslidden on God, angry, just didn’t trust anybody, and he came in
and we began to love on him. We began to tell him that he could be somebody,
and we began to pour into him, and began to encourage him to seek the Lord and
to be on the altar, and to allow the presence of Jesus to change his life. He just graduated with over a 3.0 average GPA, and he is going for his master’s degree and he is now a minister of the gospel, he is married, and a teacher.

Another student who was highly involved in their ministry had a similar experience:

One young lady in particular was afraid of her own shadow and suffered severe anxiety. Public speaking was one of her greatest fears. We also saw so much potential in her and she became a tremendous leader in ACTS. She actually served for several years on our executive board and we trained her in leadership and she became an ordained minister of the gospel and serves as an assistant pastor to our ministry.

Having confidence helped both Joe and James to excel in areas they would have never imagined they could excel in. They had support and encouragement from the leaders in the ministry who believed in them. This inspired them to do better in their academic life, as well as, empowered them and gave them opportunities to increase their social self-efficacy. As noted by Strayhorn (2010), African American males make up less than 5% of all undergraduates in the United states due to the non-supportive academic climate, and racial stereotypes about black men. However, both James and Joe had a more positive experience which helped them to thrive academically and socially. This was all because of the impact the campus ministry leaders made on their lives. The investment in the students produced a greater outcome.

Vocational Identity Development. Holland, Dager, and Power (1980) defined vocational identity as “a clear and stable picture of one’s goals, interests, personality and talents.” (p.47). Evidence that ACTS helped students with their vocational identity
emerged when some participants shared that as they got more involved in the ministry, they started to find out what they were good at, and even changed their majors to something they would enjoy. James started off as a computer science major, and eventually switched to communications studies with an emphasis in mass communication. He stated:

So, video and things like that, which I enjoy, I do a lot of that with the campus ministry with videos prior to switching my major. I found my passion as a result as the major. Right now, I am just using this as a time to just build on my skills, get my education, and just to get my mind clear, and prepare me for what God has in store for me for the future.

Joe learned about his personality and changed his career path as well:

As far as my career, I have also learned, because of the different doors that have opened up to me, even like I said, learning about my personality in the ministry, learning what I am good at, learning my strengths, my weaknesses, what I like to do career wise, my career has changed. Now, I have learned that I do want to work in the health care field now. When I first came to Eastern, I wanted to be an engineer, but then I saw the chemistry and math classes, then I changed my mind. Then I changed my major to kinesiology. I always wanted to be a PE teacher, but then once I got involved in ACTS, and started growing. I really started to develop spiritually and even learned that I wanted to be an ordained minister, which I am an ordained minister now. I feel the call on my life to serve as a pastor in the future, as a pastor over a campus ministry, alongside with my wife. Both the leaders in ACTS Campus Ministry helped me out with that. They have given me
guidance, they have counselled me, and helped me out a lot in my career goals; even writing my goals out.

Carter was unsure about his choice of major and eventually changed it. He also credited his change in major to the help of the ACTS advisors:

When I first attended the ministry I was in education, physical education, which was what I wanted to go into as far as my career goals, but after a few semesters of being at Eastern and the ministry, I noticed that my career goals had shifted for the simple fact that, that wasn’t were God wanted me. It was that when I transferred into organizational and professional development. I did two semesters there to finish up with my bachelors and then I went back in that field of study and got my masters two years in organizational and professional development. I think (ACTS Advisor). Yeah, she definitely encouraged me to get into it, and then I didn’t really have any help from my advisors. They kept trying to get me to stay into education and spending money on the basic skills test that I couldn’t pass. So they were no help, so yeah it was definitely (ACTS advisor). Yep. That was it, and after doing research myself, I found that was something I liked. I don’t see myself working, I see myself doing full time ministry, if you would consider that a career. That’s what I will do, because even if I master everything that I am doing now, that wouldn’t satisfy me. Even if I master being a president, I would still do fulltime ministry.

