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Student Engagement: A Comparative Analysis Of Traditional And Nontradional Students Attending Historically Black Colleges And Universities

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Abstract*: This study purpose was to offer a perspective on Student Engagement: A Comparative Analysis of Nontraditional and Traditional Students Attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities. This study was designed utilizing secondary data from the National Survey of Student Engagement for the 2014 academic year. In comparing traditional and non-traditional undergraduate students, both descriptive and t-test analyses were utilized to explain the differences between nontraditional and traditional students' levels of engagement while attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities.*

Keywords*: Non-Traditional, Traditional, National Survey of Student Engagement, and Student Development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

During the past 30 years, nontraditional student population has increased substantially (Isserlis, 2008; LaNasa, Cabrera, &Trangsrud, 2009). Kasworm (2008) estimated that 53.7% of the current college population is comprised of 22 to 24 years old, adults who have delayed enrollment, and nontraditional students 25 and older. This is in comparison to 46.3 % of 18 to 21year old traditional students (Kena et al., 2015; Keller 2001). Not only are the numbers growing, but adult learners matriculating on college campuses are a growing concern for administrators (Fincher, 2010; Kazis, 2007). Research by Fincher (2010) expound on management of adult learners is critical in higher education. The increased enrollment of nontraditional students on college and university campuses has changed the composition of these institutions considerably (Austin & McDermott, 2003; Kasworm, 2008). Institutions of higher education are both aware of and challenged by the diverse and multiple needs of nontraditional students; one reason for this problem may be that they do not have sufficient documentation of how these students manage their lives while pursuing formal education (Kuh, 2009; Lundberg, 2007).

A second statement of the problem is the lack of empirical information on the nontraditional student attending HBCUs (Kuh, 2009). Data culled through the National Survey of Student Engagement by Kuh (2009) show that there is limited participation by HBCUs with NSSE. Therefore there is limited knowledge of nontraditional students attending these institutions. This represents a gap in the literature because the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) offers an opportunity for HBCUs to learn about their adult learners (Aud et al., 2012).

It is imperative that institutions of higher education including HBCUs understand the engagement practices of the nontraditional students on their college campuses (Kuh, 2009). Theory of Student Involvement by Astin (1984) posits that, "An involved student is one who devotes considerable energy to academics, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations and activities, and interacts with the faculty" (p. 292). Astin defined involvement to mean the student's investment of "physical and psychological energy"-time and effort-in the academic enterprise, with the persistence becoming the by-product of student involvement (Astin, 1999; Davis & Murrell, 1993). Research by Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2005)corroborate the benefits of adult student involvement and outcomes: "Adult learners' involvement in high quality out of class experiences contributes to the learning, development, and satisfaction" (p. 4).

Student engagement requires a commitment from both the institution and the student to put forth an effort to promote involvement (Isserlis, 2008). In Bridges, Kuh and O'Day's (2001) study, research found that the extent and quality of engagement are dependent on the breadth and depth of participation put forth by faculty and students. Engagement is also dependent upon the motivation of the students to participate in and contribute to course related activities (Bridges, et al., 2001).

While students have a responsibility to be involved in campus activities, some of the reasons why they have not been as actively engaged as their counterparts have been examined in the literature (Astin, 1999; Buhr, 1997; Carnevale, Smith, &Strohl, 2010; Kasworm, 2008; Lerer& Talley, 2010 Wyatt, 2011). Available research indicates this nontraditional population is unique in several respects (Kasworm, 2008). Kasworm (2008) champion, first, it is transient; thus, nontraditional learners must learn how to adapt and identify valuable

resources and integrate that support quickly. Secondly, nontraditional students have a greater number of life roles than do traditional college students (Kasworm, 2008). Further, Kasworm added, that "higher education institutions need to acknowledge there may be interdependency between higher education, the community, and other environments, given that nontraditional students have a wider range of social networks and responsibilities.

Nontraditional students are classified as 25 years and older, live off-campus, commute to school, attend part-time, are employed off-campus (often full-time) (Wyatt, 2011; Kasworm 2008). These variables decrease the on-campus time of nontraditional students, and decrease the likelihood of positive involvements and interactions with peers, who share similar struggles and experiences (Astin, 1999; Carnevale, Smith, &Strohl, 2010). In short, nontraditional students attending evening and weekend classes have varied financial burdens, and the prevailing *business as usual* academic culture, has deterred colleges from arranging programs targeting those learners (Carnevale, et al. 2010).

