

Black Paths to White Boards: Black Alumni Service on PWI Governing Boards

by

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Abstract

Governing boards of universities are tasked with upholding university principles and promoting university ideals, including those pertaining to diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, many university governing boards, especially those at predominantly white institutions (PWIs), lack the diversity required for accurate representation of all students' interests. While the importance of board diversity has been established, the perspective of Black alumni serving on governing boards at PWIs is unknown but may lend important insight into replicating their successes.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the narratives of Black alumni serving on governing boards at PWIs to determine common themes in their experiences with and paths to service. The study was framed by Tillman's Culturally Sensitive Research Theoretical Framework to inform this narrative inquiry by examining the experiences of Black alumni of PWIs that have assumed positions on Boards of Trustees. Twelve participants shared their narratives regarding their pathways to and motivation for service on their respective PWIs' Boards of Trustees. Their narratives explicate the essential steps required for service, as well as the benefits and challenges of being Black alumni on PWI boards. Essential themes were elucidated within the context of culturally sensitive research and public service motivation, an unanticipated finding of the study. The results of this study expose the landscape for existing and future Black alumni serving on governing boards at PWIs. This research has implications for bringing awareness of existing issues, encouraging and assisting PWIs in diversifying their governing boards, and achieving insight into strategies for historically underrepresented students to achieve success in the future.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview of the Issue

Black leadership in society has historically been overlooked in the United States (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Even though many Black leaders and other leaders of color succeed, they continue to face deep-rooted barriers to their leadership. Leadership research that prioritizes Black experiences as the framework for understanding the pervasive role of race in social experiences is lacking, and the findings from the research that does so are often underemphasized or outright ignored (Tillman, 2004). Bloom and Erlander (2003) eloquently summarize a body of literature arguing that “findings presented from a historically underrepresented insider’s perspective are regarded as dubious and unlikely to be published in professional journals” (p. 344). This highlights a persistent and systematic issue with research focused on the understanding of the roles of Black individuals in HIED leadership in part because the path to leadership, especially to board service, is unclear. The experiences of Black leaders in higher education are especially important, as these institutions provide formative experiences for young adults over which leadership can have substantial influence, yet there is little known about how those few Black individuals who have successfully obtained these positions have done so.

For the interests of Black individuals to be represented in any organization, Black individuals must be a part of the governance of that organization. When one considers leadership and governing boards across most fields, Black people are underrepresented. Governing boards from corporate spaces to institutions of higher education are predominantly comprised of White men (Pawley, 2019). For example, while many have considered the 2008 election of Barack

Obama as the President of the United States to be a sign of racial equality, one might conversely argue that his presidency emphasizes the ongoing disparities in representation throughout American politics. Interestingly, research has shown that during his presidency, Obama enacted more policies benefiting African American constituents than did his White democratic predecessors, but was less likely to overtly mention race, suggesting that even at the highest level, Black leaders face pressure to avoid being perceived as merely a representative of their race (Haines et al., 2019). Normalization of representation and acceptance of historically underrepresented groups as having a legitimate place in leadership without their having to compromise or downplay their racial identities is thus essential to the efficacy of Black leaders, especially as it pertains to acting on behalf of those they represent (Hutchings et al., 2021). This pertains not only to the political realm but extends to all areas of leadership including that of higher education.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) were established with the primary purpose of educating Black students, but most Black students in HIED today attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (Mobley, 2021). While many of these institutions of higher education (HIED) include the word “diversity” in their mission statements (Jargowsky, 2018; Phillips, 2019), diversity within the higher education institutions of America continues to be an issue (Dumford & Miller, 2018). Black students face barriers to entering and completing higher education programs, including challenges in relating to predominantly White faculty, lack of flexibility, stereotyping, and microaggressions (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Davidson et al., 2020). Furthermore, while a pathway to attendance at HIED institutions has been created for Black students, the increased focus on diversity has not necessarily translated to a change in

institutional attitude toward these populations or genuine inclusion, especially at the level of institutional leadership (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Brannon et al., 2018). Historically underrepresented HIED students deserve leadership that can speak to their unique perspectives, notably on the governing bodies where key decision-making occurs, yet this representation lags significantly behind efforts to increase historically underrepresented access to HIED (Siqueiros, 2020). Corporate and HIED governing boards that are diverse in membership tend to be more engaged and can be an asset to institutions (Lozano & Hughes, 2017; Schmidt, 2014; Osili, 2018). Alger (2014) argued that governing boards have a responsibility to act as diversity stewards. Further, he surmised that higher education needs to do better at providing opportunities for all students regardless of their backgrounds; a failure to do so only reinforces societal inequalities (Alger, 2014). The key factor here is to create diverse governing boards that prioritize social, moral, economic, and educational imperatives in executing the institutional mission (Alger, 2014). Research additionally shows that a diversified system of higher education has positive economic and societal benefits (Goglio & Regini, 2017). There is thus a critical need to increase racial diversity at the level of board membership, and particularly to expand the presence of Black board members at PWIs. Nonetheless, despite this disparity in representation, some Black individuals have successfully charted a path to board service. However, the perspectives and experiences of such historically underrepresented individuals serving on governing boards, especially within HIED, have not been well studied, and it is critical to give these individuals a voice.

Problem Statement

The problem statement of this study is that while the importance of board diversity has been established, the perspective of Black alumni serving on governing boards at PWIs is unknown but may lend important insight into replicating their successes. These governing boards have different degrees of power and influence in the higher education setting and within their institutions (Barringer et al., 2020; Bastedo, 2005). The role of governing boards may also vary depending on the type of institution they serve and their mission. For example, governing boards may take an activist position, focusing on policy changes, whereas other boards may act primarily as a figurehead without enacting meaningful action to drive institutional changes (Bastedo, 2005). Governing boards play a critical role in crisis management and should anticipate any challenges that the institution may face by remaining vigilant in their oversight and understanding of the current political and social climate, at local and national levels, that may impact the institution (ABG, n.d.; Bauer-Wolf, 2022). This includes remaining cognizant of student experiences, including those of historically underrepresented students.

There has been ample research focusing on the experiences of Black students at PWIs indicating that retention is a problem (Thompson, 2020). Though abundant, existing research on the Black college student experience at PWIs has not successfully led to the development of programs and practices that would address Black student retention or improve their overall educational environment (Shuford & Flowers, 2016). Governing boards play a critical role in shaping and executing the mission of HIED institutions, including with respect to diversity and inclusion. However, homogeneous boards may be less likely to prioritize or appropriately respond to these issues; there is thus a critical need for research focused on the perspectives of

those historically underrepresented individuals who have successfully navigated a path to board service. This research theorizes that diversifying HIED governing boards will lead to better and more effective diversity practices that will result in a better overall historically underrepresented student experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the narratives of Black alumni serving on governing boards at PWIs to determine common themes in their experiences with and paths to service. The primary motivation for this research is to understand the landscape for existing and future Black alumni serving on governing boards at PWIs and to help bring awareness of existing issues to encourage and assist PWIs in diversifying their governing boards and achieve insight into strategies for historically underrepresented students to achieve success in the future.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this qualitative narrative inquiry study:

1. How do Black alumni board members at PWI talk about their path to service?
2. What experiences contributed to or mitigated Black alumni's interest in board service?

Research Approach

The standard qualitative interview style of questioning does not apply to this study. As in narrative inquiry, the researcher's role is to become a listener more so than an interviewer (Lewis, 2011). Dixon (2018) describes the process of the narrative interview utilizing three sub-sessions, which will be further described in chapter 3 but are summarized here in brief. First, the researcher frames the conversation by asking one specific question that has been designed to elicit a narrative response, allowing ample time for the participant to respond while remaining

quiet, focused, and interested. During this first session (narrative phase), if the participant appears to lose track or isn't sure what to say next the researcher can ask a prompting question. Second, when the researcher is sure the respondent has finished sharing their story, they can ask them to expand or clarify specific aspects of the story (narrative follow-up). The third phase is optional if the interviewer feels that the original narrative did not provide adequate data, they can request a follow-up interview that takes more of a semi-structured interview form in an effort to elicit specific additional data (Dixon, 2018).

The following question will generally guide the interview, allowing the participant to freely tell their story (Feher, 2011).

Can you tell me your experiences and path of assuming a position on the Board of Trustees as a Black alumni of a Predominantly White Institution?

Theoretical Framework

Tillman's (2002) Culturally Sensitive Research (CSR) Theoretical Framework informs this narrative inquiry by examining the experiences of Black alumni of PWIs that have assumed positions on Boards of Trustees. Using culturally sensitive research approaches can lead to the development of theories and practices aimed at improving the lives of African Americans (Agyeman, 2003; Tillman, 2002). As part of CSR approaches, ethnicity and culture are recognized and acknowledged as fundamental to the research process (Tillman, 2002). When working with diverse communities, Tillman (2002) stressed the importance of culturally sensitive methods, which are aligned with a research method that centers on the voice of both the participant and researcher. Tillman's CSR (2002) is an extension of the works of Dillard (2000), Collins (1999/2000), and Kershaw (1990,1992).

Endarkened feminist epistemology describes the way we come to understand reality when rooted in Black feminist thought, embodying a distinct perspective positioned at the intersection of the culturally constructed socializations of race, gender, and other identities, as well as the historical and contemporary contexts of oppression and Black women's resistance to oppression (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2000, Tillman, 2002). In Dillard's framework, language plays an important role; that is, language has to possess instrumentality in order to transform specific ways of knowing and producing knowledge (Tillman, 2002).

Dillard's (2000) epistemology made six assumptions: (a) self-definition constructs a person's involvement in and responsibility to their community; (b) research is the pursuit of intellect, spirit, and purpose; (c) the individual appears and continues to develop only within the context of the community through dialogue; (d) routed experiences within daily life build the standard of meaning, the "matrix of meaning-making;" (e) knowledge and research transcend both historical time and geography: to approach them otherwise diminishes the value of their cultural and empirical significance; and (f) the manifestation of racism within research is rooted in power relations (Dillard, 2000, Tillman, 2002).

The Afrocentric emancipatory methodology developed by Kershaw (1990, 1992) focuses on the historical, cultural, and modern experiences of Black people. The methodology additionally emphasizes the importance of those experiences, the individuality of Black experiences and their relationship with others and strengthening ties between the academic and non-academic communities. Kershaw's framework is characterized by centralism or the generation of transformative knowledge by those "who are products of particular historical and cultural contexts" (p. 160). The Afrocentric emancipatory methodology requires the researcher to

(a) use qualitative methods to develop pragmatic knowledge about elements that impact the lives of African Americans; (b) use learnings garnered from qualitative inquiry to define and analyze empirical realities of the identified relationships; (c) identify any obvious paradoxes as well as the intersection of a group's discernment and impartial reality; (d) partner and educate study participants by sharing research outcomes and develop tools that empower them; (e) identify and conduct a study that will forge valuable and emancipatory learnings and develop new theories (Kershaw 1990; Tillman, 2002).

Both Kershaw (1990, 1992) and Dillard (1992, 2000) centered African Americans at the heart of their methodologies instead of as bystanders in the research process, making it possible to prioritize and value their perspectives. With Black perspectives in mind, Tillman (2002) outlined a culturally sensitive research method founded on a culturally congruent approach, insights specific to culture, and data interpretations informed by culture. Tillman's (2002, 2006) five primary categories of a CSR framework include:

Culturally Congruent Research Methods. The CSR approach relies on qualitative research methods including interviews and observation, or in the case of this study, narrative inquiry. These as well as other qualitative methods are used to capture a comprehensive picture of the social, political, economic, and educational factors that affect African Americans' lives on a daily basis, particularly in educational settings.

Culturally Specific Knowledge. The CSR approach relies on the individual and distinct Black self-representation experiences of Black individuals. The researcher strives to maintain the cultural integrity of the research participants and the larger community. While conducting the

research, the researcher accounts for their own cultural knowledge, cross-racial and same-racial perspectives, and insider and outsider issues.

Cultural Resistance to Theoretical Dominance. The CSR approach endeavors to reveal, comprehend, and answer to unbalanced power relations that can undervalue, marginalize, vanquish, or reject the numerous realities and perspectives of Americans. The researcher's privilege, impartiality, and objectivity are challenged in educational research. Research methods that position Black perspectives within the margins of the study are questioned. The cultural perspectives of people who encounter the economic, educational, political, and social effects of unequal power dynamics are prioritized over the perspectives of those who are not normally impacted by these experiences.

Culturally Sensitive Data Interpretations. The CSR approach positions experiential knowledge as fair, proper, and vital for data collection, analysis, and reporting. Data presentation methods can include storytelling and narratives developed from the Black perspective.

Culturally Informed Theory and Practice. The CSR approach has the potential to generate future theory development for the purpose of addressing the “culturally specific circumstances” of the lives of Black Americans. Participant perspectives and cultural understandings of the phenomena under study are utilized by researchers to establish links between espoused theory and reality, and then to generate theory based on these understandings. Using culturally informed knowledge, researchers propose educational change and work to build meaningful relationships with the non-academic community.

With these categories in mind, CSR incorporates storytelling within a cultural and conceptual framework that honors the diverse groups being studied (Tillman, 2002). Tillman

(2006) made a compelling case for the use of a culturally sensitive framework shaped by both the researcher and the research participants' cultural perspectives throughout all aspects of the study's design, data collection, and data interpretation. It could be argued that all research considers a group's cultural knowledge and that focusing on a culturally sensitive methodology for a specific ethnic group is crucial (Tillman, 2006). This framework is not linear, as, in reality, the stages of research are seldom distinct and often overlap. Tillman (2002) noted that although a culturally sensitive research approach does not represent all research possibilities, the framework she developed has implications for considering research from a "specific position of color" which she described as a critical and essential distinction from more traditional theoretical frameworks.

Positionality

Positionality describes the worldview of an individual and their position regarding a research project and its social and political context (Frank, 2022). The researcher's worldview refers to their beliefs about how society functions, existing knowledge about the world, the nature of knowledge, and assumptions about how people interact with the world around them and relate to it (Grix, 2019). A researchers' positionality refers to their choice of position within a research study (Parson, 2019). In addition to influencing how researchers conduct a study, positionality also influences its outcome (Parson, 2019). Researchers identify their position regarding three areas: the subject under investigation, research participants, and research context and process (Holmes, 2020). Gender, race, skin color, and nationality are all culturally ascribed as fixed aspects of positionality (Homes, 2020; Hopkins, 2022; Parson, 2019). Some elements are more fluid, subjective, and contextual, such as political opinions, personal life history, and

personal experiences (Holmes, 2020). While these fixed aspects may predispose an individual to a particular perspective, that does not necessarily imply that they lead to that perspective or viewpoint (Fasavalu & Reynolds, 2019).

In Culturally Sensitive Research

The CSR framework enables doctoral students to examine their positionalities throughout their research as CSR addresses questions related to cultures, identities, and epistemologies (Tillman, 2002). Researchers can gain a nuanced understanding of positionality through CSR by examining interpretation and representation, two interconnected aspects of research (Roegman et al., 2016). As a result of its emphasis on cultures as an integral part of research processes rather than an additive factor, this lens proves particularly useful. The CSR movement emphasizes the importance of racialized, gendered, and classed experiences and the importance of reciprocity with participants (Knight et al., 2004). Culturally sensitive researchers work reflexively while developing methodologies instead of claiming neutrality as they attempt to solve educational problems (Tillman, 2006).

Qualitative research can be challenging since it involves numerous epistemological, methodological, and cultural issues (Roegman et al., 2016). In particular, doctoral students in the field of education are likely to engage in research with participants who are different from themselves, as they were unlikely to do research during their master's degrees. Different backgrounds can contribute to these differences, such as race, ethnicity, class, nationality, immigration status, and other aspects of positionalities (Milner, 2007; Tillman, 2002). Roegman et al. (2016) refer to research positionalities as the ways in which researchers' cultures shape how

they perceive and conduct research. Therefore, Roegman et al. (2016) emphasized the importance of how doctoral students enact their positionalities in research as emerging scholars. As Roegman et al. (2016) point out, several research studies demonstrate how CSR can support researchers in reconceiving research with marginalized groups. Using Tillman's tenets of CSR, Roegman et al. (2016) examined doctoral students' evolving positionalities within and beyond a study of African immigrants' perspectives on their educational and civic experiences. Using Tillman's CSR framework, Roegman et al. (2016) examined ways for doctoral preparation to be strengthened so that emerging scholars can better engage questions of positionalities and culture. The Roegman et al. (2016) study was useful for this study because it allowed me, as a researcher, to see CSR applied in a relevant way, and it gave me reassurance as a doctoral learner that I was pulling together appropriate concepts for my own research approach. Part of my mission for writing this dissertation was to explore Black stories from a Black perspective. I deliberately avoided Eurocentric frameworks and considered exploring Black-led methodologies for this study. This led me to Tillman, and to contemplate adopting Toliver's (2021) Endarkened Storywork methodology. Although Toliver's work is exceptional, the emphasis on storytelling as a methodology seemed to drive this research far past the research challenges Roegman et al. (2016) pointed out. I landed on a combination of framing the research from the perspective of CSR with a narrative inquiry focus that pays homage to an endarkened storywork methodology by focusing this research on learning and telling Black stories, without contributing to the growing overwhelm of a late-stage doctoral student. This challenge of balancing Black-led research with proven methodologies is not mine alone.

Scheurich and Young (1997) coined the term epistemological racism to describe how race presents epistemological problems in educational research. According to Scheurich and Young (1997), most of the founders of ontological and axiological categories used to socialize and educate children in the United States have been White. These White scholars have constructed the practice by embedding their beliefs, assumptions, and perspectives within educational research. Epistemologies of research in the United States are generally based on White social history. Researchers have developed alternative epistemologies to aid them in understanding this history and developing methods for engaging in research (Collins, 2002; Dillard, 2000; Tillman, 2002).

In Narrative Inquiry

Positionality is an important consideration in narrative inquiry. Mertova and Webster (2019) suggested that narrative inquiry recognizes that both researchers and researchers are in a relationship with each other, learning and changing from the encounter. Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experiences (Clandinin et al., 2018). Our experiences shape our lives within the context of our personal, familial, social, institutional, professional, linguistic, and cultural narratives (Caine et al., 2019). Participants and researchers are engaged in co-composition throughout each narrative inquiry, manifested in the narrative inquirer's dedication to collaboration. The narrative inquirer perceives lives as always in a state of flux, which has significant implications for how they represent their work (Caine et al., 2019). In narrative inquiry, narrative inquirers understand that their intent is not to produce one singular truth and that what they represent in research texts needs to be carefully considered (Prosek & Gibson,

2021). Researchers make visible their personal, practical, and social justifications for their work in their research texts while addressing multiple audiences (Caine et al., 2019).

Philosophical and personal perspectives influence positionality (Holmes, 2020). For instance, narrative inquiry and analysis require acknowledging and unpacking these perspectives. As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge my perspectives using narrative techniques to study individuals with different social realities. A narrative's construction begins with the question of who is telling the story, and the researcher's and participants' stories are intertwined in a narrative study. With this in mind, I share my own narrative as follows.

My Narrative

Growing up in Germany among Germans and the German culture, I was never fully aware of my uniqueness in that environment. With a White German mother and a Black American father but not living on base, I was not exposed to the racial and cultural differences that are so predominantly visible and emphasized in the US. I realized I was unique among my German classmates and family members, but I saw it as the gift that God bestowed upon me. I enjoyed my view of life which made me special and precious, just as Gold is special and precious. I was and am uniquely me like the most precious metal on this earth. It was only after moving to the United States that the color of my skin became a trait that was attached to so many different viewpoints, opportunities, and challenges.