Although the ministry is not a career path; it is considered a calling from God. The participants began to consider a career path they would enjoy and factored their
spirituality into it. By being highly involved in ministry, the students further developed their vocational identity.

Everything that was mentioned by the participants about the impact campus ministry had on their college experience supports the goal and desire of the campus ministry advisors. Wanda Kay Robinson expressed this by saying:

Well, campus ministry for me is very important because it's been the funnest part of ministry that I’ve ever done. My husband and I have been in ministry for over 30 years and we pastored two different churches, we did evangelistic work, some oversees, and when we came to start a campus ministry; I felt like for the first time in all these years that I was truly making a difference in people’s lives and changing lives on a daily basis. I see students change their lives completely around as a result of this campus ministry, that’s why I love it so much.

Dr. Andrew Robinson added:

When we got connected with campus ministry, we got connected with young people who are trying to find their way and from our experience, there have been times that we have made mistakes and we had to learn the hard way because we didn’t have anyone mentoring us or guiding us. So, one of the things that we have been able to do is be able to help young people avoid some of those mistakes and maximize their future going forward. So, campus ministry to me, in addition to what (my wife) mentioned about changing lives, it is being able to know that you are making a positive impact and what you do matters. It gives us a good feeling to know that whatever we are doing is making a positive impact and it matters to people.
Making a positive impact on the lives of young people is something that both Doc and Mable have found to be fulfilling. The young people who attend their campus ministry know that they care about them because they want them to be better as a result of the inspiration they bring to their lives.

**Deeper Involvement in the Ministry**

Participants were asked to explain what motivated them to join the cultivating ministers program, simultaneously while pursuing their educational endeavors. In January 2013, the Robinsons began training young men and women who felt the call to preach. The program soon developed into the Christ Ministries School of Divinity, Cultivating Ministers Program. It is a 2-year ministerial training program geared towards teaching students more in depth about the bible and work of the ministry. The students met weekly after the regular Sunday services for class. Some core courses include pulpit ministry, pastoral counseling, administrative leadership, Pentecostal theology, and ministerial ethics. The first nine students, all African American, six men, and three women, graduated from the program on August 23, 2015, earning their Master of Divinity degrees and receiving ordination into the ministry. For these students, education was the initial motivation for attending the university, and once they got involved in ACTS Campus Ministry and began to develop their spiritual relationship with God, they soon felt the call to the ministry (Young, 2017). As they observed the leaders serve the students to such a great capacity, it instilled a passion within them as well. One of the requirements was to attend a weekly class on Sundays after church to learn more about the word of God, ministerial etiquette, and other administrative tasks. Along with that they had weekly assignments, daily memorizing of scriptures, and learned a great deal of
discipline, because all assignments were due at 5pm on Fridays. The main themes for this question were a *Desire for Spiritual Growth*, *Inspired to Serve to Help Others*, and the *Benefits to the Ministry*.

**Desire for Spiritual Growth.** Spiritual growth is measured by how the individual matures as a result of applying the scripture to their lives. It is evident by the changes the students see in their individual lives by taking heed to the wisdom from their leaders, bible studies, and their personal devotions to God. When asked why they would pursue another master’s degree while already being committed to their educational endeavors, James and Joe eluded to how it would help them to grow spiritually. James shared:

I wanted to grow in my spiritual walk with God. I wanted to get close to Jesus, and I do believe that as I result, it led me to that purpose. So, I would say that, it felt like it was something that God wanted me to do, so I did it.

Joe's reason was similar:

My overall desire was that I wanted to seek God and love God more; you know and deepen my relationship with him. I think that was the primary motivator.

Both James and Joe were motivated by their sincere desire to grow spiritually.