There is a need for educational institutions to understand 'what' support systems and campus resources are necessary for nontraditional students to achieve their academic goals (Buhr, 1997; Lerer& Talley, 2010). To aid the nontraditional student who works primarily away from home, either full or part-time, and is attending college, either full or part-time, it is necessary to have an understanding of the "perceived role of engagement with regard to the achievement of academic success and completion of educational goals" (Buhr, 1997, p.10). Previous research (Kasworm, 2008; Lerer& Talley, 2010) indicates nontraditional students have greater external demands and pressures than traditional students. Therefore, support, and sources of support take on greater meaning for adult learners participating in higher education (Buhr, 1997).

As older students become a more prominent segment of the student population, colleges and universities must start to examined whether findings from years of research on traditional college students hold true for nontraditional students as well (Fincher, 2010; Wyatt, 2011). Donaldson and Townsend (2007) examine seven journal articles and the findings from their studies "reinforce earlier observations about the marginalization of adult students in the higher education literature as well as more recent observations that the majority of research about the impact of colleges focuses on the traditional age students" (p. 44).

Studies of the growing population of nontraditional students are scarce (Kasworm, 2008; Lerer& Talley, 2010). A major limitation of current research is the lack of analysis regarding how the involvement theory applies to nontraditional students (Fincher, 2010; Wyatt, 2011; LaNasa et al., 2009). Most studies have focused on students of traditional age, 18-22 years old (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). This is especially relevant with regard to "campus involvement" (Fincher, 2010; Wyatt, 2011).

It is time for institutions to focus beyond the norm of the "traditional" student and realize there are considerable differences with the counterpart, "nontraditional" student (LaNasa et al., 2009). More needs to be learned about populations, which are not considered "traditional" (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2011). Price and Baker 2012 study suggest more research on the nontraditional student that will provide data and informative information, which will assist in retention and graduation rates for this growing population on college/university campuses.

The landscape of the undergraduate college environment is changing drastically, in its increasing diversity. Adults are returning to the college classrooms in record numbers, and the American college student is no longer the traditional, 18 to 22 years of age (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2011; Fincher, 2010; Wyatt, 2011; Lerer& Talley, 2010). The issue of student engagement and its importance has become very popular within the higher education environment in the past decade (Snyder &Dillow, 2010). There has also been extensive research conducted over the years measuring the student engagement of college students across university campuses (Kuh, 2009). Once it was proven that it can be measured, researchers began conducting studies to determine if and what, positive or negative effects, student engagement has upon students, their educational and institutional experience, and academic performances (Astin, 1984, 1993; Kuh, 2009). The emerging trend within the study of student engagement is the level of student engagement and its impact on students' academic performance (Kuh, 2009; Fuller, Wilson, & Tobin, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to compare levels of engagement of nontraditional and traditional students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), utilizing the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) as the research instrument. In Kuh's (2006) study, it was found there is a lack of participation of HBCUs utilizing NSSE as a tool to assist administration with data on student engagement. This study was designed to address this gap in the literature and to learn how the benchmarks comparatively impact outcomes for nontraditional students.

Research Questions

1. Is there a significant difference between nontraditional students and the traditional students relative to the Level of Academic Challenge (LAC) Benchmark at HBCUs?
2. Is there a significant difference between nontraditional students and the traditional students relative to the Enriching Educational Experiences Benchmark (EEE) at HBCUs?
3. Is there a significant difference between nontraditional students and the traditional students relative to the Supportive Campus Environment (SCE) Benchmark at HBCUs?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bean and Metzner (1985) pointed out that the diversity among the nontraditional student population makes it difficult to create a profile of a typical nontraditional student. Bean and Metzner (1985) proposed, "Describing how nontraditional students differ from traditional students, is the best way to define nontraditional students" (p. 489). Additionally, the literature suggests that using the age cut-off of 25 is a useful way to define a population that shares several common characteristics different from those of traditional college students (Choy, 2002; Kasworm, 2008; Aud et al., 2012).

Kasworm (2008) classified the major differences between nontraditional students and traditional students as: (a) nontraditional students are predominately part-time students (69% of nontraditional students are part-time compared to 27% of traditional students); (b) nontraditional students are more likely than traditional students to work fulltime (approximately 50% of nontraditional students are working full-time and attending college part-time compared to 36% of younger students; (c) nontraditional students are more likely to fund their education through their own discretionary funds, loans, or government aid; (d) nontraditional students are more likely to have major family responsibilities (56% of nontraditional students are married compared to 6.5% of traditional students); (e)the majority of nontraditional students, 70-90%, are "re-entry" and have not been continuously enrolled since their first experience in college; (f) nontraditional students are usually not as prepared for the role of student, and are more likely to experience role conflict.