Going to college and seeking an education was a given in my family. My mother had studied in Germany and England and my father received his education through experience and training in the United States Army. A higher education degree would allow me to better myself and open doors to greater opportunities than my parents had. But since neither of them could

guide me on the path of higher education in the US, I had to navigate it on my own. I was unaware of the different types of colleges but knew a 4-year degree was my goal. HBCUs, liberal arts colleges, and regional comprehensives were not part of my vocabulary. I left home ready to figure it out myself and explore the possibilities at a large, four-year institution in a new state.

As a first-generation, bi-racial undergraduate student at a PWI, I learned to navigate the desert of support and knowledge I encountered just enough to be successful, enjoy my time as an undergraduate and graduate. I held a few positions in various campus organizations that allowed me to be involved with the majority but never enough to take leadership and place myself in the inner circle of power.

After a few years in the workforce, I circled back around and found myself back at my alma mater. Working at the alumni association afforded me the opportunity to see firsthand how many Black alumni from PWIs had used their involvement and networking as undergraduates to place themselves in a position to be leaders on the campus in various ways. In my alumni position as the Minority Alumni Coordinator, it was my responsibility to connect our Black alumni back to the university and to do so in a positive and engaging way. Those years of service gave me a bird's eye view to see how certain Black alumni moved to positions of granted power in the sea of White privilege. Some were serving on committees tied to their undergraduate major or current industry, others used their time and talent to serve philanthropically with financial support, while most were involved through social events. Over the years, I have seen many of my fellow undergraduate classmates grow their careers, families, and network to the fullest extent possible using all the resources at their disposal from connections during their undergraduate years. It was not until returning to work at my alma mater that I saw how some

Black alumni had strategically used their time on campus to set themselves up for a higher trajectory within the institutional structure than most.

While it is exciting to see an increase in Black alumni involved in these institutional committees, councils, and boards, there should be a concern at the decrease in the Black undergraduate population with a lack of emphasis on recruiting, retention, and service to this student population. The Black student population at my PWI has decreased by more than 50% in the last three decades as Black alumni engagement has slowly increased. This divergent response to Black alumni involvement in conjunction with an increase in strategic diversity initiatives, calls into question the actual influence and power given to those serving in a majoritarian higher education leadership culture.

While the majority of the Black alumni who have chosen to engage and serve their PWI do so in the capacity of serving on advisory boards or social events chairs, there are a handful that have strategically aligned themselves in a way to rise to positions of influence and perceived power, such as on the board of directors for the alumni association, the university foundation or the board of trustees. Serving in these positions affords them access and makes them more visible to those who have influence at the PWI. Moving from one committee or board to another and supporting the institution's goals and missions while remaining in a place of least resistance has allowed several Black alumni to move into positions on the governing boards. It is not enough to have a seat at the table, Black alumni must provide a blueprint to other Black undergraduates and alumni so that a pipeline of succession can be established. Power and influence cannot be established to support our Black students if there are no representative voices advocating on their behalf. With the continued emphasis on social justice and diversity

initiatives, HIED institutions need to start at the top, with their governing boards and take advantage of the diverse voices and viewpoints representing the diverse population on their campuses. I am personally motivated to explore the narratives of Black alumni serving on governing boards at PWIs because of my own journey and those around me.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative narrative inquiry is an appropriate methodology for this research because this method allows participants to tell their stories in their own way (Clandinin, 2007). This will be further described in Chapter 3. Narrative inquiry is a methodology for research that offers a mechanism for interpreting experiences (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Narrative inquiries effectively give voice to marginalized groups who aren't frequently asked for their perspectives (Deakin, 2022).

The purpose of a narrative interview is to generate a story related to a particular event, experience, or phenomenon (Allen, 2017). A narrative interview is different from semi-structured and structured interviews because the emphasis is not placed on a question-and-answer format. Instead, the researcher assumes the role of a listener and the participant becomes the narrator (Allen, 2017). The researcher subsequently becomes a storyteller when recounting the collective experiences and stories of the participants.

Definitions

The following terms, phrases, and concepts will be discussed throughout this study.

African American/Black. Individuals of African descent born and raised in the United States. Terms will be used interchangeably.

Alumni/Alumnus. Alumni (plural) and Alumnus (singular) refer to a person who graduated or formerly attended a specific college or university (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Boards of Trustees. A college or university's board of trustees is in charge of guiding the college or university in achieving its mission (Oster, 2016).

Critical Race Theory (CRT). In critical race theory, race is seen as a culturally constructed category used to oppress persons of color, and the legal system and legal institutions in the United States are viewed as inherently racist as they serve to maintain social, political, and economic inequalities between White and NonWhite people. (Dixson et al., 2018).

Culture. Culture refers to a group's perspectives and beliefs, which include their collective experiences, consciousness, skills, values, expression forms, social institutions, and behaviors (Tillman, 2002).

Diversity. For the purposes of this research, diversity refers to "the inclusion of people of different races, cultures," backgrounds, and otherwise marginalized groups. (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Governing Boards. Governing boards are made up of individuals not directly invested in an institution that work to ensure that the institution is best serving the interest of the larger public (Rall et al., 2019).

Higher Education (HIED). Higher education is formal education that is beyond high school offered at colleges and universities (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). An HBCU is an institution of higher education that was established in the United States before 1964 for the specific purpose of enrolling and educating African American students (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Predominantly White Institution (PWI). A PWI is an institution of higher education that has a student body of at least 50% White students (Lomotey, 2010).

Assumption, Limitations and Delimitations

The following provides an overview of the assumptions made for this study, as well as the applicable limitations and delimitations that will guide and contain the research.

Assumptions

Assumptions are the aspects of the research that are generally taken for granted because they are understood to be true (Walden, n.d.). In this study, the researcher assumed that all participants of the study would provide honest and forthcoming accounts of their narrative. To help ensure this, the researcher will diligently assure confidentiality and anonymity for the participants, so that they feel comfortable sharing their truthful thoughts. Furthermore, it is assumed that participants will have no incentive to be untruthful, as they do not stand to gain anything from being deceptive.

Limitations

Narrative interviews are incredibly valuable; however, this method of study is not without limitations. Narrative interviews return a large amount of data that requires a substantial time commitment for collection, transcription, and analysis (Dixon, 2018). The quality of the data relies extensively on the participants' storytelling skills. Although a participant may commit to sharing their story, they may have difficulty doing so clearly and concisely, or they may be inhibited due to nervousness, especially if the use of a voice or video recorder causes discomfort (Dixon, 2018). The researcher must thus guide the participants to remain on topic and proceed in telling their complete narrative, asking for participants to elaborate on important details.

However, the researcher does not have *a priori* knowledge of participant experiences and cannot be expected to know which experiences are important to the participant if they fail to provide a complete and coherent narrative.

Delimitations

Delimitating factors for this study include confining the study to the experiences of Black alumni of PWI that are currently or have served on the Board of Trustees of HIED institutions in the Southeastern United States. These participants may not fully represent all Black alumni of PWIs who have served on governing boards, nor do they necessarily represent all Black board members in general.

Significance of the Study

Higher education institutions depend on the service and commitment of governing boards to assist them in fulfilling their mission, developing policies, and upholding their fiduciary responsibilities (Bastedo et al., 2016; Henderson, 1967; Kezar, 2006). However, there has been criticism regarding the lack of diversity among members of boards at HIED institutions, leading to an increased focus on representation and the role governing boards and their members play in diversity and inclusion. As such, the perceptions of historically underrepresented board members and particularly African American alumni serving on governing boards at predominantly White institutions are largely unknown. This study will lend insight into the process whereby some African American alumni have defied probability and successfully navigated a path to board service. The perspectives of these uniquely positioned individuals are highly valuable and it is hoped that investigation thereof may aid in the process of replicating their success to increase board diversity in the future.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Background and Importance of Governing Boards

Higher Education (HIED) institutions depend on the service and commitment of governing boards to assist them in fulfilling their mission, developing policies, and upholding their fiduciary responsibilities (Bastedo et al., 2016; Henderson, 1967; Kezar, 2006). These governing boards have different degrees of power and influence in the higher education setting and within their institutions (Barringer et al., 2020; Bastedo, 2005). The role of governing boards may also vary depending on the type of institution they serve and their mission. For example, governing boards may take an activist position, focusing on policy changes, whereas other boards may act primarily as a figurehead without enacting meaningful action to drive institutional changes (Bastedo, 2005). Governing boards play a critical role in crisis management and should anticipate any challenges that the institution may face by remaining vigilant in their oversight and understanding of the current political and social climate, at local and national levels, that may impact the institution (ABG, n.d.; Bauer-Wolf, 2022). However, there has been criticism regarding the lack of diversity among governing boards at HIED institutions, leading to an increased focus on representation and the role governing boards play in diversity and inclusion. As such, the perceptions of historically underrepresented board members and particularly African American alumni serving on governing boards at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) are largely unknown.

Governing boards' decisions influence all aspects of an institution, from institutional administration to student life (Scott, 2018). One example of this is the creation of the Slippery Rock University College of Health Professions by the SRU council of trustees in the fall of 2021.

The trustees' decision to support the establishment of the college will impact the university in several ways. The administration of academic programs, providing students with more opportunities for diverse studies and improved visibility by many businesses and prospective students, as well as better organizational cost savings and more focused leadership will benefit all stakeholders (*SRU Trustees Vote to Approve Creation of College of Health Professions*, 2021). Additionally, admissions policies, administrative guidelines, tuition costs, and new construction are just a few more areas where governing boards have influence, since they have to weigh in on major changes in these areas (Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Barringer et al., 2020; Bjorklund & Green, 2012).

Governing boards are the highest authority in the structure of a HIED institution. While public system-wide governing boards have the responsibility of several HIED institutions and may have coordinating boards to assist in the administration of each entity, most governing boards work in conjunction with the President and board chair to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities for the institution they oversee. Governing boards are frequently directed by state laws and in the case of public institutions, influenced by the Governor and legislative decrees (Colleges and Organizational Structure of Universities - Governing Boards, The President, Faculty, Administration and Staff, Students, Future Prospects, 2022).

Despite their wide influence, there is relatively little research into the subject of governing boards in public PWI HIED institutions, leaving a substantial gap in the literature related to how these entities drive institutional culture as well as concerning the experiences of individuals serving as trustees in diverse circumstances (Rall et al., 2021). This chapter will present a review of the relevant literature describing how governing boards contribute to HIED

and current issues that they face such as social media, technology, and diversity. The literature review will also include a summary of the role of diversity at predominantly White HIED institutions in the United States, as well as a description of the responsibilities, history, and configurations of governing boards. The review will also describe problems facing governing boards, their composition, and paths to board service, including how board service can be a source of alumni engagement. Finally, this chapter will include a review of research concerning Black student experiences at PWIs and Black alumni engagement, with particular emphasis on the role of Black alumni involvement in governing boards at predominantly White institutions (PWIs).

Governing Boards' Contribution to Higher Education

Governing boards are critical to maintaining a diversified body of authority to manage institutional policies and practices and provide oversight regarding the general direction and mission of a college or university. In addition to their role in overseeing the general administrative function of a college or university, governing boards can also assist an institution through crisis management. They should anticipate any challenges that the institution may face by remaining vigilant in their oversight and understanding of the current political and social climate at local and national levels that may impact the institution (ABG, n.d.; Bauer-Wolf, 2022). Governing boards are in a unique position “to assist colleges and universities in navigating complex challenges, from the global COVID-19 pandemic to diminishing enrollments, declining government funding, and public skepticism about the value of a college education today.” (ABG, n.d.).

Strong, effective governing boards are those that are influential in driving institutional culture and practices and are in tune with the needs of those they serve. Boards that are diverse in their membership, including age, gender, cultural background, and more, can be an asset to the HIED institution and set it on a course of success and legacy. Although a bulk of governing boards have faculty and student representation, these members may be ex-officio or non-voting, but able to bring the concerns and viewpoints of their groups to the table. However, critics including AGB, argue that having student and faculty representation on governing boards is not recommended because of the conflict of interest that may arise. They argue that students and faculty are only concerned with the short-term fiduciary role of the institution that impacts their own term of office (Ruf, 2021). Conversely, research has shown that diversity in thought, coming from members with different backgrounds, can bring governing boards to value the diverse community and constituencies they serve (Anderson, 2019; Bjorklund & Green, 2012; Ruf, 2021). Alumni, in particular, may have a vested interest in the success of the institution that transcends their own tenure as a student there and may thus be valuable contributors to governing boards.

Many students are entirely unaware of the role of governing boards, which are frequently Boards of Trustees, in HIED institutions, or view trustees as being significantly removed from the college or university they serve, with their primary function being to ensure the financial well-being of the institution. However, the decisions made by these governing boards can influence all aspects of an institution, from institutional administration to student life (Scott, 2018). Additionally, admissions policies, administrative guidelines, tuition costs, and new construction are just a few areas on which governing boards can have a considerable influence,

as they are required to weigh in on any significant changes to these aspects of institutional function (Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Barringer et al., 2020; Bjorklund & Green, 2012). The disconnect between students and governing boards may result in a lack of effective communication of student needs and institutional culture to board members, resulting in tensions and inadequate service for these students.

Boards of Trustees are generally the highest authority in the structure of a HIED institution and are tasked with higher-level decision-making responsibilities as opposed to having a significant involvement in specific details of the educational process (Loss, 2022). They also act as a channel via which HIED institutions may access the private sector, as many trustees on educational governing boards are also associated with corporate industry. While the corporatization of education has been criticized by some, investments and financial security remain important aspects of university function that are largely determined by governing boards and thus influenced by the connections held by trustees and the knowledge they have gained through these other roles (Barringer & Riffe, 2018). Studies have indicated that trustee effectiveness is related to their knowledge of their specific responsibilities (Michael et al., 2000), suggesting that expertise in the business sector may not translate to effective trusteeship in higher education (Johnson et al., 2021). Michael et al. (2000) argue that it is critical that trustees be able to differentiate between the needs of educational institutions and corporate entities. In addition to maintaining financial viability, HEID institutions have the additional goals of facilitating a positive student experience, as well as attaining prestige and a reputation for academic excellence, all of which are important considerations for institutional leadership and governing boards (Dean & Clarke, 2019).

Governing boards are essential to maintaining a culture of an educational institution and establishing standards for student conduct, ensuring student liberty and safety, and establishing protections against discriminatory practices (Malcolm, 2018). They do this by initiate policies and influencing the institutional mission and priorities, both by directing funds towards what they consider to be essential services and by setting an official agenda, with the goal of implantation through lower levels of administration and student governance. Governing boards can also act as an important means for alumni to maintain engagement with an institution, either directly via service as board members, as a means of communicating alumni opinions about the direction of the institution, or through alumni engagement activities that are organized by or otherwise interact with governing boards (Mitchell & King, 2018).

Governing boards of HIED institutions are positioned to hold influence over numerous aspects of university function and are often the final authority on major decisions regarding institutional policies and practices. While these entities are not the sole arbiters of important decisions, they represent a critical component of the shared governance structure comprising more universities (Scott, 2018). The contribution of governing boards to the well-being of the institution and its constituencies come in many forms, including the selection of board members and the president, the price of tuition, and establishing policies that trickle down through the institution. Due to their authority over major decisions, governing boards have the potential to exert significant influence over university priorities (Barringer & Riffe, 2018). Additionally, many trustees contribute financially to the HIED institutions for which they serve with the expectation that these donations will be used for a specific purpose, creating a power dynamic wherein the trustee has disproportionate control over the institutional direction or specific

programs within the institution. Others make unrestricted gifts, allowing other university shareholders to decide how to best utilize these funds (Barringer & Riffe, 2018). In many cases, these financial contributions are prerequisites to individuals being appointed as board members, in which case the institution may be more interested in their financial contributions than their effectiveness as board members (Barringer & Riffe, 2018). Thus, while it is impossible to generalize the influence of board members on HIED institutions, it is important to recognize that these individuals are often in a position to guide university infrastructure via financial incentives.

Governing boards that are diverse in membership, including members of varying ages, gender, cultural background, and more, can be an asset to the HIED institution and provide an opportunity for success (Lozano & Hughes, 2017; Schmidt, 2014; Osili, 2018). Additionally, governing boards that are more diverse tend to be more engaged (Osili, 2018). The effects of this are variable, but, for example, nonprofit boards with more women tend to show higher levels of commitment and involvement in governing. Programs supported by diverse members of governing boards often receive more visibility and traction once board support is voiced. Just the attendance of a board member at a specific function or program can provide the needed support within the university structure to elevate it. However, maintaining a diverse governing board can come with its own challenges. While there is little research focusing on governing board diversity in education, research focused on non-profit organizations demonstrates that the benefits of a diverse governing board are mitigated if the group does not behave inclusively, and that diversity in itself is not sufficient without measures to ensure that diverse board members can contribute in a meaningful way (Fredette et al., 2016; Buse et al., 2016). Diverse perspectives must be treated as an important contributor to effective board function and be

valued rather than treated as fulfilling a quota. Accordingly, there is much to learn about practices to facilitate inclusion beyond simple numerical representation, much of which may come from the study of boards outside of the academic sector.

In today's digital society, governing boards and their decisions remain under the watchful eye of many stakeholders. The increased availability of information coupled with the rapid news cycle leads to increasing public knowledge about board decisions, opening up room for critique thereof. Faculty and staff, as well as students, frequently are impacted by governing board's decisions and therefore will speak out in support of or against issues that are important to them. For example, students and even some former board members spoke out when Howard University trustees removed faculty, student, and alumni affiliate positions on their board (Ruf, 2021). The outraged students argued that "the choice replicates the elitism & supremacy of the structures that necessitated Howard's creation," and removed the opportunity for the collaborative voices of all stakeholders (Ruf, 2021). Similarly, a recent decision by the University of California system to waive tuition for Native American students living in California will impact over 600 students and has spurred scholarships for other non-recognized tribal students (Ross, 2022). Social media facilitates the rapid dissemination of information to a wide audience, resulting in the uproar surrounding these incidents spreading far beyond the institutional community. Many times, these responses from stakeholders force immediate action or retraction of decisions, that previously would have been implemented and/or ratified before being contested. Recent media attention substantiates this on the federal level, with the influx of federal funding due to COVID-19 or on the state and local level when changes in the administration are questioned.

Origins and History

One race has dominated the establishment and structure of education since colonialism and the settlement of what would become the United States (Dancy et al., 2018; Wilder, 2013). White settlers from England and across Europe came to the New World to flee oppression and gain freedom from persecution. Wanting to build a New World and to 'civilize' the Natives through bringing their own beliefs, the White colonizers purported to build schools to educate Indigenous peoples of the Americas, all the while stealing and enslaving Natives and Africans (Dancy et al., 2018; Thelin, 2019b; Wilder, 2013).

European influence permeated throughout the early constructions of the colleges and universities that tried to replicate Oxford or Cambridge not just in architecture but also in governance and academics (Bastado, 2016; Thelin, 2019a). Harvard, William and Mary, and Yale all date back to the 17th century in their founding and still resemble their forefathers of Oxford and Cambridge. Many of the colonial colleges adopted the model of governance that had a board and president at the helm, which still persists in many of our public colleges and universities today (Bastado, 2016; Minor, 2008; Thelin, 2019a).

Part of the colonial founding of higher education institutions is the dark history of African slaves brought to this country to construct these colleges and universities (Thelin, 2019a; Wilder, 2014). The construction and foundation of our colleges and universities in the early 1600s and beyond rested on the slave trade and slave labor (Thelin, 2019b). African slaves physically built the buildings that housed these institutions, and often the sale of enslaved people funded the construction (Wilder, 2013). It was not just the slave labor that built the institutions in many ways, but the institution of slavery allowed the sons of the elite to pursue their education

and not have to work the farms or fields (Thelin, 2019a). With this foundation of White supremacy and cultural domination, there can be little argument about the impact of systemic racism and its presence in the United States' educational system, especially in our Institutions of Higher Learning (Dancy et al., 2018; Thelin, 2019b; Wilder, 2013).