This corresponded well with the advisor’s vision:

The training that we give them is to have that love for people. We go over with them administrative skills, how to plan events, event planning and different things. They are assigned leadership positions in our ministry to oversee and things. Our school of divinity for our ministers is not for the faint of heart because it is not an easy program and we don’t let them by easy, because we cause them to realize the gravity of being a minister of the gospel.
**Inspired to Serve.** Another motivation for the student’s deep involvement in the ministry was because they began to feel an urgency to help others. This inspired them to continue through the program while pursuing their academic endeavors. James stated:

I was starting to really see a lot of negativity in this world and a lot of like bad things that were happening to people that I cared about the most back in my hometown. I just felt like a lot of people there were given up on, and I really felt that God spoke to me and was showing me the purpose that he had for me and what he wanted me to do in life. I feel that God really illuminated what he wanted and thankfully with this ministry which I was involved so heavy with at the time.

Joe also began to find a greater purpose in serving:

Because of that drive to want to be a future leader or to be a future impact on people’s lives, it was worth the while to make the decision. I really found myself having a love for people and having an impact on people, and wanting to help them out, even to help them out spiritually to get them to strengthen their relationship with God and to pray for people and to really want to help people out.

The advisor emphasized why these students continue to become immersed in the ministry to serve:

What drives them is that call of God. When you have a genuine call of God in your spirit to be minister of the gospel, nothing in this world can satisfy you and fulfill your life until you are operating in that calling. That’s what it is. The ministry is not for everyone, it is not just a career path, it shouldn’t be looked at in that way, and it’s a calling.
The students who were involved in the Cultivating Ministers Program were inspired to make a difference in the lives of others due to their involvement in the ministry. Though, the ministry is not the same as their career, they find a greater sense of fulfilment by answering the call that God has on their life.

**Beneficial to Future Ministry.** Carter and Randy also looked at the cultivating minister’s program a way to inspire others and that the degree was an additional perk to their future work in the ministry. For Carter:

Cultivating ministers was a degree, but it was something I was doing anyway, so it was an additional perk for me. It really didn’t come as nothing too challenging or that I couldn’t do, it was already stuff that I was doing, that was just a benefit.

Randy did not look at it as a difficulty either, but a way to enhance his ministry. He added, “I looked at it as a privilege, I came here for one masters and leaving with two, only paying for one.” The main motivations of why students continued to become involved in ministry is because of their commitment to spiritual growth, their desire to live a life to serve others, and the benefits that it can be to their ministry.

**Summary**

Involvement campus ministry played an important role in the college experiences of the African American students in this case study. Whether they were raised in church, saw spiritual practices in the home or not, the encounter with ACTS campus ministry inspired them to pursue a relationship with God, become more invested in their academic endeavors, and helped to shape their career goals outside of the ministry. Not only did they excel in their social and academic life, but they formed meaningful relationships with the leaders of the campus ministry as well who become their family. Their high
involvement in the ministry propelled them to go deeper into the work of the ministry by enrolling in the Cultivating Ministers Training program to become ordained ministers of the gospel. Though the ministry program was no easy endeavor, with the help of their leaders and encouragement from their peers in the campus ministry, they persisted through while also aspiring to graduate from the institution.
Chapter V

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the impact of the ministry on students’ achievement; more specifically it sought to answer the research questions: How do African American students get involved in campus ministry? Why do African American students at a Predominately White Institution become involved in campus ministry? Why do African Americans become highly involved in campus ministry? What impact, if any, does high involvement in the campus ministry have on the achievement of African American students at a Predominately White institution? Triangulation was achieved by obtaining data from individuals who were highly engaged in the ministry, as well as ministry leaders, and ministry artifacts. These chapter discusses the findings, presents implications to college student affairs, limitations and recommendations.

Discussion

This study sought to understand the role of spiritual involvement in the African American student’s college experience at a PWI. Specifically, what impact does high involvement in campus ministry have on the African American students’ college experience? Achievement? Several important findings were revealed: Highly involved peers in the ministry played a major role in African American students getting involved. African American students remain involved with campus ministry because it provides them with a sense of belonging and a family atmosphere. Further, they become highly involved because they are inspired to make an impact on the lives of others. As a result of their deep involvement in the ministry, African American students begin to aspire to
serve in ministry and desire to make a huge impact on society. Lastly, the findings revealed that high involvement in campus ministry have largely positive impacts on African American students’ achievement.