Kasworm (2008) also championed that nontraditional students are twice as likely as traditional students to leave college after their first year; nontraditional students are more likely to have higher college grade point average (G.P.A.) than their traditional counterparts; nontraditional students have unique pressures compared to those of traditional students. Many nontraditional students suffer from low self-esteem, self-worth and are very insecure about their academic abilities. Many nontraditional students believe that their study skills are rusty, and do not believe they will be able to compete with their younger counterparts coming directly from school (Morgan, 2001).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Student Engagement

Insight into engagement trends and student outcomes on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) campuses has not been sufficiently provided in mainstream higher education (Harper, Carini, Bridges& Hayek, 2003). Little is known about how HBCU students spend their time and the extent to which they are actively engaged in educationally purposeful activities (Harper et al., 2003). Because students of color often make up a much smaller percentage of students in studies, their experiences and needs are often lost and go undetected; however, these issues are becoming more urgent (Swail, 2003). Swail (2003) stated, "We must have institution-wide programs to improve the graduation rates of minority students through studies of student engagement" (p. 75).

Studies have been unable to produce consistent relationships between characteristics that students bring with them to their studies – such as gender, ethnicity or ability levels on entering higher education – and the extent to which they engage as students and those relationships which were found, were very weak at both HBCUs and PWIs (Trowler&Trowler, 2010). Quaye and Harper (2014) expounded, "We are persuaded by a large volume of empirical evidence that confirms that strategizing ways to increase the engagement of various student populations, especially those for whom engagement is known to be problematic, is a worthwhile endeavor" (p. 3). The gains and outcomes are too robust to leave to chance, and social justice is unlikely to ensue if some students come to enjoy the beneficial byproducts of engagement, while others do not (Quaye& Harper, 2014; Gasman, 2013).

Kim and Conrad (2006) championed, "the literature on Black college students suggests that those matriculating at HBCU campuses tend to have backgrounds different from those at Historically White Colleges and Universities" (p. 401). Black students are being underrepresented in 4-year colleges and universities. Underrepresentation continues in graduate and professional degree programs as well; which means these students are underrepresented in surveys (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Gasman (2009) research described HBCU student crisis as: First, these institutions serve a student population that is disproportionately low income. According to data from the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, in the 2006–07 academic year, 90 percent of HBCU students received

financial aid; engaging them in shared governance and appreciating their intellectual contributions and commitment to the institution. (p. 27) Walpool (2006) study states that college choice and undergraduate experience contribute to graduation persistence. Kuh (2009) implies that institutions of higher education including HBCUs need to understand the engagement practices of the nontraditional students on their college campuses to ensure these students persistence towards graduation.

National Survey of Student Engagement

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is used as a tool for measuring student perceptions of quality. It is intended to be instrumental in measuring perceptions of quality and improving the development of educationally purposeful activities that engage students, which in turn adds value to their undergraduate experience (Kuh, 2006). The term "student engagement," as measured by NSSE, developed out of years of research on student involvement coupled with the development of outcomes assessment through learning process indicators for both students and faculty (National Survey for Student Engagement, 2011).

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has become increasingly valuable to higher education institutions for measuring the quality of the undergraduate experience by asking first and fourth year college students about educationally purposeful activities considered essential to undergraduate development and learning (Kuh, 2009). NSSE is grounded in the educational practice that comes from the widely cited Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education, by Chickering and Gamson (1987); they are the following: "encourage student-faculty contact, encourage cooperation among students; encourage active learning; give prompt feedback; emphasize time on task; communicate high feedback; respect diverse talents and ways of learning" (Chickering&Gamson, 1987, p. 2). NSSE has five benchmarks: Level of Academic Challenge (LAC), Active and Collaborative Learning (ACL), Student-Faculty Interaction (SFI), Enriching Educational Experiences (EEE), Supportive Campus Environment (SCE) (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2011). When using these benchmarks it is expected that adults will score lower than the traditional students due to their focus on out-of-class or nonacademic experiences (Price & Baker, 2012; Chickering&Reisser, 1993). The researchers utilized three of the five benchmarks (Level of Academic Challenge, Level of Enriching Educational Experiences, and Level of Supportive Campus Environment) to evaluate each benchmark with both traditional and non-traditional undergraduate students.

Astin's Involvement Theory

Involvement theory, conducted by Alexander Astin, is rooted in a longitudinal study of college dropouts. It examines environmental factors that influence development. In this particular study, Astin sought to identify factors in the college environment that significantly affect the student's persistence in college. Astin (1984) defined student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic and social aspect of campus life" (p. 134). He also noted students must be actively engaged in their environment in order for student learning to take place (Astin, 1999). If this is to take place, student affairs professionals and faculty need to create opportunities for involvement to occur, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Astin's (1999) Theory of Involvement has five assumptions. First, involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects, which can be anything from the student experience as a whole to a specific activity, such as an intramural volleyball game or the amount of time spent studying on average per week versus time spent studying for a specific exam. Secondly, regardless of the object, involvement occurs along a continuum. Some students will invest more energy than other students in the same object, and any particular student will be more involved in certain activities than others. Thirdly, involvement can be assessed both quantitatively and qualitatively. A quantitative aspect of involvement would be the amount of time devoted to an activity, whereas a qualitative component would be the seriousness with which the object was approached, and the attention given to it. Fourthly, the amount of student learning and personal development is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program. This means that, the more students put into an activity, the more they will get out of it. Finally, the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement (Astin, 1999).