Governing boards have played a vital role in higher education institutions' life, culture, and viability since their establishment (Barringer et al., 2020; Dean & Clark, 2019; Thelin, 2019a; Zwingle, 1979). Paltridge (1973), in a study on board decision making, found that the number of boards, especially for public, four-year institutions, saw a significant decline in the mid-1970s after a steady increase in previous decades. This decline was due to some higher education institutions in states being consolidated under one governing board in a multi-campus system or the formation of several separate systems being controlled by one board (Kezar, 2006; Paltridge, 1973).

Governing boards at public higher education institutions vary in name, function, composition, and power across this education sector (Dean & Clark, 2019; Kezar, 2006; Madsen, 1998). States establish governing bodies to oversee HIEDs and enforce the policies of higher education through a board of regents, a commission on higher education, or a board of trustees. Some states have two types of governing boards, one for their community/technical colleges and one for their universities (American Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century, 2013). Each state has its own way of governing its higher educational institutions, and some will vary in the responsibilities assigned to each governing board (Alacbay, 2021; Dean & Clark, 2019).

Governing Boards in the United States Responsibilities

Governing boards at public higher education institutions in the United States vary in name, function, composition, and power across this education sector (Dean & Clark, 2019; Kezar, 2006; Madsen, 1998). At most public HIED institutions in the country, governing boards go by many different names, such as Board of Regents, Board of Supervisors, or Chancellors but for this study, Board of Trustees will be used. One very outdated reference is the Board of Overseers (Harvard), which dates back to the days of slavery and oppression that was the foundation of the higher education system in this country (Association of Governing Boards [AGB], n.d.; Thelin, 2019a; Thelin, 2019b). In the Project on Governance for New Era, the responsibilities and challenges experienced by governing boards, especially in higher education are summarized clearly:

Lay governance has long been one of the great strengths of American higher education. A powerful, informed, and engaged board is essential for effective governance and boards must embrace their fiduciary responsibility. Their task is far larger than simply selecting the campus president or chancellor and then stepping aside (Schmidt, 2014).

Governing boards in the United States' responsibilities include identifying and evaluating leaders; institutional mission statements; financial health; interaction with stakeholders; and their performance (AGB, n.d.). Additionally, responsibilities include diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) of the university. However, not much is studied about the board DEI ratio (Morgan et al., 2021). The focus of this study will be on the Board of Trustees of a large, public, southeastern, predominantly White, research institution.

Diversity at Predominantly White Institutions

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) used to be the primary institutions via which African American students sought out higher education. However, increasing diversity throughout the nation has resulted in larger numbers of African American students attending predominantly White institutions. DEI efforts at HIED institutions are frequently hindered by archaic guidelines and outdated selection criteria that raise questions for governing boards. For example, recent media attention has centered on the selection process of board members or the next president, such as in the incident at the University of South Carolina (Anderson, 2019; Insidehighered, 2019). There were no female candidates in the finalists for the presidential position at the University of South Carolina, prompting an outcry by students, faculty, and the community for the lack of diversity in the selection process. This increased scrutiny challenges policies that affect underrepresented students, faculty, or staff (Marcus, 2015). In addition, governing boards are questioned in their decision-making, such as denying tenure to a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist at North Carolina, Chapel Hill (Bauer-Wolf, 2022; Marcus, 2015). Such incidents are easily picked up by the media and brought to light, begging not just the question of the decision made by the governing board but also examining the board's membership.

Configuration of Governing Boards

Governing boards are configured differently among the various HIED institutions. The administration of public HIED institutions is regulated by governing bodies, coordinating boards, or state agencies in each of the 50 states. Only 8 states have a governing board that regulates the entire state's educational system, while a majority have either a coordinating board/agency or a governing board overseeing their HIED institutions (Pechota et al., 2020).

Governing boards serve an institution to the best of their ability through their membership and the skill sets board members bring to the table. Depending on this membership makeup, a governing board can provide areas of strength that will move the institution forward or on the flip side, their weaknesses or areas of lacking can stagnate the institution without even being aware of it. Those institutions that failed to adjust to the change in student populations when veterans returned and the GI bill became effective, were left behind in taking advantage of the influx of students and the aid that they brought with them. Institutions that embraced these changing demographics prospered quicker in the same way that openness to gender and racial equality has propelled some institutions to the top of prospective student lists.

The reality that most boards are not very diverse in age, gender or race creates a challenge that must be overcome if a campus diversity mission is to be successfully advanced. First-order initiatives in tackling campus diversity and strengthening governance include working to diversify their own membership and establishing inclusive practices and diversity policies (*Boards and Institutional Diversity* | TIAA Institute, n.d.).

After serving on more than five higher education boards of trustees and working with boards across the business sector and education for more than 60 years, Dr. Altman concludes that the selection and appointment of Board of Trustees members often have no strategy, allowing faculty, the president, or even development officers to take part in the selection process. There are often gaps in skill sets, industry experience, and financial and political knowledge, but also cultural gaps, according to Dr. Altman (Alacbay, 2021). Many of the members who serve on boards do not have any educational experience other than attending the institution or one similar (Tierney, 2004). Boards that have diversity in gender, age, race, and ethnicity and more closely

match their student population are better able to align the institution's mission and strategy to serve those constituencies they serve.

Boards' essential tasks include stating higher education's overall goals, serving as a buffer between postsecondary institutions and the government, policy development, strategic planning, and making essential recommendations (Lowry, 2001; Minor, 2008; Morgan et al., 2021).

Though there has been a metamorphosis in the make-up, selection, and the powers these boards have, today's boards still function to support, guide and position the higher education institutions to succeed in the current educational environment (Chait, 1993; Hendrickson et al.; 2013; Kezar & Eckel, 2004).

Board of Trustees are charged with directing the mission, long-term planning, quality of education, and financial stability of their institution (AGB, n.d.; Barringer et al., 2020; Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Bjorklund & Green, 2012; Commission on Higher Education, 1971; Minor, 2008). Boards often appoint and collaborate with chancellors and presidents on critical choices, but they also have much influence over an institution's finances (AGB, n.d.; Barringer et al., 2020; Chait, 1993; Dean & Clark, 2019; Minor, 2008). State governments commonly control these boards, and those governments can have a financial hold over these institutions because of the state funding that supports these institutions (Dean & Clark, 2019; Minor, 2008). A good balance between the fiduciary and governing functions that boards have will bring about stable, effective, and efficient progress for an institution.

Composition of Governing Boards

Much of the information on Board of Trustee composition is contained in outdated studies or generalized from corporate and non-profit boards (Chait, 1993; Michael & Schwartz,

1999; Walker & Davidson, 2010). Many of the resources and research speaking to current issues and make-up of the Board of Trustees come from the Association of Governing Boards (AGB) in its Trusteeship journal or are generalized for corporate boards.

To be an effective board, members must understand the institution's mission and culture to serve it well (Chait, 1993; Commodore, 2017). The perception of board members seeing their campus as welcoming vs. the view of graduates/students is almost 40% less. This indicates a significant gap in the perception of the governing group in contrast to those being governed (AGB, 2021). A board must be in tune with the people, culture, and processes they are charged to govern.

The membership that comprises governing boards varies from board to board. At public, 4-year HIED institutions, the majority of governing board members are White, males over the age of 50 (Burns, 2021; Schmidt, 2014). The service of women and racial/ethnic minorities is just recently increasing and becoming more of a focal point in the governance of HIED institutions. HIED institutions need to consider looking at the make-up of their governing boards. The Association of Governing Board's recent report shows that board membership remains male-dominated, and over 80% are still White (AGB, 2021), not deviating much from a study in the late 1970s that pointed out the issue of the lack of diversity in boards (Paltridge, 1973). The average age of board members is still 76.5% of those over the age of 50 (Burns, 2021; Schmidt, 2014). Hence, there is a generational gap between the current board and the constituents they are there to represent and advocate for (Burns, 2021; Woodward, 2009). Generational legacies, homogeneity, and political/wealth-power have kept many governing boards looking the same

with a lack of women and people of color serving among their ranks. This does not reflect the changing demographics of the student bodies of many HIED institutions.

A 2021 report by the Association of Governing Boards shows a lack of diversity in race and gender among members of these boards (AGB, 2021). The report also shows that 77.3% of public institutions have male chairs running their boards while 74.8% of private institutions are male-led (Burns, 2021). Gender diversity followed by ethnic and cultural diversity must become a goal of governing boards if they wish to adequately represent their constituencies. Setting term limits and providing processes that assure new and diverse representation on these governing boards are strongly needed to provide good decision-making and diversity of thought (Anderson, 2019). From another viewpoint, only 37% of members of public HIED institution governing boards are women while 36% are represented on private HIED boards. These statistics are not parallel with the 59.5% of women students at HIED institutions (AGB, 2021). Many board members have been involved in various areas outside of education, such as business and industry, which can benefit the Board of Trustees (Barringer et al., 2020; Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Chait, 1993; Dean & Clark, 2019; Minor, 2008; Pusser et al., 2006).

Even though the original governing boards of many higher education institutions were often comprised of the uninformed, wealthy, influential, and politically connected, in recent decades, membership on governing boards has shifted slightly to those who understand higher education and its place in the American education system (Alacbay, 2021; Chait, 1993; Dean & Clark, 2019, Thelin, 2019a). A 2020 survey conducted by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges along with Gallup, Inc., found that when compared to corporate boards, these governing boards only spent about 100 hours annually on issues of trusteeship,

while corporate boards devoted over 240 hours annually to ensuring the success and well-being of the institution they were entrusted with (AGB, 2021). If this holds, then the Board of Trustees must focus more on executing their roles than just acting as figureheads for show (Commission on Higher Education, 1971). When boards have an array of members from various industries and backgrounds, it gives boards a more vital capacity to govern the complexities of the institutions they serve (Bjorklund & Green, 2012; Commission on Higher Education, 1971).

While Board of Trustee members' perception of their institution's openness to diversity often varies from that of the students and graduates, there remain only about 17% of people of color who comprise these public governing boards (AGB, 2021). In order to be an effective board, members must understand the institution's mission and culture to serve it well (Chait, 1993; Commodore, 2017). The term diversity has taken on a broader interpretation in our society in the last several decades, moving from race and gender to include sexual orientation, religion, and disability (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). There is little research on the presence of diversity on boards. This is just one example of the need to study diversity on boards and how the lack thereof can show the disconnect between those governing and those being governed.

Chun, 2017, posits that diversity on the Board of Trustees is needed to parallel the diversity of the student body on many campuses but especially PWIs. Chun illuminates the Alliance for Board Diversity (2017) research that supports the slow or sometimes lack of growth in diverse board membership in all areas, from corporations to education. Hence, addressing Board of Trustee diversity at PWIs in this study and exploring the influence of the undergraduate experience of those who serve will broaden the scope of this issue. Patton (2016) scrutinized the educational system that continues to function on the racist/White supremacist foundation and

only looked for those underrepresented groups to work hard to gain access and equity to places widely available to Whites.

Challenges to Governing Boards

Governing boards face numerous challenges. Beyond the internal issues that compromise governing boards' efficacy, external problems can provide challenging situations to which governing boards must rise. The most prevalent of these are funding and DEI. When a lack of funding necessitates changes that are not received well by either the faculty/staff or student body, questions will be asked, and explanations sought. Diversity, equity, and inclusion issues are also often a challenge to navigate either within the board itself or throughout the institution.

Funding

State governments often control decisions made by governing boards because they have a financial hold over these HIED institutions due to the state funding that supports these institutions (Bauer-Wolf, 2022; Dean & Clark, 2019; Minor, 2008). As state funding for institutions continues to decline, many HIEDs are forced to compensate by raising tuition and other fees for students (Bastedo et al., 2016; Serna & Weiler, 2016; Zaloom, 2020). Some HIED institutions have even been forced to make drastic changes such as the abrupt closing of Sweet Briar College against the outcries of faculty and alumni (Bauer-Wolf, 2022; Marcus, 2015). This in turn has led to an increase and added burden of student debt (Higher Education Boards Move from Ceremonial to Challenging, 2016; Marcus, 2015; State Higher Education Executive Office [SHEEO], 2021). This growing student debt crisis has been a hot topic in HIED, and some recently published works have even termed it a political agenda item (Bauer-Wolf, 2022; Hansen & Shaw, 2020; Zaloom, 2018).

Even in the latest elections on the federal and state level, conversations regarding the student debt crisis and its effects on the future of our economy were a focal point for political candidates such as Trump and Biden. Educational funding and federal debt relief have remained high on the list of debate issues. But with the COVID epidemic, many HIED institutions have seen federal funding flow in via relief packages, which has helped relieve some of the crisis for the institutions and students for now (Bauer-Wolf, 2022). As funding for higher education becomes more and more dependent on outside sources rather than federal or state legislative support, institutions rely more on student tuition, corporate grants, and alumni donations (State Higher Education Executive Office [SHEEO], 2021).

The diminishing enrollment and parallel increase in tuition costs due to lack of funding have forced many governing boards to adjust policies in several ways, i.e., admissions standards, teaching delivery methods, and housing costs (Teich, 2021; Bauer-Wolf, 2022). With many students not returning to campus and in-person classes becoming optional or switching to hybrid, the fiscal bottom line of institutions has been affected forcing governing boards to make a shift in strategy to keep the doors of the institution open (Teich, 2021; Iniguez, 2021; Rall, 2021). A diverse governing board can help make adjustments needed by having diversity in thought and experience that reflects the changing times and shift in the way education is delivered.

Diversity

Governing boards are still not representative of the bodies they serve. African American alumni from the PWI make up a small percentage of the total alumni population; therefore, seeing them in service on the governing boards is very unlikely unless there is a concerted effort to change that. In a recent report by the Association of Governing Boards (2021), the numbers

clearly show work needs to continue. The report shows only 30% of public HIED governing boards are diverse while 17% of private boards have some diversity. The report highlights the disproportionality of the 41% of public institutions' student bodies that are considered diverse and 34.8% at private institutions.

While diversity is a hot topic in the corporate world as well as the educational arena, not much research has been found to substantiate the need and value that an ethnically and racially diverse board brings to the organization (Hermalin, 2017; Higher Education Boards Move From Ceremonial to Challenging, 2016). An increase in female board members has shown a positive return for some corporations while the loss of gender diversity has had the opposite effect (Burns, 2021; Schmidt, 2014). This trend can be assumed to have the same effect on governing boards and HIED institutions (Why Diversity Matters on Your Board of Directors | Directorpoint, 2019). But there is a gap in the literature looking at racial and ethnic diversity among HIED institutions governing board members.

Having a diverse governing board sets the institution and those in charge up for good decision-making by minimizing bias and a single point of view by providing a broader perspective of culture, experience, financial background, and political perspective (Ehrenberg, 2005; Hermalin, 2017). This is critical in helping governing boards make decisions that affect the ever-changing demographics of the institution's workforce and student population (Ehrenberg, 2005; Why Diversity Matters on Your Board of Directors | Directorpoint, 2019).

According to the 2018 Spencer Stuart Board Index, which studies the S&P 500 boards, more than half the new board of directors joining these firms are women, indicating the shift in gender diversity in a male-heavy industry norm. Women and historically underrepresented

groups increased but there remains a deficit in the representation of African Americans (Schmidt, 2014; Stuart, n.d.). It can be hoped that this trend in gender diversity will flow into the HIED arena and that a focus on having African American representation will grow as issues of DEI remain at the forefront of society.

While there is limited research about the diversity of the Board of Trustees at PWIs, it is just as concerning that little is documented about the influence of the Board of Trustees' decisions on the policies, practices, and procedures that impact the experiences of students from diverse backgrounds on university campuses (Bjorklund & Green, 2012; Commodore, 2017; Michael & Schwartz, 1999; Rall et al., 2019).

According to Schwartz, (2010) Board of Trustees should reflect the population of the campus and the constituencies they represent (as cited in Bjorklund & Green, 2012). Unfortunately, many of the Board of Trustees of PWIs in the Southeast have not followed that trend, especially given the change in student population since the late 1960s (Auburn University, n.d.; Ghosh, 2021). Despite the AGB's recommendation that governors recruit and appoint board members with the "...ethnic diversity required to oversee today's increasingly complex and diverse higher education institutions and systems," governing boards remain 74.3 percent White at a time when the U.S. and postsecondary population looks vastly different (AGB, n.d.).

While Board of Trustee members' perception of their institution's openness to diversity often varies from that of the students and graduates, there remain only about 17% of people of color who comprise these public governing boards (AGB, 2021). This also supports the idea that the people in positions of power make institutional decisions based on their homogeneity. In some cases, system-level decisions that can have significant consequences on the functioning

and longevity of the institution are not always representative of those who will bear the brunt of the consequences of these decisions (Rall et al., 2019).

When addressing diversity concerns in their institutions or on their board, only 5% of the member respondents in an AGB report ranked it as an issue needing to be addressed (AGB, 2021). Although diversity has been elevated to the strategic goals of many higher education institutions, it remains just a topic of discussion versus demonstrating the actual number changes (Alumni Engagement Metrics Task Force, 2018; Bjorklund & Green, 2012; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993).

Current issues facing Governing Boards

Governing boards face countless issues that must be addressed to administer the proper guidance of HIED institutions, however, there are times when the board itself must be examined for failing to live up to its fiduciary responsibilities. Board members may be unqualified and generally receive little training. ABG offers training and guidelines for board members, but many governing boards do not take advantage of this resource and rely on the 'this is how we've always done it' mantra. This, coupled with the lack of consequences following these failures result in numerous issues compromising their efficacy. The recent exit of the president at Kentucky State University after the discovery of a \$20 million budget deficit has led to the state moving to replace members of the board due to their lack of oversight and regulation (Kelderman, 2022). Likewise, the University of South Carolina has been riddled with controversy over its board's hiring of the last president, his subsequent resignation, and now the threat of legislative removal of all of the trustees by 2023 (Donaldson, 2022). Issues that place governing boards and presidents on opposite sides generally cause upheaval and negative

consequences that are played out in the media and adversely impact the HIED institution. For example, Black female college presidents may feel as though they need to compromise their value system to accommodate more conservative trustees (Commodore, 2018). Lack of cooperation and genuinely shared ideology can complicate institutional dynamics, especially if the board is homogeneous and is not open to diverse perspectives.

Ideally, the governing board should represent the interest of the institution and all the stakeholders. “The board of a public institution is the duly constituted representative of the people and has a primary duty to the public” (Schmidt, 2014). Although in public institutions, the governor appoints members or trustees to their state’s HIED institutions in two-thirds of the states, Schmidt (2014) emphasizes that it is imperative for the governor, who is elected by the people, to ensure that the members of the governing board are responsible and accountable for their decisions. According to the Association of Governing Boards (AGB, 2022), private boards are self-perpetuating, which suggests the board collectively selects their successors. Furthermore, Schmidt states that the membership should reflect the state's public demographic breakdown. Schmidt contends that public servants should not be able to influence the education of the state's future citizens but rather an emphasis on trustees. Again, the University of South Carolina serves as an example of legislative action that could overhaul the membership of the governing board. The proposed action of 11 elected and 2 appointed members, down from 20, could cause a shift that removes diverse representation and place political influence at the head of the HIED institution (Donaldson, 2022).

While most governing boards are no longer just figureheads, some still are influenced by outside forces to direct the HIED institution toward specific outcomes (Barringer & Riffe, 2018).