I would like to highlight three key insights that were integral to this study; spirituality is important to developing the whole student, involvement in campus ministry and spiritual matters play a significant role in helping African Students to have a sense of belonging at PWI’s, and as a result of being involved in campus ministry, the self and academic efficacy African American students increased.

The mission statement of all colleges and universities includes helping its student’s to become successful in all facets of their life. In 1949, the American Council on Education included in its publication the goal to meet the physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs of its student’s (Schmalzbauer, 2013). However, due to the secularization of higher education the spiritual growth has often been neglected. In this study, the findings reveal that as the spiritual needs of the students were addressed, they did well in other areas such as academics, socially and in the classroom. We also see that the students’ career path was inspired in part due to their involvement in spiritual matters. Joe elaborated on this by saying, “I learned that I am going to be an individual who helps other people reach their goals and aspirations and serve as a person who can really help out other people”. Spirituality is important in the lives of African American students, spirituality is not just a religious organization for African Americans, but it is a part of their lifestyle (Mattis & Jagers, 2001). While the intellectual growth is the main reason why students decided to enroll in a college or
university; we find that spirituality played a significant role in helping to retain African American students at a PWI.

While focusing on the spiritual needs of these students, we also find that their involvement in the campus ministry helped to create a sense of belonging while getting their education at a PWI. The campus ministry became a place that reminded them of home; they even called their peers their “brothers and sisters”, and the leaders were regarded as parents to them. One of the participants attested to this by saying, “We call each other sisters and brothers at ACTS; we are a body in Christ.” Having a place where they sensed a family atmosphere was a common factor among the participant’s response to why they continued to become involved in ACTS Campus Ministry. This relates to a study done on African American college students, which found that African American students who are engaged in extra-curricular activities feel more involved in their campus community (Willis, 2010).

ACTS campus ministry impacted African American student’s achievement by increasing their academic and social-efficacy, helping them develop leadership skills and clarify their vocational goals. Bandura (1977), described four sources through which an individual’s self-efficacy can be impacted: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Of the four sources, ACTS campus ministry impacted students’ confidence by verbal persuasion through the words of affirmation provided not only by its leaders but by its members to one another. This undoubtedly played a central role in increasing their self-efficacy. Furthermore, vicarious experiences was illustrated when students saw examples from the leaders. This is supported by what the advisors shared, “We just try in some way to enhance that and let
them know that we believe in you and we want you to use your talents and your gifts”.

This was aligned with the findings of Bennett, Chance, and Williams-Johnson (2013) who found that motivation and academic achievement of African American males were greatly impacted by their religious commitments while in college. Hall and Rowan (2001) in their research on African American males in higher education found that African American males lag far behind in terms of completing their post-secondary degree due to lack of academic preparation and alienation in institutions of higher education. However, the current study revealed that students who were highly involved in campus ministry continued to pursue their educational endeavors, with many moving on to pursue a graduate degree. Another study found that many African American students report fairly negative relationships with faculty member and peers both outside and inside the classroom (Davis, 1994). This was different for the students who were highly involved in ACTS, who were engaged in and outside of the classroom. High involvement in ACTS also helped with students’ vocational identity development defined as, “a clear and stable picture of one’s goals, interests, personality and talents” (Holland, Dager, & Power, 1980, p.47). James Marcia’s concept of identity achievement helps to explain the student’s vocational identity development while in college and while being involved in a campus ministry. Prior to being involved in the ministry, the students chose their majors based on what they saw growing up, what their parents had in mind for them, and what seemed comfortable to them. They would be in what James Marcia would call, “identity foreclosure” or “identity diffusion” by not deciding to make a commitment (Davey, 2014). However, after being more involved in the ministry and feeling more
confident as a leader, these students began to commit to a career based on what is important to them.