Kuh's Theory of Student Engagement

The origin of student engagement theory begins with the work of Astin (1984, 1985), Pace (1984), and Kuh and his colleagues (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). Although these theorists used different terminology to describe their definition of student engagement, their views were based on the same premise that students learn from what they do in college. Kuh's (2006) Theory of Student Engagement addresses two concepts. First, engagement is student driven, meaning students who invest time and energy into studying and taking part in other purposeful activities (e.g., student organizations, group study, conversations with faculty)

will achieve higher levels of engagement (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005; Chickering, 1987). Second, engagement is institution driven, meaning that colleges and universities also need to be purposeful in what they do, in order to maximize students' opportunities for engagement (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005).

The following are several areas where colleges and universities can be purposeful in their interaction with freshmen: (a) recruiting and retaining students (enrollment management); (b) assessing freshmen student outcomes; (c) challenging and supporting freshmen, both inside and outside the classroom; (d) encouraging expectations and performance requirements for faculty and staff; (e) creating a campus culture that fosters student success; (f) creating services for underrepresented minorities; (g) integrating diversity into the campus climate; (h) building a foundation for student success; (i) advocating for freshmen; (j) developing collaborative partnerships between academic and student affairs; (k) using and understanding technology; and (l) facilitating faculty and staff professional development opportunities. The following freshmen services: first-year seminar courses, academic advising, service-learning projects, learning communities, orientation programs, living environments, and other support services would be effective in assisting in freshman interaction (Upcraft et al., 2005). In other words, it is important for administrators and faculty of colleges and universities to be organized and thoughtful in how they allocate their time and resources in order to maximize opportunities for student engagement and learning (Upcraft et al., 2005).

Kuh's theory (1991) was developed while conducting the College Experiences Study. The study selected 14 colleges based on their high quality of out of class experiences (Kuh et al., 1991). The study later developed into the DEEP project (Documenting Effective Educational Practices) consisting of 20 colleges and universities ranging from highly selective public to private institutions (Kuh et al., 2005). These colleges received higher than expected scores on the National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE) and higher than predicted graduation rates, factors that contribute to student engagement and related desired outcomes of college (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh& Whitt, 2005). Many scholars support the importance of institutional engagement (Chickering&Reisser, 1993; Kuh et al., 2005; Manning, Kinzie, &Schuh, 2006). In order for student engagement to exist, students must be involved in quality learning opportunities, both inside and outside the classroom (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Pike, 2006; Porter, 2006). Students must make a concerted effort with their institution by taking advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided for them (Pascarella&Terenzini, 2005).

III. METHOD

The College Student Report administered through NSSE will be used to measure the levels of engagement of students attending HBCUs. Data from this study were based on the analyses of the 2014 NSSE results from first year and seniors attending four-year HBCU in the United States. The College Student Report asks for students to report the frequency with which they engage in activities that are representative of good educational practices (Kuh, 2009). In this study, student engagement of nontraditional and traditional students was compared across the five benchmark dimensions. The engagement behaviors of the nontraditional student at HBCUs compared to the traditional student on a collection of data using the three benchmarks of student engagement as dependent variables. NSSE's three out of five benchmarks were used as three dependent variables in this study: level of academic challenge, enriching educational experiences, and a supportive campus environment (Kuh, 2009).

Participant Demographics

The research group was comprised of freshmen and senior students classified as nontraditional or traditional students, who participated in the 2014 College Student Report as administered through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). NSSE collected data from 355,000 first-year and senior students attending 622 U.S. colleges and universities that participated in NSSE in spring 2014. This study utilized data from HBCUs nontraditional and traditional students who participated with NSSE survey. A first year student is defined by the National Survey of Student Engagement Institute (NSSEI) as aforementioned in following spring 2014. Senior classification for this study was also identified previously. (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2014).