When trustees come from industries that participate in areas of research, commonly the ability of the institution or specific researchers to have access to vital information or contacts in that industry is highly increased. Barringer & Riffe (2018) note the influence trustees can have on an institution, financially and otherwise, through their internal and external relationships.

Governing boards can be the leaders that provide equitable treatment of marginalized groups. Boards can do this by ensuring that policies and other institutional processes address and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) (Rall et al., 2019; Rall, 2021). In this new and changing environment, governing boards must not just focus on their fiduciary commitment to the institution but also open their eyes to the changing demographics of their constituencies. Additionally, there should be increased accountability for governing boards to attend to these issues, just as they should be held accountable for the aforementioned budgetary deficits. Building diversity goals into strategic plans and making them part of the mission of the institution in addition to the budgetary goals set, should bring about more focus and attention to attaining those goals than if these issues were absent from those strategic plans or missions.

Faculty, staff, administrators and students are no longer the same homogeneous bodies of the past but are changing in age, gender, ethnicity, culture, and focus (Burns, 2021; Woodward, 2009). With these changing factors, the governing boards must change alongside them to be able to properly advise, administer and govern institutions for the highest and best return on the investments made by all involved (Burns, 2021; Eckel & Trower, n.d.; Why Diversity Matters on Your Board of Directors | Directorpoint, 2019). This includes recognizing modern institutional goals and challenges and including them in strategic plans and missions.

Many of today's issues facing HIED governing boards are different from those faced by prior generations. Previously, HIED faced challenges such as student representation (Lozano & Hughes, 2017). In addition, funding issues and heightened awareness of the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have spotlighted boards to perform at higher levels than before. Due to changing demographics of our society, attention to DEI, the shift in who attends college, and what is being taught to prepare our citizens to function in this expanding world of technology forces HIED institutions and governing boards to evaluate their selection processes, member composition, and operational procedures (Anderson, 2019; Burns, 2021; Eckel & Trower, n.d.; Higher Education Boards Move From Ceremonial to Challenging, 2016; Why Diversity Matters on Your Board of Directors | Directorpoint, 2019).

The changing roles of HIED governing boards have become more visible as the higher education arena is shifting to the forefront of discussions among local, state, federal, and national agencies. Where once board members were figureheads, appointed by the governor to rubberstamp new policies, construction, and even presidential appointments, boards are now being challenged to step up and be held accountable for their actions or inactions (Barringer & Riffe, 2018; Bauer-Wolf, 2022; Marcus, 2015). Examples of boards having to answer hard questions have come at the University of Virginia in their attempted dismissal of their president or the Florida State hiring of a president reportedly at the direction of the governor (Bauer-Wolf, 2022; Marcus, 2015). These examples have brought attention to members of these governing boards and their decisions that have previously gone unnoticed. The internet, cell phones, and social media have played a significant role in visibility and attention to what governing boards do or don't do.

Social Media Influence

Social media and the news focus attention on HIED institutions and their governing boards, mainly when board members breach protocol and violate the trust that has been placed in them, frequently leaving the institution and its stakeholders to pay a heavy price. Declining enrollment, increased student debt, diminishing state funding, and more force governing boards to address any lousy publicity to minimize the adverse effects on the institution (Bauer-Wolf, 2022; Marcus, 2015; State Higher Education Executive Office [SHEEO], 2021). Questions of ethics and DEI focus on many issues facing HIED institutions and their governing boards. Social media and the continuing expansion of technology have placed governing boards in a glass box that has previously not existed. Many of their discussions, policy changes, and selection processes are seen and heard by their communities and constituencies. This increased transparency has placed added pressure on the board members to employ DEI initiatives and follow equitable guidelines to direct the HIED institution during these never-before-seen times.

More attention must be given to the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) of governing board members for them to represent the constituencies they serve equitably. It is no longer only the composition of specific stakeholder groups that fall under the watchful eye of our changing society. However, also the way learning and teaching are approached, even the materials that are used (issue with Critical Race Theory) and the subject matters addressed (racism), that focus on equity, inclusion, and a new sense of humanities vast scope of being (Iniguez, 2021).

Technological Influence

The influence of technology is also an issue facing governing boards. Policies that are created or changed along with decisions made by governing boards sometimes come to light

quicker through media coverage and the numerous social media platforms so prevalent today. The ever-changing technological arena is also forcing HIED institutions to adapt their teaching methodologies, ways of presentation, and what they are teaching to keep up with the new demands of society in the face of the dramatic shifts that have been experienced by our world i.e., the pandemic, social justice initiatives, and educational delivery methods (Iniguez, 2021; Teich, 2021). However, the exponentially changing world of technology has allowed HIED institutions to be at the forefront of research and how information is being delivered. Unfortunately, there remains some skepticism regarding whether this advancement adequately prepares graduates for what is needed when they enter society and become part of the workforce (Alam & Asimiran, 2021).

The hybrid world of online classes and meetings has shown that a college education can come in many forms and is not always necessary through in-person teaching. Some students are now choosing to learn online exclusively or are skipping school altogether to become entrepreneurs through digital delivery options such as Facebook or TikTok. This change in our society will continue to impact HIED institutions and their governing boards as they adjust to the new normal or post-pandemic life. Governing board members are now under more scrutiny through their own social media presence and have to be open to technological advances that are demanded by the newer generations of students and faculty. An investment in upgraded technology and providing more digital and asynchronous class offerings are part of the changing world that requires the old guard to adjust to the exciting new future ahead.

Diversity on the Board

Governing board members are in part responsible for directing the culture of college and university campuses, and as such must consider how specific institutional policies affect diversity, equity, and inclusion. While many administrators and members of governing boards are highly conscientious about the importance of maintaining an inclusive campus culture, it is not uncommon for these ideals to be neglected by trustees and board members who have other priorities or do not understand the nuances of establishing this type of environment (Chun, 2017). Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives have become increasingly common among HIED institutions, and governing boards play an essential role in ensuring that these initiatives are successfully implemented. However, it is unsurprising to find that diversity is less likely to be prioritized by governing boards that are themselves not particularly diverse. Furthermore, historically underrepresented individuals on governing boards that are predominantly White and/or male are likely to feel as though they do not have a voice and are less likely to bring up diversity-related concerns in this environment (Chun, 2017). This leaves out a vital voice representing an important group that needs to be heard.

While diversity among students has risen in recent years, diversity among administrative leadership and members of governing boards has not matched the changing demographics of attendees of these institutions. This has been widely criticized and shown to have a deleterious effect on historically underrepresented students, who are less likely to feel represented and are thus hindered in their academic pursuits (Bustillos & Siqueiros, 2018; Martinez-Acosta & Favero, 2018). The Association of Governing Boards determined that in 2017, only 23% of trustees at public universities in the United States and only 13% of trustees at private institutions

were racial or ethnic minorities. Furthermore, trustees were more than twice as likely to be male than female, and 69% were between the ages of 50 and 69, demonstrating a profound level of homogeneity (Chun, 2017). Additionally, the gross majority of administrators, faculty, and staff at HIED institutions are White, with only 26.8% of employees being racial or ethnic minorities compared to 45.2% of students, as of 2016 (Smith, 2019). Substantial research has indicated that successful diversity initiatives require an institutional commitment to inclusion at all levels, which requires not only a commitment by trustees to hire diverse candidates but also diversity among trustees themselves (Chun, 2017; Smith, 2019; Martinez-Acosta & Favero, 2018).

Another example of public discontent with the lack of administrative diversity comes from the Campaign for College Opportunity, made up of a coalition of students from various colleges and universities in California. The organization raises concerns that despite having made some progress, the governing boards that serve these institutions do not reflect the student population (Siqueiros, 2020). While women are reasonably well, if not equally, represented in the major governing bodies that serve California public universities, the study finds that appointees to these positions are disproportionately White. For example, only 20% of California State University (CSU) trustees appointed by the governor are Latinx and only one individual is Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander (AANHPI) despite these groups making up 47% and 17%, respectively, of the CSU student body (Siqueiros, 2020). Similarly, there is only one AANHPI gubernatorial appointee on the University of California (UC) Board of Regents despite 38% of the UC student body identifying as AANHPI (Siqueiros, 2020).

With this increased scrutiny, policies that affect underrepresented students, faculty, or staff, are now also being challenged (Marcus, 2015). In addition, governing boards are

questioned in their decision-making, such as the denial of tenure to a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist at North Carolina, Chapel Hill (Bauer-Wolf, 2022; Marcus, 2015). According to Choi (2019), academic freedom is the grail in which education thrives. Without it, Choi suggests it is an instrument with no purpose. Such incidents are easily picked up by the media and brought to light, begging not just the question of the decision made by the governing board but also examining the board's membership.

While the importance of diversity among academic governing board members has not been well studied, there is ample evidence from studies of nonprofit leadership that diversity has a positive impact on governing board outcomes. For example, female leaders have been shown to outperform men in facilitating an inclusive environment and establishing a democratic management style (Gupta, 2019). These findings demonstrate the importance of diversity as a self-sustaining process, pointing out that prevailing leadership norms are less conducive to progress towards diversity. Additionally, governing boards of nonprofit organizations with more women or a younger average age were found to be more engaged in fundraising and have higher levels of involvement and commitment to the organization (Osili, 2018).

Understanding Governing Board Service

To understand what it means to serve on PWI governing boards of HIED institutions as a Black alumnus, one has to first explore the paths to board membership, the roles of alumni members, and the barriers for Black alumni.

Paths to Board Service

The official pathway to board service can vary significantly by institution. Some board members are elected, while others are appointed, and the requirements vary significantly as

prescribed by law or policies of the state or the institution and/or its charter (Pusser et al., 2006; Kezar, 2016). The government (Governor and legislature) appoints the vast majority of board members at four-year public institutions (AGB, 2021). It can thus be difficult to ascertain how one might go about seeking a position on a governing board, as the process varies and may be at the discretion of government officials, university presidents, or current board members. However, there are some commonalities that may be taken into account and increase the likelihood of a particular individual being appointed, such as alumni status.

According to the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) board chair, Dr. Altman, the appointment of trustees at public higher education institutions is a highly political process (Alacbay, 2021). Alumni with strong ties in the state and industry many times are in better positions to serve than those individuals with no ties to the institution or the state. Governing board members' backgrounds vary from industry to industry with many of them having no background in education directly.

Board Service as Alumni Engagement

A 2005 study by Gaier explored the correlation between alumni engagement and the undergraduate experiences of the participants. The study hypothesized that the better a student's academic sense of accomplishment, the more likely he or she would participate in alumni activities after graduation. The study found that alumni are more likely to be engaged with their alma mater if they had a good undergraduate experience versus those who did not have a good experience (Gaier, 2005). The same conclusion was drawn by Weerts & Ronca (2009), indicating the connection of a positive undergraduate experience with future alumni service.

Therefore, it is crucial to explore student experiences at the PWI to understand their future service to their alma mater.

One of the best indicators of future financial support is the undergraduate experience (Day, 2018; Gaier, 2005). McClintock (2009 and 2009a) explains that institutions should make a more concerted effort to help current students understand that their connection to the institution does not stop after graduation and that alumni engagement allows their undergraduate experience to be what it was (Rau & Erwin, 2015). A good undergraduate experience is more likely to yield more engaged alumni upon graduation.

Undergraduate student experiences consist of academic and social realms. While academics are vital, their social development in this new domain of independence must be understood to tie it to their overall college success. Astin (1999) defined student involvement as the quantity and quality of a holistic college experience. When students participate in extracurricular activities, connect with faculty and staff on campus, and engage in the educational process, they will have more significant personal development and overall learning (Astin, 1999; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993). When students are involved, succeeding in their academics, and building social networks, they can walk away from their undergraduate experience with a sense of satisfaction (Rau & Erwin, 2015; Weerts & Ronca, 2008). Hence, according to Gaier (2005) and Miller and Casebeer (1990), this should lead to alumni engagement on some level after graduation.

The amount of involvement in academics, the quality of relationships with professors and staff, and participation in academic activities are all characterized by an academic experience that, if positive, will add to a favorable imprint on students (Day, 2018). In the same way,

according to Day (2018), extracurricular activities are social experiences such as involvement in fraternities/sororities, civic/political/social clubs, or sports that also contribute to a positive student experience. Any negative or challenging experiences can shift that imprint and cause a desire to disconnect from the college experience.

Black Students' Experiences at PWIs And Connection to Alumni Engagement

Given the rising African American student population at PWIs and the current outrage from African American students speaking out against unpleasant campus environments, it is necessary to seriously evaluate these undergraduate education experiences (Dancy et al., 2018). A deeper understanding of African American students' undergraduate experiences can assist faculty and practitioners in determining how to use such experiences to obtain alumni support.

Davis et al. (2004) have found that PWIs often devote intensive efforts to historically underrepresented student recruitment but find that subsequent retention is a significant problem. In Predominantly White Institutions, 70% of African American students do not complete baccalaureate education compared to 20% of those from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (de Brey et al., 2019). This points to the challenges African American students face at PWIs that do not correlate with those of HBCUs.

In one study, African American students spoke of racial microaggressions in academia and social areas during the undergraduate attendance at PWIs during focus group interviews at three institutions (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Despite their prevalence, racial microaggressions, or unconscious and subtle manifestations of racism, are rarely examined (Hollingsworth et al., 2020; Sue, 2010).

Institutions of higher learning must make an effort to recognize, educate and change the climate of discrimination, microaggressions, and institutionalized racism to allow all minoritized groups (African Americans and non-Eurocentric people) to thrive and feel like the playing field is level (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hollingsworth et al., 2020; Neville et al., 2004). If this can be achieved, then there is a hope "that students undergo academic and intellectual development, become more involved in a healthy socialization process, feel more committed to attaining a college degree, and develop a sense of belonging at and commitment to their institutions." (Cabrera et al., 1999).

African American students face the same stressors as their White counterparts, such as leaving home, making new friends, and performing academically, but they also face some that are uniquely theirs (Neville et al., 2004). African American students have their own additional race-related stressors that others do not face, such as not feeling like they belong and having adverse effects on their academic and social development (Cabrera et al., 1999). This unique experience differs from the majoritarian view prevalent at PWIs and must be examined to bring about an understanding of the responses these underrepresented students exhibit as alumni. Hearing their counterstories and interpreting their responses to the outcomes of the challenging environments they encountered allows for the possibility of change for future generations.

Positive undergraduate experiences at PWIs are essential for African American students' sense of belonging, connections with classmates, instructors, staff, and capacity to graduate (Daniels-Osaze, 2016; Weerts & Ronca, 2008). Supportive connections with institutional leaders can have a psychological and physical impact on African American college alumni (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Davis et al. (2004) discovered that alumni who could recollect at least one

individual affiliated with the school who was interested in them were more satisfied with their educational experience and likely to engage with the institution after graduation.

Race plays a significant role in understanding student experiences on campus, particularly for students from underrepresented groups at PWIs (Hotchkins & Dancy Johnson, 2017; Karkouti, 2016; Marcus et al., 2003; Neville et al., 2004; 2017 Schwitzer et al., 1999). The experiences of African American students attending PWIs can differ significantly from those of White students (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). According to the findings of Reid and Radhakrishnan's (2003) study, Non-White students on campus exhibited a higher level of negativity in their opinions of racial issues than White students.

Several factors can contribute to African American students not successfully adjusting to college life and persisting on to graduation, unlike their White counterparts. Microaggressions, which can be "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional that harm the marginalized person," can strongly affect African American students on these campuses (Sue, 2010). Another factor is the feeling of isolation from other African American students, and a feeling of lack of belonging makes it hard for these students to navigate their higher education path successfully and with a sense of positivity (Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017; Loo and Rolison, 1986). Often hostile campus racial climates include the entire institutional environment that extends beyond college classrooms into residential domiciles, social organizations, and work situations (Harper et al., 2009; Hollingsworth et al., 2020; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017).

Marcus et al. (2003) conclude that schools are no different from the broader population in their study on the impression of racism on campus. The findings demonstrate that African

American men are more affected by racism than African American women. Racism was viewed more strongly by African American students of both sexes than by White students. According to the report, African American students thought professors were more prejudiced than their counterparts (Marcus et al., 2003).

African American students' involvement in identity-based organizations that speak to their culture or history and allow them to socialize with people they have more in common with than not is how African American students can adjust to college life (Schwitzer et al., 1999). Organizations such as NSBE (National Society for African American Engineers), NPHC (National Panhellenic Council – including the Divine 9 – African American fraternities and sororities), and the Black Student Union (BSU) provide a sense of community and comradery that gives African American students a sense of belonging (Davis et al., 2004). Despite these outlets for fellowship, there still remains the threat of feeling isolated when attending classes or university functions that cater to the majority (Karkouti, 2016). Often an African American student will find himself or herself the only person of color in a class or activity. Then situations occur where they are looked at for the 'African American representative or viewpoint' or speak for an entire race. This is where African American students often incur microaggressions that compound the ever-present isolation already felt (Neville et al., 2004). These incidents can contribute to a negative view of their undergraduate experience and cause a diminished desire to be connected to the institution in the future (Rau & Erwin, 2015).

The impact of various factors on African American students' experiences and their relation to future alumni engagement has not been studied enough. Often, the financial impact alumni have is the only avenue that is considered engagement (Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins,

2003) but rarely do researchers look at specifically their engagement through service to their alma mater, such as on the Board of Trustees or the Alumni Association Board. When alumni see themselves represented in the institution's branding, it often leads to increased alumni engagement. This engagement can come in the form of service to the institution and involvement in programs through mentorship or other advisory capacities, which opens the way for lifelong alumni engagement, frequently leading to increased financial support for the institution (Cowell-Lucero, 2021, Drezner, 2018). We understand that alumni financial contributions, regardless of race, are vital (Cohen, 2006; Curti & Nash, 1965; Drezner, 2008; Drezner, 2009) but looking at the impact of their service and the time alumni give back to the institution without financial ties also warrants a second look.

Black Alumni Engagement: Why Do They Engage and Barriers Faced

Despite the AGB's recommendation that governors recruit and appoint board members with the "...ethnic diversity required to oversee today's increasingly complex and diverse higher education institutions and systems," governing boards remain 74.3 percent White at a time when the U.S. and postsecondary population looks very different (AGB, n.d.). This disparity in representation must be addressed to ensure equity in leadership and to give a voice to all students.

Because most Predominantly White Institutions were created as White, male-only institutions, this foundation has guaranteed a homogeneous board membership for years (Alacbay, 2021; Harrison, 1995; Thelin, 2019a). Only after the admittance of African American students, who then became alumni, is there now an opportunity to diversify these boards (Morgan et al., 2021; Walker & Davidson, 2010). Nevertheless, even that seems to be a

challenge as the bureaucratic process, especially in the Southeast, where boards are still very White and male-dominated (AGB, 2021; Harrison, 1995; Walker & Davidson, 2010). As a part of this effort to diversify boards, increased insight into the experiences of African American alumni engagement is essential. African American alumni engagement at PWIs has not been studied as in-depth as philanthropy but can take much of its basis in the study of why alumni choose to return to their alma mater (Cohen, 2016; Curti & Nash, 1965; Gaier, 2005; Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003; Holloman et al., 2003).

Even though there has been an increase in African American students attending college, the experience of African American college alumni has been ignored in the literature (Holloman et al., 2003). As African American students identify as alumni stakeholders at PWIs, they encounter problems that arise within the PWI's setting (Neville et al., 2004). While both internal and external variables influence how all alumni connect with their alma mater, these variables have a more significant impact on African American students, many of whom are first-generation college students who find the majoritarian institutional culture alien (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Davis et al., 2004). A history of racial persecution, poverty, and lack of program preparation, along with institutional elements like a mostly White social culture and the idiosyncrasies of academics, can create a hostile atmosphere (Davis et al., 2004).