-Spirituality played a significant role in the college experience of these African American students. The more the students got involved in the ministry, the more spiritual they grew in their relationship with a higher power. This is similar to a study conducted on spirituality and college students, they found that “college students involved in spiritual communities and spiritual practices are associated cross-culturally with higher levels of faith, hope, and love (Delaney & Miller, 2013, p. 129). They then began to include spirituality into other areas of their lives such as choosing an academic major, what career path to pursue, relationships, and even who they chose to hang out with. This demonstrates what Williams James suggested in his theory of spiritual development in stage four; integration of spiritual memories and experiences into a spiritual identity with concomitant changes in behavior (Poll & Smith, 2003). Prior to their involvement in ACTS campus ministry, the students were at stage one, pre-awareness of spiritual identity; they did not consider themselves spiritual and did not yet have a spiritual encounter. They based their relationship with God off what they saw their parents do at home. Not all the participants saw an example of spirituality in the home, but after their involvement in ACTS, each of them started to develop their personal relationship with God. After their involvement in the ministry, they were at stage four, integration of spiritual memories and experiences into a spiritual identity with concomitant changes in behavior. The students began to implement their spirituality into their everyday life through reading their bible daily, praying, faithfully attending bible study and Sunday church services, and actively practicing their faith.
Students who were highly involved in the campus ministry recruited other African American students into the ministry. As was the case of most of the participants in this study, a friendship developed, and students felt safe to take that first step. The positive experience from the first encounter led to a continued engagement, as the campus ministry became like family. This is similar Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007) who found that students who are more integrated with faculty, academics, and social life tend to have a higher sense of belonging. As noted by one of the participants, “It ended up being a place where I could go to church and consider a church home and family”.

ACTS campus ministry, a Registered Student Organization (RSO) filled the role of a family to the students. In addition to this, the students were able to express themselves in an environment that resembled a family. This relates to what Donahoo and Caffey (2010) found on how the church environment provides a safe space for African American students to express themselves while being spiritually and mentally uplifted. Having a place where they sense a family atmosphere was a common factor among the participant’s response to why they continued to become involved in ACTS Campus Ministry. This relates to a study done on African American college students, which found that African American students who are engaged in extra-curricular activities feel more involved in their campus community (Willis, 2010). This supports the mission and purpose stated by the ministry advisors concerning why started ACTS campus ministry: our #1 purpose for that as well ever since we became Christians, especially the call to ministry over 30 years ago, is that we have two main purposes, #1 is to rescue souls, to lead people to true salvation and a genuine experience with Jesus Christ and the second
purpose is to help them develop into spiritual maturity where they can find their divine purpose and be the person that God wants them to be.

African Americans who are highly involved in campus ministry found greater purpose wanted to make an impact on the world around them as a result of their high involvement in the ministry. Joe elaborated on this by saying, “I learned that I am going to be an individual who helps other people reach their goals and aspirations and serve as a person who can really help out other people”. In relation to Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 1994), when a person reaches self-actualization they are comfortable with who they are; and they are more focused on becoming a better person who can contribute to society in a positive way (Poston, 2009; Maslow, 1994). Social relationships have been known to make a huge impact college students’ religiousness (Delaney & Miller, 2013). These African American students’ experiences in the ministry encouraged them to want to make their mark in society by serving as ministers and empowering other young people as they have been inspired by the leaders.

ACTS campus ministry impacted African American student’s achievement by increasing their academic and social-efficacy, helping them develop leadership skills and clarify their vocational goals. Bandura (1977), described four sources through which an individual’s self-efficacy can be impacted: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Of the four sources, ACTS campus ministry impacted students’ confidence by verbal persuasion through the words of affirmation provided not only by its leaders but by its members to one another. This undoubtedly played a central role in increasing their self-efficacy. Furthermore, vicarious experiences was illustrated when students saw examples from the leaders. This is
supported by what the advisors shared, “We just try in some way to enhance that and let them know that we believe in you and we want you to use your talents and your gifts”.