Data Collection Procedures

Data were requested from the Center for Postsecondary Research, which administers the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), that include responses to all survey items from the 2013 and 2014 versions of NSSE. The study used secondary data on nontraditional and traditional students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Students' information was anonymous for ethical research purposes. The NSSE dataset included HBCU participant population available from the 2014 NSSE versions. The data population in this study consisted of first year and senior traditional and nontraditional students attending HBCUs. The population of this study: first year freshmen totaling 1,565; seniors totaling 1,824, with

total population of 3,389. The data from NSSE offered a comparative analysis of student engagement of the nontraditional to the traditional student. The information from NSSE respondents included the following demographic information: (a) age; (b) sex; (c) ethnicity; (d) student classification in college; (e) transfer student status; (f) types of other institutions attended; (g) participation in a fraternity; (h) cumulative grade point average; (i) current living location; (j) highest level of education completed by the mother and father; and (k) major. This dataset was unidentifiable at the institutional or student level because all institutional and/or student identifying information was removed from the data prior to researcher receiving dataset from NSSE per agreement. The United States Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulate the NSSE's use of student data. The NSSE administration protocol also adhered to the federal regulations pertaining to the protection of human subjects and is approved by the Indiana University Internal Review Board (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2012).

Data Analysis Procedures

The data were analyzed using quantitative analysis methods. The latest version of SPSS Version 16 statistical software student edition was used to perform the quantitative statistical functions. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and frequency were collected for each variable. The t-test was used in this study because it deals with differences and the study examined the differences between two groups of independent variables: nontraditional and traditional first year and senior level students. Data analysis used the $p<.05$ level of significance when comparing the variables of student engagement benchmarks. Inferential statistics were used to assist in answering the research questions aforementioned. Prior research determined the differences that exist between the variables listed in the questions, so an independent t-test was utilized to compare the nontraditional and traditional student attending a Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The study used an independent t-test to determine if significant differences exist amongst HBCU nontraditional and traditional students in response to NSSE benchmark. The Independent t-tests were performed to evaluate differences found in NSSE benchmark responses. Wested and Shavelson (1997) asserted that assumptions when using t-tests include ensuring the scores are randomly sampled from some population and scores in the population are normally distributed. The researcher utilized first-year freshmen and senior students attending HBCUs in this study. Both gender and ethnicity were relevant to this study to answer the research questions assembled.

IV. FINDINGS

The data analysis for demographics was divided into five categories: (a) gender, (b) race/ethnicity, (c) enrollment status (d) commuter students, and (e) residency status. As shown in Table 1, more female college students than males participated in this study. Based upon the data provided, there are 73.1% female students who fit the criteria for participation and 26.9% male students who fit the criteria for this study.

Table 1 Distribution of Participants by Gender

Gender	Count	Percent
Female	249	73.1
Male	755	26.9
Total	1589	100

According to Table 2, African-American participants were 76.2%, Caucasian were 8.2%, and 0.6% were Mexican-American. Moreover, 4.0% of those who participated in the study preferred not to disclose their race/ethnicity. Table 2 offers a true depiction of the ethnic population of college student enrollment at HBCUs.

Table 2 Distribution of Participants by Race

Race		Frequeny	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	American Indian or other Native American	16	.5	.6	.6
	Asian, Asian American or Pacific Islanders	47	1.4	1.7	2.3
	Black or African American	2130	62.9	76.2	78.4
	White (non-Hispanic)	229	6.8	8.2	86.6
	Mexican or Mexican American	18	.5	.6	87.2
	Puerto Rican	8	.2	.3	87.5
	Other Hispanic or Latino	34	1.0	1.2	88.7
	Multiracial	110	3.2	3.9	92.7
	Other	70	2.1	2.5	95.2
	I prefer not to respond	135	4.0	4.8	100.0
	Total	2797	82.5	100.0	
	Missing System	592	17.5		
Total		3389	100.0		

Note. System Missing-Student did not identify race

The information listed in Table 3 describes the importance of student enrollment status. As a part-time student, most of these students are considered nontraditional, and rarely fully participate in the full college experience, while other factors also prohibit them from attending classes on a daily basis.

Table 3 Distribution of the Enrollment of Students Based on the Current Academic Term

Status		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Less than full-time	256	7.6	9.1	9.1
	Full-time	2549	75.2	90.9	100.0
	Total	2805	82.8	100.0	
	Missing System	584	17.2		
Total		3389	100.0		

The data represented in Table 4 explains the distribution of participants by age. The students reported their age categories based upon their age at the time of the survey. More students 33.1% reported being aged 19 or younger at the time of the survey. Furthermore, only 1.8% of students were over the age of 55. One-third of the students who participated in this survey were between the ages of 25-55. Although these students are considered nontraditional, the ratio of nontraditional students to traditional students is evenly distributed and produced better statistical outcomes when defining differences in the behaviors of traditional and nontraditional students.

Table 4 Student Age Status

Age Category		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	19 or younger	923	27.2	33.1	33.1
	20-23	877	25.9	31.4	64.5
	24-29	334	9.9	12.0	76.5
	30-39	274	8.1	9.8	86.3
	40-55	331	9.8	11.9	98.2
	Over 55	51	1.5	1.8	100.0
	Total	2790	82.3	100.0	
	Missing System	599	17.7		
Total		3389	100.0		

Note. System Missing-Student did not identify age.