African American graduates who attended PWIs and had tumultuous connections with their various alma maters suffer emotional ties (Schwitzer, 1999; Sue, 2010). Many African American graduates from PWIs in the 1950s-1980s hang on to memories that would prevent them from actively engaging with the university (Williams et al., 2014). Even after this, some students who report having a terrible undergraduate experience want to be more involved as

graduates (Neville et al., 2004; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003) often to help current students navigate the campus environment successfully.

Research on African American alumni service to their alma mater that is not focused on philanthropy is scarce in higher education literature. This shortage is especially apparent when it comes to research on African American alumni who attended a PWI. The historically Black colleges and universities community have been the site of a vast amount of research on African American alumni and philanthropy (Cohen, 2006; Daniels-Osaze, 2016; Drezner, 2008; 2009; Holloman et al., 2003).

Many African American graduates of PWIs receive their diplomas and decide to never look back at their alma mater. They have achieved their goals, navigated the challenges of a predominantly White environment, and are now ready to forge forward without looking back at where they came from (Harper et al., 2009). This is where research on African American alumni engagement is merited. Exploring why these African American alumni engage can clarify the difference between those who serve and those who choose not to serve.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

The current narrative inquiry study aims to understand the story of Black alumni on governing boards at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Governing bodies in higher education (HIED) institutions play a critical role in the policymaking and governing of schools (Tucker, 2021). They provide oversight regarding how institutions are run and help steward an institution towards its mission and vision. Moreover, governing boards assist the institution during crisis management; they anticipate the problems an institution may face by remaining vigilant in their oversight roles (Davis, 2021). As discussed in Chapter Two, governing bodies play a crucial role in the management and running of higher institutions. Institutions with diverse governing board membership in cultural background, age, gender, and race are considered benchmarks of the success of governing bodies (Pusey-Reid et al., 2022). However, there is limited research investigating the involvement of Black alumni on PWI college and university governing boards. Accordingly, the present study will investigate diversity in governing boards specifically as it pertains to the experiences of Black alumni serving on the board of trustees at PWIs and their paths to board service. To ensure cultural sensitivity and engagement with personal tensions related to race and racialized and racist phenomena, the researcher embraces vulnerability, respecting and protecting the participants (Dillard, 2000; Tillman, 2002). This chapter will provide the research methodology applied to collect data, the research design employed, the method of choosing the participants, the study setting, and the data analysis methods employed in chapter 4. Furthermore, the chapter will provide the ethical considerations made and how the researcher ensured that all the considerations were followed.

Qualitative Method

The researcher utilized qualitative methods of research to gain insight into the narrative of Black alumni on governing boards at PWIs. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the path whereby Black alumni of PWIs assume positions on Boards of Trustees?
2. What can we learn from Black alumni on governing boards at PWIs that will help inform the success of future graduates?

The qualitative narrative method was chosen for this study to help the researcher understand the perspectives of Black alumni on PWIs governing boards. Snyder (2019) notes that qualitative research ensures that the researcher understands the phenomenon being studied. A qualitative approach to the study also results in a concise and clear explanation of the phenomenon under study. Qualitative analysis of a problem provides a researcher with deeper insight into the phenomenon being investigated as compared to other methods of research where only the justification of the problem is provided. Flick (2018) notes that qualitative approaches to research provide the researcher with the chance to “experience the experience” and in so doing acquire the participant’s unique perspective. In this case, the researcher will gain insight into Black alumni’s perspectives on how to assume positions on Board of Trustees at PWIs and what it means to have Black alumni in these positions. Furthermore, the researcher, through qualitative research methodology from an endarkened feminist epistemology viewpoint, can understand the participants’ feelings by amplifying their voices and experiences (Dillard, 2000). Qualitative research methodology involves gathering data through interviews, interpreting the data, establishing theory and making sense of data gathered to address the research questions.

Richards & Hemphill, (2018) notes that using a qualitative approach to understand participant's experiences within the context of an issue is the most appropriate way.

Narrative Inquiry Research Design

The narrative inquiry research method was utilized to gain insight into the experience of Black students in PWIs who become Black alumni that have been appointed to the governing boards of PWIs. The phrase "experience the experience" is used in this study to show the rationale for using the narrative inquiry method as the primary research method (Hotchkins, 2017). The narrative inquiry method of research aims at understanding and making meaning to the experiences of different participants in the study through a narrative. Unlike traditional narrative analysis, which focuses on restoring and identifying storytelling elements, this study will take a pivot toward an analysis of narratives. In the current study, the narrative inquiry method will be used to gain an understanding and insight of the narrative of Black alumni who go on to serve on governing boards at their alma mater PWIs.

Traditional qualitative methods such as phenomenology and ethnography have been used to understand different perspectives of numerous demographic groups. For instance, phenomenology has been used as a method in which the researcher understands individuals and participants by entering into the field of research and getting the perception of those in the field on the research topic (Cropps, 2020). Similarly, ethnography has been used to understand the social organization of activities of a group of participants within a given setting; these have been expressed in different ways, including seeing the society from the actor's point of view. These research methods are closely related to what Max Weber described as *verstehen* or empathic understanding (Tucker, 2021). Weber notes that such approaches enable the researcher to

understand an individual's behaviors and get their perspectives. However, these approaches face shortcomings such as social integration, wherein the researcher is required to set aside all the pre-judgments to understand the participants in the study.

Gadamer (1975) made it clear that research is not simply a method of understanding but an attempt to clarify the conditions in which understanding occurs. Gadamer (1975) agrees that in the process of understanding and getting perspectives, there are conditions that exist that cannot be assumed. Gadamer's (1975) research perspectives will be used in this study, however through the lens of Tillman (2002), focusing on *amplifying* participant voices rather than *giving* them an opportunity to share their experiences. These include prejudices and fore-meanings in the researcher's or interpreter's mind, depending on the case. James (2019) candidly emphasizes the influence of a researcher's prejudices and preconceptions; he notes that there is no genuinely innocent scientist and that all the narratives begin in the researcher's mind, which may influence the observations in the field. Researchers in narrative inquiry methods often find themselves in dual roles of experiencing the experience and being part of the whole experience. The duality of the roles makes researchers fully involved in the research with the participants and, at the same time, creates distance from the participants. Grey, (2020) notes that narratives serve as a point of reference; they help the researcher imagine what an experience felt like, which informs how it might be studied and presented in a research context. Experience consists of the stories people live, and in telling and narrating these stories and life experiences, they reaffirm, modify and create new ones. These assumptions that people, by their default nature, lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives are also shared by Johnson, (2019). The authors note that if people naturally lead storied lives and understand their world using narratives, then it would be equally fair to

apply a narrative perspective in a research setting. Hence the study will utilize narrative inquiry as to its primary research design with the aim of placing meaning around the narratives of Black students' experiences at PWIs who sit on Board of Trustees and what it represents to have Black representatives in the top decision-making organs in higher institutions.

Methodological Guidelines and Implications for Research

The narrative method of inquiry contains many complexities compared to other methods of research; accordingly, Rosiek & Snyder, (2020) provided guidelines to be followed by the researcher. Two guidelines will be provided in the study to help the researcher; the first guideline provided includes the awareness of the researcher that they are in the middle of a nested set of stories that involves ours and theirs (O'Grady & O'Toole, 2018). Researchers in narrative inquiry research need to understand that they are in the middle of a nested set of stories, including their own stories and that of the participants. Drawing upon Tillman's (2002) *Culturally sensitive research approaches: An African American perspective*, emphasizing that the goal of this study is not to pit "our" versus "their" narratives in a competitive manner. Instead, the research aims to embrace and honor all participants' voices, incorporating their diverse perspectives into the study. The major goal is to find connections between these stories and narratives, allowing for the development of meaningful interpretations that offer a variety of perspectives. Researchers may transit between numerous traditions as they delve into these narratives, showing the interdisciplinary character of narrative inquiry. It is therefore essential to understand that narrative inquiry is inherently interdisciplinary in that it runs across different divides and traditions (Lynch, 2019). Researchers should ensure that the data inquiry process is fair and does not choose one discipline over the other but rather incorporate all the narratives.

Understanding one's personal views and biases is an important step in incorporating all the narratives in a study, Maxwell notes that one should not avoid their understanding of their problem but rather embrace their understanding from their experiences. Maxwell (1996), in his study, invited students to mine their experiences, as there is potential 'gold'; hence one should often dig in and find meanings in their experiences which they can incorporate in their narrative inquiry study. However, he additionally notes that the inclusion of subjectivity does not give a license to uncritically impose assumptions and values on the research. Still, we must raise the personal experience above them and use it as part of the inquiry process.

The second guideline used in the study is that narrative research should address the purpose while recognizing that the purpose may change with different stories from different participants (Coby, 2022). Narratives are an essential aspect of uplifting people's perspectives as experiences and continue to be the starting point of all inquiry of social issues (Dillard, 2000). It is also important to note that participants view these stories and experiences as intimate; it is essential that the researcher presents their case in a manner that conveys the impact of these experiences on the participant (Dillard, 2000; Spencer, 2022). Accordingly, this study looked to ensure that participants felt comfortable and felt their voices were uplifted when discussing their experiences with the researcher.

Research Sample

The study utilized purposive and convenience sampling as a method of participant recruitment. The convenience sampling method allows the researcher to retrieve data from conveniently available respondents, while purposive sampling allows the researcher to choose individuals who can provide in-depth and detailed information about the topic (Sedgwick, 2013).

Cresswell (2017) notes that purposive and convenience sampling is appropriate for this type of research as it allows the researcher to get an in-depth analysis of participants in the study. The study collected data from Black alumni from PWIs serving on the same PWI's board of governors. The key to choosing this method for the study was that these two groups of participants were in the middle of what was being investigated in the current study (Cropps, 2020). They were selected to ensure that the narrative of how it felt being in an institution being represented by Black alumni on the board of governors felt and what sitting on the board of trustees meant for the individuals. In this case, the convenience sampling method involves delimiting the study to the Black alumni from PWIs serving on the same PWI's board of governors, while the purposeful sampling method involves recruiting participants through within the identified population, described below.

The researcher recruited 10-12 Black alumni who are serving or have served on the board of trustees at PWIs in the Southeastern United States. The researcher identified Black alumni serving on the Board of Trustees of higher education institutions through university websites and reached out to them via emails provided through the websites or their LinkedIn profiles. Participants in the study were briefed on what the study was and what the researcher aimed to obtain from them and were under no obligation to participate.

Research Setting

The setting for the study was virtual using the Zoom teleconferencing technology. Chosen participants were prompted to choose days and times that were convenient for them and the interviews took place on those dates and at those times. The interviews were conducted in the researcher's home office.

Data Collection

Before conducting data collection for the study sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the research (Mertova & Webster, 2019). IRB ensures that the research is done ethically and humanely and is a requirement for all the studies using human beings as data sources (Settles, 2018). After receiving the approval, requests were sent to potential participants through emails. Purposive sampling was used so only individuals who met the selection criteria were informed about and asked to participate in the study. Potential participants were briefed on the study and informed what the study aimed to achieve and how the researcher aimed to achieve it.

Demographics forms were also utilized in the study; participants were provided with demographic questionnaires. Demographic questions in qualitative research allow the researcher to gain background information on their participants (Stephens & Shimada, 2021). The forms provide demographic information on race, gender, and ethnic background; the researcher will utilize the demographics forms and provide the researcher with a description of the participants.

The study looks at Black alumni serving on boards of trustees of PWIs, hence the demographic forms will allow the researcher to screen for the intended participants for the study. After confirmation of participation, the researcher scheduled interviews for each participant; each participant was provided with 1-2 hours during which time they were asked open-ended questions about their experiences leading up to and with the process of being appointed to governing boards of HIED institutions. The researcher was guided by a set of prepared questions that were aimed at guiding the narrative inquiry process. The researcher conducted the interviews

in an interactive manner that looked to engage the participants in having a narrative discussion rather than having a question-and-answer session with the study participants.

Interviews

Interviews were used as one of the primary sources of data in this study; the researcher conducted interviews with study participants through the Zoom platform to accommodate the tight schedules of the participants (Rana & Culbreath, 2019). Each interview was allocated between 1-2 hours depending on the participant's preference and availability. Before scheduling interviews, participants were required to sign consent forms and return them via DocuSign; participants were once again briefed of the risks that came with the participation in the study and it was confirmed that they were comfortable with interviews being recorded at the beginning of the session. The voluntary nature of participation is emphasized, and participants are well-briefed about the study's aims (Tillman, 2002).

The interviews began with the participants describing their life stories and how it was for the participants to go to schools predominantly consisting of Whites, and how it has been different for them to be African American during their post-collegiate years. The question was chosen to drive the interview into a narrative inquiry session where participants provide their life stories which can be used in the study to collect data (Ford, 2020). During these sessions, the researcher's main intention was to capture and elevate the participants' thoughts on how it feels to have Black alumni on the institution's board of governors. Each interview was recorded via zoom, and the participants were informed of the decision to record the zoom meeting. The interviews were recorded and transcribed via Otter.ai to help the researcher with the analysis of the interviews. The recordings were sent to each participant 48 hours after each interview as a

means of member checking; this was done to ensure that the data were accurately captured and could be analyzed in the next step (Candela, 2019). During the interview process, the researcher took field notes, noting participants' impressions and expressions while conducting interviews; this was done to reduce bias.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis is often an ongoing process during and after the interview sessions (Nardo, 2021). Each interview was recorded to ensure accuracy and to ensure that the process of data analysis is smooth and the themes, perceptions and views of the participants can be collected and analyzed after interviews are completed (Monson et al., 2021). The recorded zoom meetings were played while the researcher looked to identify key themes in the process; the names and identities of the participants were hidden before transcription of the interview contents to ensure anonymity and reduce potential biases in data analysis. Transcribed interviews establish rigor in data analysis, after transcriptions, the researcher went through each transcription in its entirety noting down key narratives from the narratives. The interview transcripts were uploaded to NVivo software, NVivo is a statistical software analysis program used in qualitative research methods. NVivo software as noted by Maher et al, (2018) is used in analyzing unstructured text, audio, and image data. The interview recordings in the study will be uploaded to NVivo software to allow for thematic analysis of the study. Themes were identified from the study and coded using axial to allow for easier analysis. Coding is the analytical process of categorizing data, hence the process entails gathering related topics into codes that represent the themes (Parameswaram et al, 2020). Axial coding was chosen for this research as it allowed the researcher to reveal codes and categorize codes.

After noting down key narratives and similarities in the interviews, the researcher processed meanings and perceptions by utilizing axial coding (Taylor et al., 2019). Using the NVivo analysis software, the themes in the study were analyzed. The researcher followed the following steps in analyzing data familiarization of the data collected, generating initial codes, searching for themes from the narratives, reviewing themes, and defining themes (Leigh, 2019). The researcher notes that the data analytic process is iterative and redefined codes as themes emerged during the analysis. The researcher utilized codes consistent with the theoretical frameworks of the study to ensure that the data analysis was rooted in theory and unbiased. The researcher noted the results from the data analysis process and presented the research results in the next chapter.

Researcher Positionality

In this narrative inquiry study, it is crucial to acknowledge and address my positionality as the researcher, as it may influence the analysis process and interactions with participants. The methodologies employed in narrative inquiry emphasize the importance of recognizing and incorporating the researcher's experiences and biases to maintain transparency and authenticity in the research process (Lessard et al., 2018; Hadon et al., 2021; Rosiek & Snyder, 2020). As a bi-racial researcher, my identity and background shape my perspective and understanding of race and racialized phenomena. I am not 100% Black, meaning my experiences differ from most Black students and alums, but I am often treated like I do not have a White-Eurocentric background. My upbringing was predominantly in a White-European environment, influencing my comfort level. Despite being able to navigate Black culture, it has been a learned

environment for me. While I have picked up elements of the culture, I continue to educate myself about its history and complexities and often find myself living Black experiences.

Embracing vulnerability is a fundamental aspect of my positionality, allowing me to acknowledge my biases and potential limitations as a researcher. By openly acknowledging my background and experiences, I aim to invite credibility and trustworthiness in the research process. Additionally, I must respect and protect the participants' voices and experiences as I understand the importance of creating a safe and inclusive space for participants to share their narratives without feeling coerced or influenced freely. Throughout this study, I was aware of my role as a researcher and a participant in the narrative-sharing process. I could draw upon my experiences of representation in higher institutions and being an African American at a PWI. As I conducted the interviews, I reflected on my undergraduate years, recognizing the similarities and differences with the participants' experiences.

I must approach the analysis with reflexivity, acknowledging that my experiences and perspectives may intersect with the participants' stories. I aimed to bridge my personal experiences with the narratives shared by participants, seeking to understand their perspectives while remaining sensitive to the uniqueness of their experiences. By recognizing and engaging with my positionality, I strive to conduct a robust and insightful narrative inquiry that can contribute to exploring an "endarkened feminist epistemology." and add to the culturally sensitive research available. I value the voices and experiences of the participants and endeavor to produce research that fosters increased representation, equity, and respect within higher education institutions.

Ethical Considerations

Maintaining ethicality in research is important and fundamental (Jeffrey, 2019). The Belmont report provides important guidelines for conducting research studies. It provided researchers with three basic ethical principles that should be followed when conducting a research, respect for persons, beneficence and justice (Sims, 2010). The first ethical principle highlighted in the Belmont report was respect for persons. Here, the report noted that people are autonomous and are entitled to have their own opinions and choices. The report thus indicates that people's opinions and demands should be respected; hence participants in the study were informed of the study purpose and potential risks and allowed to withdraw their participation at any time (Paxton, 2020). The second ethical principle identified by the report is beneficence, where it is noted that people should be treated in an ethical manner not only through respecting their opinions but also by protecting them from harm. The report notes that it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the benefits are maximized and risks are minimized (Adayashi et al., 2018). The last principle identified in the report is justice, which requires that participants should not be chosen due to their position of vulnerability rather than their connection to the problem. For the present study, participants were chosen due to their connection to the problem.

A primary ethical concern for this study was participant confidentiality; the researcher informed the participants that their identities would be made anonymous during and after the research study period (Torrissen & Stickley, 2018). Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants to ensure their identities were kept anonymous (Mertova & Webster, 2019). Only willing participants were chosen for the research; those that were not willing to participate in the study were excluded from the study. All participants were informed that their participation was

voluntary and no incentive was provided to the participants. IRB approval was sought as a requirement to conduct studies concerning human beings as a source of data and no data was collected prior to obtaining IRB approval for the study (Wei, 2021). The participants were informed of the research aims and objectives and consent forms were provided to them and read before the interviews to ensure that they understood what the study entailed.

Summary

The study investigates the narratives of Black alumni serving on governing boards at PWIs. The study utilized a narrative inquiry methodology to uplift and recognize perspectives and experiences of participants on the research topic. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative method that is useful in capturing the participant's experiences and perspectives of a phenomenon. Through these methods, the researcher experienced a first-person account that was fundamental in shedding light on the representation of Black students in PWIs. The study collected narratives from Black alumni appointed to PWIs governing boards related to their path to board service and potential implications for advancing the success of current culturally diverse students. The study utilized interviews where each participant was provided with one-to-two-hour sessions to provide their narratives, they were conducted through zoom meetings to allow students and Black alumni the flexibility to conduct the interviews. The researcher provided their personal experience in the research to pave the way for the participants to provide their narratives freely. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to make data analysis and thematic analysis easier. Each interview was analyzed more than two times in its entirety coded, and themes were grouped to help the researcher with data analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

Though many higher education institutions are increasingly interested in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), as evidenced by the growing number of colleges and universities redesigning their statements and missions, recently the narrative and legislation around DEI is shifting. Specifically, according to a bill that Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed into law, as of April 31, 2023, Florida state public schools and universities are not permitted to fund diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives (News Service of Florida, 2023). At the time of the participant interviews, the Florida law against DEI initiatives had not been implemented nor signed into law, therefore the findings do not reflect the outcomes of this Florida law. None of the participants also serve on the Board of Trustees in Florida. Despite this attack on DEI initiatives in Florida, many other states are still promoting DEI initiatives and further studies are recommended based on the recent political shift in DEI funding (Patton et al., 2019).