This was aligned with the findings of Bennett, Chance, and Williams-Johnson (2013) who found that motivation and academic achievement of African American males were greatly impacted by their religious commitments while in college. Hall and Rowan (2001) in their research on African American males in higher education found that African American males lag far behind in terms of completing their post-secondary degree due to lack of academic preparation and alienation in institutions of higher education. However, the current study revealed that students who were highly involved in campus ministry, continued to pursue their educational endeavors, with many moving on to pursue a graduate degree. Another study found that many African American students report fairly negative relationships with faculty member and peers both outside and inside the classroom (Davis, 1994). This was different for the students who were highly involved in ACTS, who were engaged in and outside of the classroom. High involvement in ACTS also helped with students’ vocational identity development defined as, “a clear and stable picture of one’s goals, interests, personality and talents” (Holland, Dager, & Power, 1980, p.47). James Marcia’s concept of identity achievement helps to explain the student’s vocational identity development while in college and while being involved in a campus ministry. Prior to being involved in the ministry, the students chose their majors based on what they saw growing up, what their parents had in mind for them, and what seemed comfortable to them. They would be in what James Marcia would call, “identity foreclosure” or “identity diffusion” by not deciding to make a commitment (Davey, 2014). However, after being more involved in the ministry, and feeling more
confident as a leader, these students began to commit to a career based on what is important to them.

Though these findings only relate to a small sample of African American students, it can be helpful to administrators who are trying to implement new efforts to help retain African American students at predominately White institutions. With retention of minority students being a concern for many colleges and universities (Carter, 2006), the findings presented in this case study provide important information about how to serve these students. This supports what Holland (2014) found; as the spiritual lives of African American students are fostered and enriched while in college, it results in many positive outcomes for them intellectually, spiritually and academically. Similar to what Harley and Hunn (2014) found in an earlier study about African American youth who lived in an urban environment, spirituality is the constant theme that helped youth to survive just as it helps African American college students survive in college.

**Implications**

There are implications for student affairs professionals, faculty, staff, and administration and campus ministries associated with this study. Student affairs professionals have constant interaction with students through their involvement in on campus organizations to accommodating them while living in the residence halls. Faculty, staff, and administration also have direct contact with students through one on one office hours, in the classroom setting and daily interactions from dining halls to the business office. Lastly, campus ministries serve as a support to those students who are involved in their ministries. Campus ministries also work with student affairs
professionals and faculty, staff, and administration to fulfill the overall mission of the institution.

Student Affairs Professionals. The findings of this study reveal that spirituality is an important aspect of a student’s life, especially for African American students who often times experience low-self efficacy. Some students are more in tune with their spirituality than others. However, students whose spirituality impact their everyday life need support from student affairs professionals. Student affairs professionals can better assist these students by becoming more aware of the role that campus ministry has on its students’ lives and listening to their experiences. Although student affairs professionals may not identify themselves as a spiritual person, they can become familiar with the resources that are on campus to help students, and these should have a prominent place in recruiting materials, admission days, etc. right along with the other services that the university provide with regards to student involvement. In addition, student affairs professionals can welcome the perspective of those (highly involved in campus ministry) students where it can be useful and be willing to allow them to be transparent in one on one meetings about their spirituality. This is an area that has been merely explored by student affairs professionals. Another way they can better support these students is to understand the role that their faith and spirituality plays in their life and be willing to share this with the students whom they advise. Students need to know that they are being understood and can express that to the student affairs professionals. If they cannot help, then they can point them to the respective campus ministries that can help as they grow in their spiritual development. Another suggestion for student affairs professionals is to hire
staff members in the residence halls that are spiritual to serve as a role model to those with spiritual needs as well as serve as an advocate.