The data represented in Table 5 show the distribution of participants by residency status during their time in college. The data show that 44.1% live in a residence within driving distance of the school. Additionally, 39.1% live in the college dormitory or other campus housing.

Table 5 Student Residency Status

Residency		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Dormitory or other campus housing (not fraternity/sorority house)	1086	32.0	39.1	39.1
	Residence (house, apartment, etc.) within walking distance of the institution	238	7.0	8.6	47.6
	Residence (house, apartment, etc.) within driving distance of the institution	1226	36.2	44.1	91.7
	None of the above	230	6.8	8.3	100.0
	Total	2780	82.0	100.0	
	Missing System	609	18.0		
Total		3389	100.0		

Note. System Missing-Student did not identify residency.

According to the data in Table 6, there is a statistically even distribution in the number of 1st year freshman and the numbers of 4th year seniors. The majority of students participating in this study are 4th year seniors.

Table 6 Institution Reported Class Levels

Class Level		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Freshman (1st year)	1565	46.2	46.2	46.2
	Senior (4th year)	1824	54.8	53.8	100.0
	Total	3389	100.0	100.0	

Three research questions were tested to examine differences in the level of student engagement between traditional and nontraditional college students enrolled in HBCUs. Each of the variables tested were converted from raw numbers to corresponding benchmarks, which the literature describes as characteristics of nontraditional and traditional students. Each variable was converted from the raw number to categorically as nontraditional and traditional, and the subsequent Independent t-test conducted to identify if statistical differences existed. Below are the results of the research questions according to the Independent t-test.

Research Question 1

Is there a significant difference between nontraditional students and the traditional students relative to the Level of Academic Challenge (LAC) Benchmark at HBCUs? According to data analysis presented in Table 7, there is a significant difference between traditional and nontraditional students relative to the level of academic challenge benchmark. When applying the p <.05 level of significance, results yield p =.000. Moreover, the analysis shows that there is a difference between traditional and nontraditional students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Table 7 T-test Results Comparing NST to TS LAC Benchmark at HBCU

Factors	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Nontraditional Student	1862	53.29	14.66	2.46	.117	-8.76	2781	.000
Traditional Student	921	58.39	14.07					

*****p<.05

Research Question 2

Is there a significant difference between nontraditional students and the traditional students relative to the Enriching Educational Experiences Benchmark (EEE) at HBCUs? According to data analysis presented in Table 8, there is a significant difference between traditional and nontraditional students relative to the level of academic challenge. At the p< .05 level of significance, p = .000. Moreover, enriching educational experiences benchmark analysis yields that there is a significant difference of the traditional and nontraditional students attending HBCUs.

Table 8 T-test Results Comparing NTS to TS EEE Benchmark at HBCU

Factors	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Nontraditional Student	1862	42.82	19.52	39.81	.000	-14.88	2774	.000
Traditional Student	921	31.57	17.13					

*****p<.05

Research Question 3

Is there a significant difference between nontraditional students and the traditional students relative to the Supportive Campus Environment (SCE) Benchmark at HBCUs? According to the results of t-test presented in Table 9 comparing the variable of traditional and nontraditional students, there was no statistical difference between traditional and nontraditional students when applying supportive campus environment benchmark. Moreover, with a level of significance of p <.05, the benchmark of supportive campus environment exhibits that there is no significant difference among traditional and nontraditional students. According to the data presented there was no a significant difference between these two groups yielding a significance level of p = .947.

Table 9 T-test Results Comparing NTS to TS SCE Benchmark at HBCU

Factors	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Nontraditional Student	1862	61.25	21.92	2.19	.139	-.067	2768	.947
Traditional Student	921	61.19	21.25					

*****p<.05

V. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study, the results were seeking to find if there was a significant difference amongst nontraditional and traditional students when apply the dependent variables in this study: level of academic challenge (LAC), enriching educational experiences (EEE), and (e) supportive campus environment (SCE). The study utilized descriptive statistical analysis to obtain frequency distribution on the demographic variables to ensure that all variables were displayed and explained. Of the three researched questions explored, two showed significant differences existing between traditional and nontraditional college students attending HBCUs except

Supportive Campus Environment (SCE). Data analysis showed there is one variable, SCE that yield results of no significant differences when applying the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) benchmarks. Results further disclosed a significant difference between the nontraditional and traditional students attending HBCUs when applying the three variables: LAC and EEE. The study revealed that the benchmark from HBCUs, Level of Academic Challenge (LAC), has a significant difference between nontraditional and traditional students attending HBCUs. The analysis utilized in this study was a t-test to compare the difference between traditional and nontraditional students when applying the LAC benchmark. It can be assumed that both traditional and nontraditional students have the same experience when applying level of academic challenge attending HBCUs. Data analysis showed a significant difference between nontraditional and traditional students when it relates to the Enriching Educational Experiences (EEE) Benchmarks at HBCUs. This is relative to the level of academic challenge when exploring this variable result at HBCUs. Traditional and nontraditional students have different experiences when attending HBCUs.