Diversity must permeate the highest levels of colleges and universities because the literature has shown that diversity brings better outcomes through creativity and equity. One mechanism to increase the DEI on college campuses is through diversification of the Board of Trustees. Boards of Trustees are generally the highest authority in the structure of a HIED institution and are tasked with higher-level decision-making responsibilities instead of having a significant involvement in specific details of the educational process (Loss, 2022). Despite their vast influence, there is relatively little research into the subject of the composition and pathways to governing boards in public PWI HIED institutions, leaving a substantial gap in the literature related to how these entities drive institutional culture as well as concerning the experiences of underrepresented individuals serving as trustees in diverse circumstances (Rall et al., 2021).

Chapter 4 presents findings of interviews with 12 Black alumni serving on the Board of Trustees at PWIs. As detailed in Chapter 3, I selected a qualitative approach for this study as the best method to explore the phenomenon. I served as the primary instrument of data collection using virtual, in-depth interviews to explore the phenomenon of the pathways for underrepresented alumni to the Board of Trustees at PWIs. Data for the study resulted from interviews between the participants and me, as each Black Board of Trustee member shared their personal experiences and narratives.

Chapter 4 will introduce each of the participants and present the research findings. During this discussion, I will illuminate the reasons the participants chose their respective PWIs and their experiences while attending their undergraduate institutions. Then, I will examine the pathways the participants took to reach the Board of Trustees at their institutions. Finally, I will examine the reasons the participants provided for choosing to serve on the Board of Trustees.

Meet the Participants and the PWIs

In this section, I will introduce the participants and give background information about their respective PWIs. Table 1 includes an overview of the participants' demographic profiles.

Table 1*Participants Demographic Characteristics*

Participant	Undergrad Major	Highest Degree Completion	Current Occupation	Years on Board of Trustees	PWI ID
Brandon	Chemistry	M.D., MBA	Internal Physician	5	Gibson College
Myra	Education	Masters	Retired	Less than 1	Gibson College
Fred	Political Science	J.D.	Attorney	11	Gibson College
Beth	Political Science	J.D.	Attorney	10	Appletree Univ.
Alex	Education	B.S.	Vice President	6	Appletree Univ.
Randy	Marketing	B.S.	Pastor	12	Appletree Univ.
Lloyd	Finance	B.S.	President, CEO	Less than 1	Appletree Univ.
Clarence	City Planning	Masters	Executive Director	2	Appletree Univ.
Bill	Industrial Technology	Masters	Retired	Less than 1	Bates College
Dorothy	Healthcare Management	J.D.	Attorney	20	Davis Univ.
James	Scientific field of study*	Ph.D.	Retired	35	Grant Univ.
Kerry	Political Science	J.D.	Vice President	14	Greener College

*Note: *James's field of study has been redacted because it is specialized enough that its inclusion would allow for their identification and be contrary to their confidentiality.*

Gibson University

Gibson University is in the northeastern United States. It has approximately 34,000 students, with 73% of the student body being undergraduates. The undergraduate enrollment by ethnicity includes 71% White, 6% Black or African American, 9% Asian, 4% Hispanic, and 4%

two or more races. The school boasts over 330,000 living alumni, hailing from all 50 states and internationally. Its athletic teams participate in the NCAA Division I. Three participants (Brandon, Myra, and Fred) serve on the Board of Trustees at Gibson University.

Brandon

Brandon attended Gibson University in the decade following the Civil Rights Movement when new doors were being opened for Black students. Brandon “went into college knowing [they] wanted to be a physician, but not knowing how to become a physician” (Brandon). Brandon majored in chemistry and earned MBA and M.D. degrees after leaving Gibson University. They currently practice as an internal physician at a preeminent teaching hospital in the southern United States. At the time of the interview, Brandon had served on Gibson University’s Board of Trustees for five years.

Myra

Myra began attending Gibson University one month after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. They described Gibson University’s administration as participating in a frenzied search to identify Black students to enroll in the university. Myra enrolled in Gibson University because of these initiatives. Myra majored in Elementary Education at Gibson University, earned a master’s degree, spent their career as an elementary education teacher and administrator, and recently retired. At the time of the interview, Myra had spent less than one year on Gibson University’s Board of Trustees and was still learning the intricacies of being a Board member.

Fred

Fred attended Gibson University less than five years after the Civil Rights Movement. They aspired to become an attorney and majoring in Political Science. After graduating from

Gibson University, Fred worked at a large manufacturing corporation before pursuing their J.D. degree. They reported, “Coming out of law school, I got several offers from law firms and government agencies, one [of which] was the U.S. Customs Service.” They pursued governmental law and are currently practicing as an attorney. At the time of the interview, Fred had served on Gibson University’s Board of Trustees for 11 years.

Appletree University

Appletree University is located in the southern United States. It has approximately 31,000 students with 79% of the student body being undergraduates. The undergraduate enrollment by ethnicity includes 78% White, 5% Black or African American, 2.5% Asian, and 4% Hispanic students. The school boasts having over 300 underrepresented faculty (of approximately 1400). Its athletic teams participate in the NCAA Division I. Five participants (Beth, Alex, Randy, Lloyd, and Clarence) serve on the Board of Trustees at Appletree University.

Beth

Like Fred, Beth aspired to become an attorney and majored in Political Science. Beth attended Appletree University in the late ‘80s to early ‘90s. They took one year off after graduating to work in the field of education before attending law school. They currently work as an attorney and have served on Appletree University’s Board of Trustees for 10 years. Beth reported, “I was [redacted number] years old when I started on the board, which was pretty young. I’m the youngest to ever be appointed to the board” (Beth).

Alex

Alex attended Appletree University and majored in Education, later rising to their current position as a Senior Vice President at a public service company. Alex reports coming from a

hardworking family committed to education. They said, “My mom went on and got her Ph.D. in 1978. My parents worked, and we worked. We had multiple jobs. My family had a janitorial service. My brother and I would go with them and clean up movie theaters and people's offices. When my brother and I turned 16, we went to work, and all that money went back to the house” (Alex).

Randy

Randy attended Appletree University between 1977 and 1980 and completed their undergraduate degree in Education, with a concentration in vocational and distributed education. They described this facet of education as being aligned with educational marketing. Randy participated in Division-I athletics at Appletree University. They currently work in ministry in a congregation in the southern United States. They cite athletics as one of the primary reasons for their choice to attend Appletree University, saying, “I felt like if I had an opportunity to actually make it to the pros, and I would have to be on the field. [Appletree University] expressed great interest in me” (Randy). At the time of the interview, Randy had served on PW-2’s Board of Trustees for 12 years.

Lloyd

Lloyd attended Appletree University in the mid-1980s, majoring in Finance. Lloyd also participated in Division-I athletics at Appletree University on the football team. They currently work as the President and CEO of a major healthcare organization in the southern United States. Lloyd has also “served on a number of different boards and organizations throughout the community, some nonprofit” (Lloyd). At the time of the interview, Lloyd had served on the

Board of Trustees for less than one year and was still learning the structure and processes of the Board's committees and sub-committees.

Clarence

Clarence attended a small PWI from 1979 to 1983, majoring in City Planning and Urban Development. Then they pursued a master's degree at Appletree University. They spent much of their career as a city planner in a prominent southern United States city. Clarence credits their success to Appletree University, saying, "I always tell people that my life is divided into two halves: before [Appletree University] and then after [Appletree University]. [Appletree University] just made all the difference for me" (Clarence). Clarence is currently employed as an Executive Director and had served on the Board of Trustees for two years at the time of the interview.

Bates University

Bates University is located in the southern United States. It has approximately 31,000 students, with 85% of the student body being undergraduates. The undergraduate enrollment by ethnicity includes 72% White, 4.5% Black or African American, 3% Asian, and 4.4% Hispanic students. The school has over 250 degrees and certificates, with more than 100 major fields of undergraduate study. The school boasts over 440 underrepresented faculty. Its athletic teams participate in the NCAA Division I. Bill served on the Board of Trustees at Bates University.

Bill

Bill went into the U.S. Air Force after high school, serving as a medic and reaching one of its highest ranks through their distinguished career. Bill used the provisions of the G.I. Bill to pursue their degree in Industrial Technology at Bates University. They also

pursued a Master of Healthcare Administration degree. Bill was a hard-working individual, describing themselves, “My grandparents raised me, and they were laborers. They were working people. I was probably a good student and probably one of the best cadets” (Bill). At the time of the interview, Bill had served on the Bates University Board of Trustees for less than one year but was proud to have been appointed to the position by the Governor.

Davis University

Davis University is located in the southern United States. It has approximately 38,000 students, with 85% of the student body being undergraduates. The undergraduate enrollment by ethnicity includes 77% White, 11% Black or African American, 1.5% Asian, and 5.3% Hispanic students. Davis University has a long history of producing scholars winning prestigious national awards, including the Rhodes and Fulbright scholarships. Its athletic teams participate in the NCAA Division I. Dorothy served on the Board of Trustees at Davis University.

Dorothy

Dorothy pursued a degree in Healthcare Management from Bates University, but after working in the field, decided their passion was for the law. Dorothy then pursued their J.D. degree at another prestigious PWI in the southern United States. They currently work as an attorney at a prestigious law firm. Dorothy believes that much of their success stems from their time at Davis University. They recounted, “I learned so much at [Davis University]. I would never have gotten this far in life without my time there” (Dorothy). At the time of the interview, Dorothy had served on the Board of Trustees for 20 years.

Grant University

Grant University is located in the southern United States and is well known for its competitive athletic programs. Grant University was the smallest PWI represented in this study, with approximately 24,000 students. The undergraduate enrollment by ethnicity includes 78% White, 6% Black or African American, 2.5% Asian, and 5.5% Hispanic students. It boasts a first-year retention rate of over 90%, and over 85% of the faculty hold terminal Ph.D. degrees. James served on the Board of Trustees at Grant University.

James

James pursued bachelor's and master's degrees in scientific fields from Grant University. They earned a Ph.D., worked as a research scientist, retired, and currently own a publishing company with their spouse, an author. James attended their PWI during the Civil Rights movement; they recalled being a freshman when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. At the time of the interview, James had served on the Board of Trustees at Grant University for 35 years, making them the longest-serving participant in the study.

Greener University

Greener University is located in the southern United States. There are approximately 37,000 students in enrollment throughout the main and regional campuses of the university. The undergraduate enrollment by ethnicity includes 64% White, 28% Black or African American, 1.5% Asian, and 1.5% Hispanic students. As such, Greener University had the highest representation of underrepresented students of the six PWIs included in this study. Greener University's athletic teams participate in NCAA Division-I. Kerry served on the Board of Trustees at Greener University.

Kerry

Kerry attended Greener University in the late 1980s, where they pursued a law degree and is an attorney by training. Currently, Kerry works as the Vice President of Customer Affairs for a major financial services company in the United States. Kerry reported feeling comfortable at Greener University: "My mother was a college professor. I'd been at a predominantly White institution's campus all my life. I took piano lessons and flute lessons. I attended band camp, and I went to basketball camp, all at a PWI" (Kerry). At the time of the interview, Kerry had served on the Board of Trustees for 14 years.

Research Findings

There were several themes I generated following my analytic plan outlined in Chapter 3 that provided insight into the experiences of Black alumni serving on the Board of Trustees at PWIs. The themes are categorized chronologically, detailing the participants' reasons for choosing their undergraduate PWIs, their experiences while attending their undergraduate PWI institutions, and their pathways to Board of Trustee membership. No two participants had the same experiences. Thus, the categories presented do not represent the participants' individual experiences but their collective experiences. My approach to the data analysis was to place the participants' narratives in the most appropriate context to illustrate the general experiences of the group.

Research Questions

In this study, two research questions were composed to explore the phenomenon of Black alumni's pathway to serve on the Board of Trustees at PWIs. Each of these questions serves as a category of the phenomenon and will be discussed in detail. Briefly, the following categories will

be examined: (a) the participants' reasons for choosing their undergraduate PWI, (b) the participants' experiences while attending their undergraduate PWI, (c) the participants' specific steps in their pathway to board membership, and (d) the participants' reasons for serving on the Board of Trustees. I use descriptive statements from direct quotes throughout the discussion to give a rich context to the participants' experiences, perceptions, and pathways to Board membership. I also support my assertions using the participants' verbatim interview responses.

RQ1: How do Black alumni board members at PWI talk about their path to service?

The participants' paths to service on the Board of Trustees began with their choice of their undergraduate PWIs. This path continued based on the participants' experiences at their undergraduate PWI. Finally, I will discuss the individual steps in the pathways to board membership. Each of the categories will be discussed in turn.

Reasons for the Participants' Choice of Their Undergraduate PWI

The participants began on their path to service on the Board of Trustees at their PWI by choosing their respective undergraduate institutions. I constructed six main themes from participant comments when discussing their choices of undergraduate institution. These six themes were: (a) Favorable environment for Black students, (b) Family-oriented decision, (c) Civil Rights movement, (d) Scholarship package, (e) Athletics, and (f) Visible pathway to success. These themes are summarized in Table 2. These themes are important because they give context to the participants' experiences at their respective PWIs, which, in turn, give context to their passion for their PWIs and subsequent board service. The context provides insight into why they chose to attend their institution, what drew them there or had them even consider going there. These were influences that helped them decide to go there.

Table 2*Participants' Reasons for Choosing Their Undergrad PWI*

Theme	Participants	Excerpt
Favorable Environment for Black Students	Brandon, Beth, Dorothy	"So I grew up in Western Pennsylvania. We were only 16 years removed from the Civil Rights Movement when I entered college. There were still many doors beginning to open up for Black students" (Brandon).
Family-Oriented Decision	Brandon, Beth, Randy, Kerry	"I grew up in a predominantly blue-collar city and community. I was one of the first generations to go to college, and it was natural that I would stay local" (Brandon).
Civil Rights Movement	Brandon, Myra, Bill, Dorothy, James	"I came out of high school one month after Martin Luther King was assassinated. That same month, the Black students, the few colored students that were at the university, formed the Black Action Society, which was not just a student organization, It included the community from the very beginning. They pressed upon the university that they wanted more colored students. The university decided to admit 50 colored students. They had never admitted 50 at one time. The students and the administration went throughout the city trying to recruit 50. That's how I ended up at my PWI" (Myra).
Scholarship Package	Fred, Beth, Clarence, Bill, James	"I got into about six or seven schools but did not get into [my first choice]. I did get into [my PWI]. One of the major drivers for me to go to [my PWI] was that I did not want to stay in my hometown. My PWI looked like a good alternative. It gave me a very attractive support package between scholarships, loans, and student work projects. It gave me a very good package of aid that made it possible for me to attend [my PWI]" (Fred).
Athletics	Alex, Randy, Lloyd, James	"I was fortunate because I was involved in athletics. [My PWI] gave me an attractive athletics package that made it possible for me to attend the school" (Alex).
Visible Pathway to Success	Randy, Clarence, Bill, Dorothy	"I needed it as simple as possible to succeed. That was one big reason why I chose [my PWI]" (Randy).

Favorable Environment for Black Students

Three participants (Brandon, Beth, and Dorothy) discussed choosing their respective PWIs because of the favorable environment their institutions created for Black students or that the participants fostered within the institution. For example, Brandon discussed entering college after the Civil Rights movement, when colleges and universities emphasized the inclusion and integration of Black students on their campuses (Table 2). While not many Black students were in attendance, Brandon felt a significant kinship with the other Black students and felt supported by the university. Beth expressed similar sentiments, saying:

It was really important to me to feel like I had a sense of support and that I had a sense of feeling like there was a community that I could turn to because I didn't know what I was doing in college. I found that at [Appletree University]. They gave me the resources I needed to feel supported (Beth).

Dorothy also expressed a supportive environment, expanding on the concept of the Civil Rights movement. They said, “There weren't a ton of Black students on campus, but I felt like the university tried. At that point in our nation’s history, the simple act of trying was important, visible, and appreciated” (Dorothy). Therefore, the sense of community can not really be attributed to the university because while they 'allowed' the Black students in, it was the students who created a welcoming and resourceful environment that provided that sense of community. This finding shows that community and peer support is crucial to create a DEI environment.

Notably, the PWIs that Brandon, Beth, and Dorothy attended were located in different geographical regions in the United States; Brandon attended a PWI in the northeast, Beth attended a PWI in the south, and Dorothy attended a PWI in the southeast. These data may

indicate that these PWIs generally fostered a favorable environment for Black students; however, there may be too much credit given to the institution. The institutions had measures in place to attract or assist these students, but the actual students or Black people at the institution helped make it favorable. The participants navigated challenges and helped those coming after them not to have such a hard time. Based on the participant responses, we can credit the universities with opening the door but not with the environment that these participants created for themselves. This theme is important for understanding the participants' passion for their PWIs. Many of the participants pursued higher education at a time when it was not common for Black people to do so. It was significant to the participants they could find like-minded Black students at their chosen PWIs. Thus, this theme provides context for understanding the participants' positive feelings and community affinity towards their experience at their PWIs.

Family-Oriented Decision

Four of the participants (Brandon, Beth, Randy, Kerry) noted that their decision to attend their PWI was based partly on the needs of their families. Brandon noted that as a first-generation college student, they wanted to stay close to home where they could find support from their family (Table 2). Beth similarly described they wanted to be near their family. Beth said, “Even though I received a scholarship, my family was really important to me. I wanted to be close to home. [Appletree University] was a happy medium for me. It was a great school, and it was close to home” (Beth). Thus, the desire to remain close to family was a driving force for some of the participants.

While some of the participants wanted to stay near their families, others chose their respective PWIs for the family-type atmosphere. For example, Randy said, “[Appletree

University] expressed a great interest in me. I really felt like, after attending a visit, that it was small and cozy. I needed a small campus. I needed a family-related atmosphere” (Randy). Thus, while Randy did not necessarily choose a school close to home, they chose Appletree University based on the experience of a family-type atmosphere. Kerry described Greener University as feeling like home to them. They said, “My mother worked at [Greener University], so I was already familiar with the campus and the culture. It felt like home to me” (Kerry). Thus, for these participants, the family-type or family-oriented environment was critical to their choice of PWI institution.

This theme is significant in that it highlights the values of the participants. The participants represented by this theme pursued higher education to better themselves but did so in a manner consistent with their families’ needs. This theme, therefore, gives context to the types of individuals who seek Board service. The participants represented by this theme sought better lives through education for both them and their families. They sought the betterment of themselves, but not at the expense of their family values. This contributed to the participants’ later views of their PWIs as an extended family to which they invest their passion.

Civil Rights Movement

Many participants entered college during or directly following the Civil Rights Movement. While this period was important for the advancement of Black people, it also brought challenges associated with social and cultural upheaval. Thus, many participants entered their PWIs at a time in which Black people were not viewed favorably by society. Five of the participants (Brandon, Myra, Bill, Dorothy, and James) identified the Civil Rights Movement as an influencing factor in their decision to pursue undergraduate degrees at their respective PWIs.