**Faculty, Staff, and Administration.** Students have many interactions with faculty, staff and administration. As emphasized in Tinto’s theory of student departure, “students depart higher education without earning a degree because of the nature and quality of their interactions with the college or university” (Long 2012, p. 52). They serve as role models to the students without even knowing. Faculty can become more sensitive to the needs of their students by educating themselves on each of their students. They can also educate themselves on the different religions and bring up discussions in class and be respectful of those students religious or spiritual affiliation. Astin’s theory of student involvement highlighted a way that student faculty can play a role in helping students stay engaged by encouraging them to make academic and social activities relatable to student’s personal lives. (Long, 2012). Then the students will value that knowledge more and be willing to invest more time in that endeavor. Staff and administration serve as sounding boards to students because students may be more prone to speak to them about personal areas of their lives. They can accommodate the students by allowing them to have safe spaces on campus to practice their religious activities.

**Campus Ministries.** Campus Ministries have a dual role on college campuses. They support the mission and value of the institution and provide spiritual encouragement to students, faculty, staff, and administration on campus. Campus ministries can seek ways to collaborate with student affairs professionals to put on programs to educate students on ways to cope with issues. This can also include the Health Services Office, the Career Services Office and other appropriate offices. If students notice that the
campus ministries and campus staff are working together, they may be more likely to become more committed to the university. Campus ministry can also raise awareness of the struggles of their students to student affairs professionals so they can be proactive about how they go about serving the student in their residence halls or organizations. Campus ministries can also actively seek ways to partner with admissions to see how they can assist with orientation for students who want to get involved with religious or spiritual organizations. For example, packets can be given out to students who have an interest in campus ministries during orientation at the university.

Limitations

As with any research study, some limitations have been identified that may limit the trustworthiness of the study. First, the small purposive sample means that the findings may not be transferable to all campus ministries at the institution studied or at other institutions. However, the use of triangulation techniques, helped to increase transferability. Therefore, the reader is cautioned about applicability of the findings outside of a setting that does not closely resemble to case study. A second limitation was researcher bias. Krefting (1991) states that “a major threat to the truth value of a qualitative study lies close in the closeness of the relationship between the investigator and the informants that can develop during prolonged contact required to establish credibility” (p. 218). The researcher focused intently on participants’ experiences and utilized bracketing techniques to arrive at meaningful data (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013).

Recommendations for Future Research

If this study was to be conducted again, one recommendation would be to use more objective measures, a quantitative study, on the impact of campus ministry
involvement on African American students’ spirituality and achievement at a Predominately White Institution who are deeply involved in the ministry. This study can include all campus ministry involvement and not a single case study on one specific campus ministry. This would yield a larger sample size and that would increase the generalizability of the sample to the population. Another recommendation would be to conduct a comparison study to understand difference in achievement of African American students who are not involved in campus ministry than for those who are deeply involved in campus ministry at a Predominately White Institution. This study would be a more in depth study and would seek to understand if there is a difference in these students’ college experience based on their involvement in campus ministry. On the other hand, another recommendation for future research on this topic would be to conduct a study on looking at campus ministry involvement impact on students’ achievement and spirituality through the lens of student affairs professionals, faculty, and staff. The study can then be compared to the research findings that were revealed from this study to see if they are similar. More work still needs to be done to bring awareness of the impact of campus ministry involvement on college campuses today, and these future exploration recommendations can enhance that process.

Conclusion

This study sought to understand the role of spirituality in the college experience and achievement of African American students who were highly involved in campus ministry. This was inspired because of the researchers’ intimate role in campus ministry while simultaneously undertaking a ministerial program to become an ordained minister. African American college students who are highly involved in campus ministry can
experience spiritual growth, leadership development, family support, and vocational identity development. It is strongly supported by literature that spirituality and religion plays a central role in the lives of African American students. When student’s grow spiritually, they grow in other areas in their life as well; such as socially and academically. As a result of their increased self-efficacy by having the support and encouragement the campus ministry leaders, these students feel better about themselves and want to make a positive impact on the world around them. Campus ministry supports the mission statement of student affairs professional in their efforts to help develop the “whole student”. The whole student consists of emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual growth. Though, the students have the support of their campus ministry leaders, it would be even more beneficial if they had the support of faculty, staff, and administration in order for them to be successful in their college experience. African American students need to know that they are valued and needed so they can feel a sense of belonging to the campus community. A strong sense of belonging encourages engagement in academic and social aspects of college student’s experience; as it was for African American students who were highly involved in campus ministry.
References


drug use among African American women from one southern state. *Substance Use & Misuse,*(48), 1246-1257.


APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Thank the Interviewee for being willing to participate in the study, and make any adjustments so that they feel as comfortable as possible. Briefly explain the purpose and significance of the study. Give the interviewee the informed consent form and clarify any questions they may have. Re-assure the interviewee that their participation is voluntary and no penalty will be held against them if they choose not to continue on with the study and they are free to stop at any time. Explain what a pseudonym is and what it is it used for. Inform the Participant that they can choose a pseudonym that will be used in the data analysis section. Explain confidentiality and how I will make sure that the information they share is discarded after the study. Inform them that the study will be recorded, then ask for consent to record. Ask the interviewee if they have any questions.

1. Begin recording video
2. Begin asking interview questions

Interview Questions

1. Describe your journey? How did you get involved in ACTS campus ministry?
2. How did your involvement impact you as a person? As a student? Other areas of your college experience?
3. What other groups or organizations were you apart of while being involvement in ACTS campus ministry? How did your involvement in ACTS impact your participation in other groups of involvement?
4. What motivated you to stay involved in ACTS? What factors contributed to your continual participation?
5. Is spirituality important to your family or upbringing? If so, in what ways?

6. What was your family’s response to your involvement in ACTS?

7. Why did you choose to attend Eastern Illinois University for College?

8. What struggles or challenges did you face, if any, while attending a white public university?

9. Have you ever thought of leaving EIU? If so, why? What impacted your decision to stay?

10. What were your goals or career aspirations prior to your involvement in ACTS?

   Did those goals and career aspirations remain the same or change?

11. What did you take away from your experience in the cultivating ministers program that can contribute to your educational attainment?

12. What differences do you notice about yourself as a result of being part of the cultivating ministers program?
APPENDIX B

Consent to Participate in Research

Campus Ministry Involvement and Spirituality Impact on African American Students Achievement at a Predominately White Institution

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Tania L. Ward under the faculty supervision of Dr. Catherine Polydore for the department of Counseling and Student Development at Eastern Illinois University. You have been chosen to be part of this study because of your high involvement in the ACTS Campus Ministry while obtaining your educational degree. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to be interviewed about your experience and the impact it had on your college experience and achievement. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between spirituality and achievement among African American college students who were deeply involved in ministry; why they become involved, how they become involved, and how their involvement impacts their educational achievement. This will be achieved through a case study of the Apostolic Christians in Today’s Society (ACTS) campus ministry.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1. Participate in a 30-45 minutes interview sharing your experience of being involved in ACTS Campus Ministry. You will be asked to reflect on your experiences while in college and share the impact your involvement in ministry had on your achievement and decision to remain at the university.
2. The interview will be video-taped for the researcher’s use. You will be asked to choose to pseudonym for the purpose of the data instead of your name to protect your identity.

POTENTIAL RISK AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no potential risks or discomfort associated with your participation in this study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

There are no direct benefits to you for your participation in this study, except knowing that you contributed to the body of knowledge concerning the topic of this research.
Data from this research will be beneficial to faculty, staff and administrators at institutions, especially predominately White institutions, as they strategize ways to be more effective at meeting the needs of the diverse population, especially African students who are involved in ministry or consider spirituality to play an important role in their life experiences. This study will be a tool to raise awareness that spirituality and campus ministry can impact the lives of African students and provide feedback from those who were highly involved.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of storing all data on the researcher’s personal lab top in which no one else will have the password, except the researcher.

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed for data purposes. Once three years have passed, the interviews, data, and consent will be deleted. Videos will not be used for other educational purposes.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS
If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Principal Investigator
Tania L. Ward
(217) 220-7200
tward2@eiu.edu

Faculty Sponsor
Catherine Polydore, PhD
(217) 581-7237
cpolydore@eiu.edu

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS
If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:
You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant Date