According to the results of the independent t-test comparing Supportive Campus Environment (SCE) Benchmark at HBCUs, nontraditional and traditional students; there was no significant difference between these students attending HBCUs. According to the data presented, both traditional and nontraditional students have the same or similar experiences with supportive campus environment on HBCU campuses. Statistically, SCE benchmark rendered results of no significant differences in comparison.

Discussion

The study conducted by Price and Baker (2012), on measuring students' engagement attending college campuses, revealed that76% of nontraditional students are enrolled full-time at the university. According to statistics, nontraditional students are participating at higher rates in higher education and there is a need for higher education institutions to understand these specific studies and what is needed for academic success (Price & Baker, 2012). Price and Baker's (2012) study expressed the need for institutions' to understand nontraditional students' academic choices. Price and Baker (2012) hypothesized that: Nontraditional students would score lower than traditional-age students on 13 NSSE items that were judged to be not applicable I error able to all students due to their focus on out of class or nonacademic experiences, t-test for independent means were performed. In order to control for elevated type I error rate associated with running multiple t-test, a Bonferroni adjustment was utilized. (p. 24)

The result of Price and Baker's (2012) study denoted, 42 core survey items included in the NSSE benchmark there were statistically significant differences between traditional and nontraditional students' responses in the 20 items, almost half of benchmark survey items. While, 13 items were hypothesized to have bias because they focused on traditional students' experiences; and nine items revealed statistically significant difference with adult scoring lower. "Items within two NSSE benchmark areas, SFI and EEE, showed the greatest number of items where adult students scored significantly lower than their traditional-age counterparts" (Price & Baker, 2012, p. 24).

The results of the current study is supportive of Price and Baker (2012) research in the findings from the hypothesis of a significant difference between the traditional and nontraditional students when applying two of the benchmarks: Level of Academic Challenge and Level of Enriching Educational Experiences. Price and Baker research utilized both t-test and Bonferroni analysis to yield results that would allow for a more detailed explanation of why traditional and nontraditional students have the same or similar collegiate experiences. The Price and Baker (2012) study is significant in that it offers insight on NSSE research of student engagement and the importance of all students experience. Therefore, Price and Baker suggested more research that not only focus on traditional students responses, but also the nontraditional students in that it will provide substantial information of each groups experience on college campuses. Price and Baker's (2012) study differed from the current study because the data gathered from NSSE was selected at Predominately White Institutions (PWI), whereas the current study focal group was NSSE participants attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU).

Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen (2010) conducted research of the nontraditional student attending colleges and universities. The purpose of Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen (2010) focus of postsecondary education in the lives of unmarried parents attending college.Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen (2010) stated, "Research into this field is in its earliest stages. Even providing a statistical portrait of college enrollment among these parents is difficult" (p. 180). Data was collected from National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) which was explained to likely underreport the presence of parenting students (Goldrick-Rab& Sorensen, 2010).

Research from Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen (2010) study utilized previous analyst that revealed 85 percent did not enter right out of high school, compared with 32% of other students. Eight percent begin without a high school diploma; 18%, with General Education Development (GED) and 45% scored less than 700 on the ACT/SAT compared with 18% of other students. Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen (2010) research also found national statistics indicate that in 2007-08 three-fourths of all unmarried parents who were enrolled in

college fulltime were working at least 15 hours a week and 30% working at least forty or more hours weekly. When applying for financial aid Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen found, "challenge affecting unmarried students stem from restrictions on the Pell Grant related to students' academic preparation and degree plans" (2010, p. 184).

Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen (2010) study relates to the current study in that it describes the nontraditional student how data is gathered to label this group. Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen's study set the framework of the current study when applying the descriptive test of the study. Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen explains the need for more studies of the nontraditional student in higher education being that the nontraditional student is a growing population in higher education (2010).

Volokhov (2014) conducted a study of the differences in skills knowledge between traditional and nontraditional students. Volokhov study investigated study skills knowledge in a sample of students at a rural regional campus to identify trends in student success (2014). The study revealed that study skills knowledge was significantly related to GPA and the nontraditional students demonstrated advanced study skills knowledge compared to traditional college students (Volokhov, 2014). The study utilized five individual surveys comprised as a survey packet: The General Survey, The Sorenson Self-esteem test, The Study Skills Survey (divided into two sections), The Big Five Personality Inventory (Volokhov, 2014).