Brandon noted that the Civil Rights movement had opened doors to Black students, offering them programs at Gibson University that were not available before the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (Table 2). Similarly, Myra described being recruited to Gibson University based on the administration's efforts to increase the Black student population. Myra said, "The university decided to admit 50 colored students. They had never admitted 50 at one time. The students and the administration went throughout the city trying to recruit 50. That's how I ended up at my PWI" (Myra). Thus, for Brandon and Myra, who both attended Gibson University in the 1960s to 1970s, the Civil Rights movement facilitated their entry into their PWI.

Bill had a different experience, noting that the Civil Rights movement allowed them to have Black teachers who had graduated from Bates University. The positive perception of Bates University from these individuals influenced their decision to also attend the school. Bill said,

Now, it's [Bates University]. In junior high, we first integrated; actually, it was full integration. There were some students in my neighborhood that went to Anglo Elementary schools at the time, but after we fully integrated in 1970, many of my junior high and high school teachers were also graduates of [Bates University]. They spoke about their experiences there. I decided it was worth checking out (Bill).

Bill, therefore, benefited from the experiences of those who attended Bates University before him. The positive influence of his Black educators, who had favorable experiences at Bates University, spurred him to look into Bates University for his own education. Dorothy had a similar experience. Dorothy said,

I didn't have many Black teachers, but one that I did have spoke volumes about [Davis University], who went to [Davis University] during the Civil Rights movement.

[Redacted name] made it sound like [Davis University] was the best place on Earth. We thought alike, and I looked up to him (Dorothy).

Thus, for Bill and Dorothy, the Civil Rights movement opened doors for Black students before them. Those Black students had favorable experiences, which allowed them to look favorably upon Bates University and Davis University, respectively.

This theme is important for understanding the context of the participants' experiences at their respective PWIs. This underscores the participants' strength of will, highlighting another important characteristic of Black individuals who seek board service at PWIs.

Scholarship Package

Five participants (Fred, Beth, Clarence, Bill, and James) described their decision to attend their respective PWIs to be based on being awarded a scholarship package. For example, Fred described Gibson University as giving them various mechanisms to help pay for their education (Table 2). Similarly, Beth said, "It made it a little easier for me to choose [Appletree University] with the scholarship that I received" (Beth). Clarence and Bill also got scholarships. Clarence described their excitement, saying,

I had the opportunity to attend and get the funding to be able to do my graduate work at [Appletree University]. By this time, I was a man on fire. Going down to Appletree University for graduate school was just all I could think about (Clarence).

James similarly described getting a scholarship from a state organization to pursue their education. James said, "I got a scholarship from the [redacted southern state] Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association" (James). Thus, the PWIs not only provided support to the

participants by creating favorable and family-style environments on campus, but they also provided the participants with the funding they needed to pursue their education.

The participants who received scholarships expressed gratitude to their sponsoring organizations. These scholarships facilitated the participants' success in helping them finance their education, allowing them to focus on their studies rather than dividing their time between employment and pursuing a college education. In many ways, the participants' scholarships were foundational for their success, which was, in turn, foundational for their decision to pursue Board service.

Visible Pathway to Success

While some participants were student-athletes, others pursued their undergraduate PWI for academic reasons or for the combination of academics and athletics. Many of the participants, in one way or another, described choosing their PWIs because they could see a visible pathway to a successful life and career. Four participants (Randy, Clarence, Bill, Dorothy) particularly articulated this idea. Randy said, "I needed it as simple as possible to succeed. That was one big reason why I chose [my PWI]" (Randy). Clarence also said, "When I visited the campus, I could just see myself being happy and successful. So many influential people came out of [Appletree University], and I was determined to be one of them" (Clarence). Thus, for Randy and Clarence, who both attended Appletree University, the preeminence of the university and the possibility of success were enticing reasons for their choice.

Bill and Dorothy, who attended Bates University and Davis University, also described a visible pathway to success. Bill described having their family and mentors as having high expectations for them, which paralleled their high expectations for themselves. They said, "I was

expected to be excellent, and I was. It was not acceptable for me not to give all of my efforts. Bates University gave me an opportunity to meet my own expectations for success” (Bill). Thus, Bill described the choice of Bates University as the school in which they could thrive and be successful. Dorothy expressed similar thoughts, saying, “[Davis University] had such a great track record of producing excellent, successful people. I had high aspirations for myself, and I knew with the right education, I could get there” (Dorothy). Thus, for many of the participants, their choice of PWI institution was due, in part, to the reputation of the university for enhancing the success of their students.

This theme highlights another important characteristic of individuals who seek Board service. The participants represented by this theme were extremely driven, knowing at a young age what a visible pathway to success looked like. It takes a strong-willed individual to pursue higher education in a largely segregated environment due to the knowledge that the education they would receive would ensure success. Thus, this theme is indicative of the participant’s strength, resilience, and determination, all of which are necessary to thrive in difficult environments and situations.

Participants’ Experiences while Attending their Undergraduate PWI

All participants serve on the Board of Trustees because they have a passion for that PWI. Much of that passion stemmed from their experiences on campus. When I asked the participants about their experiences on campus, they had many different narratives, but ultimately, their responses illuminated five themes: (a) Fostered community with other Black students, (b) Joined a sorority or fraternity, (c) Integrated with White students, (d) Mentorship, and (e) Programs for Black students. These themes are summarized in Table 3 and will each be discussed in turn. The

themes discussed in this subsection will be directly applicable to understanding the characteristics of individuals who seek Board service and understanding the foundations the participants' laid as a pathway to Board service.

Table 3

Participants' Experiences while Attending their Undergraduate PWI

Theme	Participants	Excerpt
Fostered Community with Other Black Students	Brandon, Myra, Randy, Lloyd	"I hung out with some Black folks from Pennsylvania, DC, Maryland, New Jersey, and New York. We formed this nice group of folks. And then, I get involved in the social and service organizations that black folks do on campus. What made it comfortable for me at [my PWI] was that we had a reasonably sized - I don't want to say a large, but a reasonably sized - Black student body. We were able to find ourselves amongst each other" (Brandon).
Joined A Sorority or Fraternity	Brandon, Myra, Fred, Dorothy	"My group of friends was the African American students who were there already. They were my fraternity brothers, many of whom I'm still connected to here. All of us who came in together were like a family. That family supported each other. While we were in a predominantly White environment, we had the protection of being able to go back into that group and use that group as our anchor" (Fred).
Integrated with White Students	Brandon, Myra, Lloyd, James	"I did not serve in a fraternity, but I did serve on one of the management clubs through the business school. That provided an opportunity for networking through the university and helped me integrate with the White students" (Lloyd).
Mentorship	Brandon, Beth	"I went into college knowing I wanted to be a physician but not knowing how to become one. Fortunately, I had some mentors, both students and faculty at [my PWI], who took me under their wing and mentored me, and showed me how to get to medical school" (Brandon).

Programs For Black Students	Brandon, Myra, Beth, Bill	"My PWI had a program called UCEP, which stood for University Community Education Program. I came up through the EP program. It was easier for me to facilitate my interaction with Black students and faculty, which put in place support programs and mentors and sponsors to allow for the transition of Black students" (Bill).
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Fostered Community with Other Black Students

Some participants (Brandon, Alex, Randy, and Lloyd) fostered a sense of community with other Black students at the undergraduate PWIs, providing comfort, a sense of belonging, and support. According to Allen et al. (2021), a sense of belonging in the context of DEI refers to a person's impression and experience of belonging to a certain group or community. Brandon described forming strong relationships with other Black students on campus (Table 1). They further spoke about the commitment of the Black students to helping each other succeed. Brandon explained, "I always could find another Black student to help me if I needed assistance in any way. We were committed to each other" (Brandon). Myra also spoke about the bond between Black students. Myra said,

You had a bunch of Black students who were so happy. Well, there were 50 of us, and then they admitted some more in September. So, we more than doubled the Black people that were there. Back then, we only had one [student group], and that was the Black Action Society. That gave us a bond. I'm still friends with many of them today (Myra).

The Black Action Society was a student organization at Gibson University that supported the interests of Black students and interfaced with university administrators (Brandon, Myra). Both Brandon and Myra spoke highly of the organization and described being involved. Both

participants believed that, through the organization, they were able to make long-lasting friendships. Myra also expanded, saying:

The students in my leadership groups wanted to make sure we were going to succeed. In September, when the next enrollment came in, the freshman integrated very well with us. It was the upperclassmen whom I will never forget. Those individuals really went out of their way to help us (Myra).

Thus, Myra spoke highly of other Black students with whom she interacted.

Randy and Lloyd also spoke about forming lasting relationships with other Black students at the university. Randy described, “Being in some student organizations for a couple of years gave me access to other smart and intelligent Black people. I started learning things about life and the school and that made me feel more comfortable” (Randy). Lloyd also believed that the other Black students were instrumental in their positive experiences. They said:

I was in a lot of different clubs. All of the Black students were. We tried hard to support each other, and that helped us integrate into campus life. None of us ever went to a campus event or organization meeting alone. When I reflect on the support we had for each other, it’s overwhelming (Lloyd).

Both Randy and Lloyd described the impact their fellow Black students had on them and their experience at college. They described a family-style environment in which the other Black students supported their efforts, interests, and pursuits, promoting the positive experience they had on campus.

This theme is similar to the *Favorable Environment for Black Students* theme in the previous section, highlighting that the participants were able to find other Black individuals with

similar values and motivations. Fostering community with other Black students facilitated the participants' sense of belonging at their PWIs, which contributed to the participants' passion for their schools. The ability to find other Black students invested in their education further ignited the participants' passion for their PWIs. Many participants seek Board service to better the experiences of Black students at the university, a foundation laid under the participants' experiences at their PWIs.

Joined a Sorority or Fraternity

Similar to the previous theme, many participants (Brandon, Myra, Fred, Dorothy, Kerry) fostered community with other Black students and students of other ethnicities in sororities and fraternities. Fred, as depicted in Table 3, described bonding with his fraternity brothers, reminiscent of how Myra spoke about other Black students at the university. Fred described his fraternity brothers as long-lasting friends with whom he still has tight connections and contact (Table 3). Brandon also described joining a sorority to participate in service organizations. They said

I got involved in the social and service organizations like most Black folks do on campus. I pledged Alpha Phi Alpha, so then I got involved in the Black Greek organizations. This sparked my interest in service, which is one of the reasons I serve on the university's board (Brandon).

Brandon directly acknowledges that their interest in service stems from their time in the university's Greek organizations. Myra also found a group of friends in their Greek organization. Myra said,

[Gibson University] was not an easy institution to get into back then. And so the upperclassmen were determined that they wanted us there, so they were going help you make it across the finish line. They were just simply amazing - all of them. I pledged Delta. And when I pledged, there were two other [same first name} already in the sorority.

Interestingly, Myra described the Black students in her sorority as being instrumental in her success. Thus, the fraternity and sorority system allowed the participants to find other Black students with whom they shared interests and with whom they could form bonds.

The participants' decisions to join sororities and fraternities also facilitated their success in their careers and also allowed for important opportunities to network. Like college athletics, many successful CEOs, entrepreneurs, and businesspersons have their beginnings in sororities or fraternities (Sasso et al., 2019). Sororities and fraternities are also important platforms for networking among successful individuals, a notion that proves important for the participants in obtaining nominations, appointments, and elected positions on their respective Boards of Trustees.

Integrated With White Students

Four of the participants (Brandon, Myra, Lloyd, James) explicitly discussed integrating with White students. As previously discussed, Myra described her sorority sisters as individuals deeply invested in her success. Other participants described their experiences integrating with the other students on campus. For example, Brandon said, "I got involved in leadership, student government, resident's life, and judicial board. So, I got more integrated within. I had great

experiences in all of my clubs” (Brandon). Thus, Brandon described an inclusive environment in which White students with shared interests invested in their success.

Lloyd and James did not join the Greek systems at their universities but similarly found solace in student-run organizations and integrated with the White students. Lloyd reflected

I did not serve in a fraternity or anything of the like but did serve on one of the management clubs through the business school. That provided an opportunity for networking, and through the university, with faculty, students, and the administration.

Everyone treated us, and me in particular, fairly (Lloyd).

Lloyd’s student-run organization not only allowed them to integrate with students on campus but also allowed them to have meaningful interactions with faculty members and administrators.

This enhanced their college experience. James began their advocacy for Black student organizations while still a university student. James said, “Student organizations. Yes. We didn’t have Greeks organizations. So, I pushed for Black Greek organizations” (James). Thus, in James’s case, their pursuit of the betterment of the university stemmed from their time at the university. They observed an area in which their PWI could be improved and began advocating for it, still continuing that advocacy today.

To serve on the Board of Trustees, the participants must either be nominated by current board members, be appointed by the Governor, or must be elected. These pathways could not be accomplished in a predominantly White environment if the participants did not integrate with White students on their respective campuses. Thus, the integration of the participants with White students is an important step in their pathway to board service. An argument can be made that

Board service could not be possible for individuals who did not invest in cross-cultural relationships, especially given the need for diverse perspectives on university governing boards.

Mentorship

Two of the participants (Brandon, Beth) highlighted the importance of mentorship to their college experience. Brandon said,

Fortunately for me, I had some mentors, both students and faculty at [Gibson University], that took me under their wing and mentored me, and showed me how to get to medical school. I took advantage of that every chance I got (Brandon).

In the interview, Brandon described ongoing support from counselors, faculty, and students. They entered Gibson University at a time when the university was first diversifying its student population. Consequently, Gibson University had a program for Black students that provided them with Black and White educators to help guide them through their respective programs and the transition to college. Brandon further explained, “Those mentors were instrumental in my success” (Brandon). Beth also spoke about having a mentor, both at Appletree University and on the Board of Trustees. Beth said,

[Redacted name] took me under his wing when I was at the university. He showed me the ropes, helped me pick classes and professors, and really invested in me. Ironically, he’s still a mentor. He’s also on the board and kind of became sort of a board mentor, if you will, in terms of understanding things. The mentorship never ended! (Beth).

Interestingly, Beth’s mentor at the university also became their mentor on the Board of Trustees. This finding not only underscores the strength of the mentorship available to Beth at Appletree University but also highlights that the relationship was long-lasting. Having a network of people

who see their work and commitment to the institution is a vital part of the success of many alumni.

Mentorship is a ubiquitous facilitating relationship. When the mentor-mentee relationship is strong, both individuals have an opportunity for substantial personal and professional growth (Lin et al., 2021). Mentorship has been cited as a major driving force among successful Black businesspersons and entrepreneurs (Keen et al., 2019; Myers, 2023). Successful Black people in almost exclusively White institutions, such as the federal government's senior executive service (Jackson & Bouchard, 2019), cite mentorship as critical to their success. Congruent with these ideas, mentorship played an important role in the participants' success, a passion they pay forward by mentoring Black students and serving on their university's governing board.

Programs for Black Students

Four participants (Brandon, Myra, Beth, and Bill) spoke about programs that their universities specifically designed for Black students. Bill, as described in Table 3, highlighted the programs that Bates University had for Black students. Bill explained, "It was easier for me to facilitate my interaction with Black students and faculty, which put in place support programs and mentors and sponsors to allow for the transition of Black students" (Bill). Bates University's programs for Black students allowed Bill to have access to individuals who could help them, including faculty, mentors, and sponsors, which eased the transition from high school to school. Bill believed those programs were essential for their college experience. Gibson University also had programs for Black students that Brandon and Myra referenced. Brandon said,

[Gibson University] had a program for Black students that had Black teachers. I had never had a Black teacher in my life. I was so excited. I got a chance to take some

advanced courses and had sponsors. I'm going to say this made the transition a lot easier (Brandon).

Myra participated in the same program as Brandon, just during a slightly different time period. Myra said, “[Gibson University] had taken care of the curriculum, housing support services, and everything be able to accommodate us” (Myra). Thus, many of the PWIs implemented programs that facilitated the transition of Black students to the university.

This theme is an important discussion in the context of Black alumni serving on governing boards at PWIs for two reasons. First, the participants’ participation in programs for Black students suggests that an important quality of individuals serving on PWI boards: resourcefulness. The participants demonstrated resourcefulness by seeking and pursuing programs that were designed to ensure their success. Second, the participants’ involvement in programs for Black students gives them insight into effective programs that aid in Black students’ success. Furthermore, the participants use this knowledge and insight in their board service by promoting new programs for Black students.

The Pathway to Board of Trustees

The main goal of this study was to reveal the pathways that Black alumni took to become members of the Board of Trustees at their PWIs. This section will directly answer that question. The section is arranged chronologically, revealing the pathway to Board service. The following themes were identified through discussion with the participants: (a) nomination, (b) appointment, (c) asked to be nominated, (d) interview, (e) confirmation hearings, and (f) election or re-election. Each of these themes represents an important step in the pathway to Board service.

They are summarized in Table 4. Notably, this section directly answers the study's research question, namely the pathways Black alumni use to serve on their PWI's Board of Trustees.

Table 4

Pathway to the Board of Trustees

Theme	Participant	Excerpt
Nomination	Brandon, Myra, Fred, Beth, Clarence	"Generally, what will happen is they will vet you through the nominations committee of the Board of Trustees. Your name needs to be nominated by somebody on the committee. I presume somebody outside the committee could submit a name to the committee. The committee will then take those groups of people and decide between them" (Brandon).
Appointment	Brandon, Alex, Randy, Bill,	"At some universities, you're appointed by the governor. While somebody else was doing the hard day-to-day work, they played politics. That's the deciding factor. It is the governor or the governor's appointee" (Alex).
Asked to be Appointed	Clarence	"I knew they needed to become more diverse, and I just happened to be African American. So, I just threw my name in the hat, so when I was interviewed and was appointed, I felt like it was just meant to be" (Clarence).
Interview	Myra, Beth, Alex, Lloyd, Dorothy, James	"I got someone willing to nominate me. There's a lot of paperwork associated with that nomination. So then everybody's nominations are submitted by a certain date. Then from that nominee pool, they picked five that they brought in to interview for the position. Once you reach that stage, then you go to the interview. They were held at the state capitol with the Governor, two trustee representatives, and two alumni representatives. So that's the five-member panel that conducts the interviews. You go in and spend time in an interview. Then after the interviews, that committee will select who they want, with the Governor's approval, because it's the Governor's nomination" (Beth).
Confirmation Hearings	Beth, Randy, Lloyd, Clarence	"Once the name is presented, it's presented to the Senate Confirmation Committee, and it has to come out of confirmation hearings before anything happens" (Beth).
Accepted by Legislature	Myra, Beth, Alex, Randy, Lloyd, Dorothy, Kerry	"In [my state], our legislature is involved, and you have to be approved by the legislature. Some different steps involve having the Senate involved" (Myra).

Election/Re-election	Fred, James, Kerry	"You have to run every four years. You have to declare that you want to be reelected, and then you run every four years" (Kerry).
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Nomination

Some, but not all, of the PWIs, have a nomination process for the Board of Trustees. Five participants (Brandon, Myra, Fred, Beth, and Clarence) spoke about the nomination process. Brandon described the nomination process, saying

So generally, what'll happen is they will vet you through the nominations committee of the Board of Trustees. Your name needs to be nominated by somebody on the committee. I presume somebody outside the committee could submit a name to the committee. The committee will then take those groups of people into consideration (Brandon).

Thus, at Gibson University, individuals known to have a strong record of service and commitment to the university are nominated for Board membership by someone already on the Board of Trustees. Myra also confirmed the nomination process at Gibson University, saying, "I think she probably nominated me because she saw what my work with the Alumni Association was really about" (Myra). Thus, Brandon and Myra showed a strong commitment to the university through work in other organizations, highlighting their passion for Gibson University. That passion facilitated their nomination to the Board of Trustees.