Volokhov (2014) study gathered participants from multiple introductory classes at a rural community-based regional campus. The study utilized an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test hypothesis 1 in the study. The hypothesis used in Volokhov study were, "students who had completed the study skills class would have greater self-esteem, increased study skills knowledge, and higher GPA" (2014, p. 206). Hypothesis 2, "centered on the possible advantages of age; specifically, that older non-traditional students would have higher GPAs and increased study skills knowledge" (Volokhov, 2014, p. 207). The findings from Hypothesis 1 was that there was no differences in self-esteem between groups. Nonsignificant result emerged when study skills knowledge was applied and when the post hoc analysis was ran opposite direction was predicted when testing traditional and nontraditional students GPAs (Volokhov, 2014). Hypothesis 2 was tested using a bivariate correlation. Results showed GPAs was not significantly correlated with age, however age did correlate with Study Skills score. Finally, hypothesis three tested the role of personality variables; specifically how personalities influences GPA and skills knowledge (Volokhov, 2014). The results from this hypothesis read there was a relationship between GPA and openness to experience and many significant correlations between subsets on the Study Skills Survey (Volokhov, 2014).

Volokhov (2014) study relates to the current study in that the same participants were used to gather data. Yet, the demographics of the participants were different in where the studies were conducted; the current study's data was collected from HBCUs. While Volokhov's study was conducted at rural college campuses and community colleges. Volokhov's study applied a t-test, ANOVA test, correlation test, and post hoc test to reveal results to hypotheses that were posed. This allowed for in-depth data of the participants higher education experiences. This differs for the current research, which utilized a t-test for a comparative analysis of the nontraditional and traditional student applying NSSE benchmarks.

Conclusion

Although far from conclusive, there is some preliminary evidence to suggest that nontraditional and traditional students may engage in the college experience in different ways. To compensate for less time on campus, nontraditional students may utilize the classroom as the avenue for developing friendships and making meaning of their college experience, as opposed to their counterparts, who engage and develop friendships while residing on campus and through social groups (Price & Baker, 2012; Bureau, Ryan, Ahren, Shoup, & Torres, 2011). Adult students typically commute to campus, often working and attending classes part-time, both in the evenings or on weekends. It is therefore important for colleges and universities to recognize the importance of the extracurricular experience as a means of engagement for these students. Institutions should utilize Student Support Services on their campuses providing assistance to ensure that the nontraditional student remains engaged in their pursuit of academic success.

It is important for continued research to focus on the distinct ways that the nontraditional students engage and integrate in the college experience, including evaluating the appropriateness of our assessment tools and theoretical models for use with this population. In doing so, institutions can more accurately assess the experience of all college students rather than base the needs of our nontraditional student population on models developed using traditional student models. In assessing effective practices in higher education, it may be necessary to define the behaviors and practices that are most applicable to all student populations and differentiate those from behaviors that are appear to be more often than not, reflected in traditional students' college experience. Within the current structure, it may be argued that the NSSE benchmark items may present some bias against nontraditional students. Price and Baker (2012) wrote,

As a case in point, NSSE has positioned itself as a measure of effective educational practices in their partnerships with accountability initiatives designed to provide accessible information to the public as a demonstration of stewardship with the inclusion of NSSE results in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) College Portrait as well as organizations associated with college rankings such as *USA Today* and *U.S. News and World Report* reporting on NSSE benchmark scores. (p. 30)

Further research needs to evaluate the appropriateness of this measure for institutions with large nontraditional student populations attending HBCUs. The results of this study provide preliminary evidence to support the notion that NSSE benchmarks may put colleges with large adult student populations at a disadvantage when results are used for accountability purposes.

Areas for further research in this area are plentiful. With the increasing numbers of nontraditional students entering our colleges and universities, it is important to investigate which factors most impact how these students interact with peers, faculty, and the institution itself. For example, to tease out the role of commuter status on nontraditional students' engagement patterns, additional research should evaluate traditional and nontraditional commuter students' engagement. It may also be useful to investigate the applicability of measures of engagement to other populations, such as asynchronous online learners, another growing population in higher education.

Furthermore, additional research utilizing structural path analysis techniques would allow for a more in-depth evaluation of mediating and moderating variables. Investigating student engagement within the academic curricular context rather than as a separate and distinct phenomenon may provide additional insight into nontraditional student engagement. As colleges and universities increasingly use student engagement and student satisfaction with the college experience as proxies for student learning outcomes for accountability purposes, particularly within accreditation reviews and national surveys of institutional quality, it is important to recognize that one size may not fit all, and that measures of engagement may not adequately reflect the experiences of certain populations.

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