Fred also described the nomination process at Gibson University in more detail, describing the role of the governance and nominating committee. Fred said

The general process is governance and nominating. Before becoming chair of the board, I was actually slated to be the chair of the governance and nominating committee. It's

governance and nominating that do the nominations. They look at the pipeline. They look at the people that are being cultivated. They ensure that we have the level of diversity, both from gender, racial, geographic, and skills perspectives, that we need for our board. That's what governance and nominating do. Governance and nominating then make recommendations to the full board on those people who should be elected to serve on the board, as well as their status, whether they will be an alumnus, trustee, special trustee, or a term trustee (Fred).

Fred underscores the fact that the individuals in charge of nominating people to the Board of Trustees evaluate many factors, including diversity and skills, when selecting Board members.

Appletree University also had a nominations process for Board service. Beth described the nomination process, saying

I got someone that was willing to nominate me. There's a lot of paperwork associated with that nomination. Everybody's nominations are submitted by a certain date. Then from that nominee pool, they picked, and I think there were five of us that they brought in as to interview for the position (Beth).

As with any important position, Beth highlights that there is a vast amount of paperwork involved in the nomination process. Randy, who also attended Appletree University, recalls being nominated without their knowledge. Randy said, “When the nominations were taking place, and all this was going on, I was paying no attention to it. I had no idea my name was being thrown into the hat” (Randy). Randy highlights that nominations can occur with or without the individual’s knowledge. Finally, Clarence also spoke about the nomination process, but from a different perspective. They said, “Now, I understand that when trustees leave, there's a vacancy,

and then there's a call for nominations” (Clarence). Thus, nominations can occur regularly or when a trustee leaves the Board at Appletree University.

The pathway to service involving nomination has notable challenges. At some PWIs, such as Appletree University, nominations must come from current Board members. Thus, an alumnus must have tight connections at the university if they want to serve on the Board. Such connections can only be made through sustained commitment over time, suggesting that this pathway to Board service can take years. In contrast, Myra noted that any university stakeholder could nominate an individual for Board service at Gibson University. This is an important distinction regarding appointments. An individual nominated by a current trustee requires deeper university connections than an individual whom any university member can nominate. However, regardless of the nomination type, the participants could not have made the connections necessary for Board service if they had not found like-minded Black students, integrated with white students, taken advantage of programs for Black students, and joined sororities and fraternities. These findings suggest that to gain the nomination, the social and political capital of a potential Board member must be thoroughly procured during their time in HIED and in the years following. Therefore, the pathway involving nomination requires a sustained, consistent service commitment to build and enhance the connections made during their undergraduate years.

The theme emphasizes the significance of ongoing dedication and forming relationships within the university community to achieve Board service at institutions of higher learning. This idea is consistent with the idea of public service motivation (PSM), which denotes a person but desire to advance society and have a beneficial influence through their profession (Wang et al.,

2020). Specifically, people who exhibit PSM are driven by a sincere desire to help the university and its stakeholders in the context of Board service. The purpose of PSM is reflected in this involvement, which indicates a strong sense of belonging and investment in the university community. Because the participants deliberately build the social and political capital required for Board service, the persistent and consistent service commitment is congruent with PSM. This finding, in conjunction with other themes, demonstrates that PSM influences many participants and will be further explored in chapter 5.

Appointment

Some PWIs did not have a formal nomination process but instead had an appointment process. Five participants (Brandon, Alex, Randy, and Bill) discussed the appointment process. Brandon spoke about knowledge of other universities' appointment process, saying, "At some universities, you're appointed by the governor. But, at our university, I think to get on the board, you really have to show sustained leadership and commitment to the university" (Brandon). Alex described early attempts to become a Board member, saying

I didn't even make it across to the governor's office for an appointment to be considered.

At some universities, you're appointed by the governor. While somebody else was doing the hard day-to-day work, they played politics. That's the deciding factor. It is the governor or the governor's appointee (Alex).

Thus, at some universities, the Governor must appoint individuals to the Board of Trustees. Bill also described their nomination process, saying, "I was appointed to the [redacted organization's] board, which is a [redacted state] African American museum. And I was appointed by the Governor [redacted name] to the board at [Bates University]" (Bill). Randy and

Kerry had similar experiences. Kerry said, “So I was appointed by Governor [redacted name] to fill a vacancy. The initial step to be on the board was that I was appointed” (Kerry). These findings indicate that some PWIs have a nominations process, whereas others have an appointment process.

An appointment is a different pathway to board service than a nomination. In the nomination pathways, a university stakeholder or current board member nominates an individual for Board service. Interested individuals are encouraged to apply to proceed through the interview process. In an appointment, a university official or the state’s Governor must select and appoint an individual to the Board. This pathway not only involves university connections but also requires significant political connections, which likely began in college or through the participants’ professional networks originating from college. In this sense, the participants likely began their pathway to the Board of Trustees through their undergraduate activities.

Asked to be Appointed

This was a discrepant theme. All participants other than Clarence described an appointment or nomination process that was distinct from theirs. That is, they did not necessarily seek Board service on their own but rather were appointed or nominated to serve on their respective Boards of Trustees. Clarence asked to be nominated to the Board. They said, "I knew they needed to become more diverse, and I just happened to be African American. So, I just threw my name in the hat, so then I was interviewed and was appointed. I felt like it was just meant to be" (Clarence). These findings highlight the notion that the nomination and appointment process can also be self-driven, as Clarence sought and was awarded Board service.

Interview

The next step in the pathway to Board service is an interview. Six participants spoke about the interview process (Myra, Beth, Alex, Lloyd, Dorothy, and James). Beth was perhaps the most descriptive about the process. They said,

Everybody's nominations are submitted by a certain date. Then from that nominee pool, they picked five that they brought in to interview for the position. Once you reach that stage, then you go to the interview. They were held at the state capitol with the Governor, two trustee representatives, and two alumni representatives. So that's the five-member panel that conducts the interviews. You go in and spend time in an interview. Then after the interviews, that committee will select whom they want, with the Governor's approval, because it's the Governor's nomination (Beth).

Beth described the multi-layered process that occurs during the nomination and interview process. The interviewers have diverse roles. Some are current trustees, others are alumni, and one interviewer is the Governor. In highlighting that it's ultimately the Governor's nomination, Beth alludes to some of the politics about which Alex spoke. Myra described being nervous before their interview, saying, "I was so nervous. I felt really intimidated by the man who interviewed me to get onto the Board. I know he gets tired of me saying this, but this man accepted me" (Myra). Alex also described pre-interview nerves and their subsequent preparation. Alex said, "I filled out the application to be on the board and got ready to do the whole interview process. I felt like I was back in college again. I studied the university like I was studying for a test" (Alex). For these participants, their nerves underscore the notion that they were deeply

invested in becoming Board of Trustee members, so much so that they were nervous in anticipation of their interviews.

Lloyd also described the interview process and alludes to some of the questions the interviewers asked. They said,

So, I went through the process of applying and being interviewed along with some other exceptional candidates for that position and had the fortunate pleasure of being recommended and selected to serve. Then, you know, there's the interview process with the selection committee and the governor where questions are asked, and you have to answer those questions. They were keenly interested in my skills as I went through the interview process. They told me there was a definite benefit from my selection onto the board (Lloyd).

Lloyd described the interviewers as asking questions regarding what Lloyd could uniquely bring to the Board of Trustees, focusing on their skills and the benefits the Board would derive from Lloyd's membership. Clarence believed that the interview process was really a formality and that the interview board had already selected their candidates. They said:

I think it was just one interview. I prepared myself for that. I really think that normally by the time you get to that point, it's just a formality going through the interview. They've already decided that you're going to fill that slot. I didn't enjoy that part of the process, but I knew it was necessary, and I felt that I was able to answer the questions adequately (Clarence).

Thus, many of the participants described being nervous and taking the steps necessary to prepare for the interview process, which ultimately resulted in their appointment to the Board.

Confirmation Hearings

After the interview, for some PWIs, there's a confirmation hearing. Four participants (Beth, Randy, Lloyd, Clarence) described these hearings. Beth described, "Once the name is presented, it's presented to the Senate Confirmation Committee, and it has to come out of confirmation hearings before anything happens" (Beth). Beth speaks about another layer of selection to the Board via the legislature; thus, not only does the Governor have to select and nominate an individual, but that individual must also meet the approval of the confirmation committee. Randy, Lloyd, and Clarence did not describe the confirmation hearings in detail but did mention them. For example, Lloyd said, "You know, I remember the day of confirmation going down to [the state capitol]" (Lloyd). Clarence also said, "After nominations are made, you have to be confirmed by the Senate" (Clarence). Thus, the next step in the process is confirmation hearings with the state legislature.

Accepted By State Legislature

Just as confirmation hearings proceed via the State legislature, the state legislature must also accept the Board candidate. Seven participants spoke about acceptance by the state legislature (Myra, Beth, Alex, Randy, Lloyd, Dorothy, and Kerry). Myra described, "In [my state], our legislature is involved, and you have to be approved by the legislature. Some different steps involve having the Senate involved" (Myra). Randy also spoke about legislature acceptance. Randy said,

When someone is appointing you, you still have to be approved by the legislature. At the time, we had a government official at [the state capitol], and they set the meeting up for me to meet with the executive board and branch of the government for the [redacted

state], the governing board officials, and the legislature. They ultimately have the final decision if you're going to serve on the Board (Randy).

Lloyd believed the confirmation process was a benefit both to themselves and to the university.

They said:

The selection and confirmation process was, candidly, a blessing for me and an opportunity to reconnect with people whom I had had either business relationships or committee relationships with after serving on certain boards and committees. For example, the confirmation hearings allowed me to go down to [redacted state capitol] to talk to legislators about specific topics or issues that may affect our business and the university (Lloyd).

Lloyd described the confirmation hearings as being a springboard for important conversations about the university and other business matters and propositions. Thus, they believed the confirmation hearings benefited themselves and the university.

The confirmation hearings and acceptance by the state legislature themes highlight a noteworthy step in the pathway to Board service. New trustees must be selected and approved by the state legislature, highlighting the intersection of university service and politics. The participants would not have been approved and confirmed by the legislature if they did not have the following characteristics: (a) commitment to the university, (b) important connections both in politics and at the university, and (c) good character.

Election or Re-election

Finally, some of the participants described having to be elected to their respective boards. Three participants are represented in this theme (Fred, James, and Kerry). Kerry said, "You have

to run every four years. You have to declare that you want to be reelected, and then you run every four years" (Kerry). Kerry, therefore, described an ongoing election process in which they actively seek Board members and reaffirm their commitment to the Board and the university every four years. James also spoke about being elected to the Board. They said, "[Grant University] is unique in that they have an election process. I'm up for my tenth election now, so I've been serving 35 years" (James). Like Kerry, James must also resubmit for election every four years. Thus, the process involves the following steps: nomination or election, appointment, interview, confirmation hearings, and approval by the state legislature.

The election pathway is different from pathways involving appointment or nomination. To continue her board service, Kerry must be reelected every four years, which requires campaigning and significant financial investment. Financial investment either involves personal investment or through sponsorship. Elections also have a significant risk of failure; an individual seeking election would lose their personal investment if someone else was elected in their stead. Thus, the election pathway is notably different than pathways involving appointment or nomination.

Reasons for Serving on the Board of Trustees

Having now discussed the process involved in getting on the board, I now discuss the reasons the participants cited for serving on the board or their reasons for being nominated. This section aims to address the following research question:

RQ2: What experiences contributed to or mitigated Black alumni's interest in board service?

In addressing this research question, there were six themes that arose from the analysis of the data: (a) Didn't ask for or seek to be appointed or nominated, (b) sustained commitment to the university, (c) financial contributions, (d) creativity, (e) diversity and (f) passion. These themes are summarized in Table 5 and will be discussed in turn.

Table 5

Reasons for Choosing to Serve on Board of Trustees or Reasons for Nomination

Theme	Participant	Excerpt
Didn't Ask or Seek to Be Appointed or Nominated	Brandon, Beth, Lloyd, Bill	"I'm the youngest ever to be appointed to the board. I will tell you, I wasn't seeking the position. There was an opening in my district, and several people contacted me and encouraged me to apply. They were the kind of people I took very seriously, who would not have reached out to me if they didn't think there was an opportunity" (Beth).
Sustained Commitment To University	Brandon, Myra, Beth, Randy, Bill, Dorothy, Kerry	"What I think happens at the university is that you show that you are involved in the university leadership activities over a sustained period. I showed them over time that I was committed to the university, both in my activities and financially. Somebody came to me at some point and asked, Hey, would you be interested in considering a position on the board of trustees? Of which I obliged." (Brandon)
Financial Contributions	Brandon, Bill, Dorothy	"You make a financial commitment to the university. You also show continued giving to the university financially" (Brandon).
Creativity	Myra, Dorothy	"When I was recruited, the person recruiting me told me that the Trustees didn't need money. They needed individuals with my drive, creativity, and commitment" (Myra).
Diversity	Brandon, Myra, Fred, Lloyd, Clarence, James, Kerry	"One of the things I think we recognized, and this is, in part, I was recruited to the Board because there wasn't enough gender or racial diversity on our board. And there wasn't enough diversity regarding professional career paths" (Fred).

Passion	Fred, Alex, Randy, Dorothy	"I think each person should choose to serve to effect change and to serve for their passion. Me, I wanted to serve because of my passion for my school. But, even when I got on the board, I didn't understand the impact of my role. But, when I got on, I realized what I wanted to do" (Alex).
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Didn't Ask for or Seek to be Appointed or Nominated

One of the participants (Clarence), as discussed earlier, explicitly asked to be appointed to the Board of Trustees. However, this was not the norm. An interesting finding of this study is that many participants didn't ask for an appointment or seek to be nominated. This points to the fact that their network and relationships were working on their behalf without their knowledge. Four participants explicitly spoke about this topic (Brandon, Beth, Lloyd, and Bill). Beth described:

I'm the youngest ever to be appointed to the board. I will tell you, I wasn't seeking the position. There was an opening in my district, and several people contacted me and encouraged me to apply. They were the kind of people I took very seriously, who would not have reached out to me if they didn't think there was an opportunity (Beth).

Beth's mentors recommended them for Board service, even though Beth wasn't seeking the position. They described their mentors as being instrumental in their choice to accept the nomination, citing it as an important opportunity. Brandon believes that their appointment to the Board is directly related to not asking for the position. Brandon said, "It wasn't that I wanted to be on the board. I didn't seek the position. I think one of the main reasons I'm on the board is because I didn't solicit membership on the board" (Brandon). In their interview, Brandon described a sustained commitment to the university through service on committees, as well as

financial contributions. They believe that this sustained service and humility were a driving force for their appointment to the Board.

Lloyd and Bill also described not seeking positions on the board of trustees. Bill said, “I didn't ask to be appointed to the board. But the governor was appointing me. I’m not the type of individual that says no when I’m called to service” (Bill). Bill, who had a distinguished career in the U.S. military, believed their appointment to the Board was a call to service that they took seriously. They further described their commitment to the position, saying

I looked at the position as a way to help current and future students. When I was at [Bates University], the university’s interest in Black students’ education was just beginning to develop. I think progress means that Black students should have someone in their corner (Bill).

Bill highlights that their board membership, despite not originally seeking it, is important to them because they have an opportunity to help current and future students.

Sustained Commitment to the University

Many of the participants believed they were nominated or appointed to the Board due to their sustained commitment to the university. Brandon described,

What I think happens at the university is that you show that you are involved in the university leadership activities over a sustained period. I showed them over time that I was committed to the university, both in my activities and financially. Somebody came to me at some point and asked, Hey, would you be interested in considering a position on the board of trustees? Of which I obliged (Brandon).

Brandon believes that sustained commitment to the university in terms of leadership facilitated their entry onto its board. Myra described the person urging them to apply for Board

membership, saying, “Her response was: no, they just don't need the money. They need individuals with your drive, your creativity and your commitment” (Myra). Commitment to the university is an essential prerequisite for Board service.

Randy also speaks about a commitment to the university as being a driving force for their nomination. Randy said, “I think it was more about trying to accomplish what needed to be accomplished for the school. That’s why I was nominated to the Board” (Randy). Furthermore, Bill explained, “My training and leadership in organizational behavior was a definite skill they were looking for” (Bill). These data collectively suggest that a strong, sustained commitment to the university is necessary for anyone to achieve a nomination or appointment to the board of trustees.

Financial Contributions

Some of the participants believed that financial contributions are a necessary step to Board service. Brandon said, “You make a financial commitment to the university. You also show continued giving to the university financially" (Brandon). Thus, Brandon highlights that commitment to the university can come in many forms, from serving on committees to financial contributions. Dorothy also spoke about the role of financial contributions to the university. They said, “No one wants to talk about it, but you have to contribute financially to the university. Even if it’s a small amount every year, a financial commitment signifies that you’re committed” (Dorothy). Thus, according to some of the participants, financial contributions to the university are a necessary prerequisite for board membership.

Creativity

Two of the participants spoke about having the creativity necessary for effective Board service (Myra and Dorothy). Myra, as described in an earlier section, believed they were appointed to the board because of their drive, creativity, and commitment. That creativity was instrumental for them. Dorothy also described creativity as being an important facet of Board membership. Dorothy said, “I think that I got onto the Board because my work and ideas on other committees were so out of the box. I bring a new perspective to Board because of my background” (Dorothy). Thus, for Myra and Dorothy, their creativity was cited as a reason why they were selected for Board membership.

Diversity

Some of the participants (Brandon, Myra, Fred, Lloyd, Clarence, James, and Kerry) spoke about bringing much-needed diversity to the Board of Trustees. Fred said,

One of the things I think we recognized, and this is, in part, I was recruited to the Board because there wasn't enough gender or racial diversity on our board. And there wasn't enough diversity regarding professional career paths (Fred).

Fred speaks about being recruited to the board based because of the diversity the Board sought in its membership. Brandon concurs with Fred, saying,

The Board wanted to broaden the diversity of the board to more represent the stakeholders of the university, alumni and students. I think they saw an opportunity for me to contribute in a lot of different ways, not the least of which I was an African American (Brandon).

Lloyd also highlights the notion that their Board was seeking diversity. Lloyd said, “It was pretty obvious to me that the board was making an effort to increase their diversity on the

board” (Lloyd). Diversity was a critical factor influencing these participants' appointment to the Board of Trustees.

James not only brings diversity to the Board but also described one of their roles on the board as being to promote diversity. Promoting diversity can be at the faculty, student, administrative, or board level. James explained

I'm the Black guy in the room. I also made sure that Black issues couldn't be glossed over. I brought up Black issues and diversity way before the DEI movement. One of my roles on the Board is to make sure Black students are treated fairly (James).

Kerry similarly described board membership as being critical to ensuring diversity. Kerry said

Being an African American board member helps bring awareness of the existing issues that occur to encourage and assist PWIs in diversifying their governing boards. We also would like to achieve an insight into the path and strategies for historically underrepresented students to achieve success in the future (Kerry).

Thus, one way these participants show commitment to the university is by bringing attention to critical diversity issues that need to be addressed so that Black students can succeed at PWIs.

Passion

The final theme in this subsection is passion. Four participants spoke about their passion for their school (Fred, Alex, Randy, Dorothy) as being a driving force for Board membership. For example, Alex said,

I think each person should choose to serve to effect change and to serve for their passion. Me, I wanted to serve because of my passion for my school. But, even when I got on the board, I didn't understand the impact of my role. But, when I got on, I realized what I wanted to do (Alex).

Thus, Alex believes their passion for their school was important for Board membership, and that passion continues to be a driving force for their Board membership. Fred also believes that passion is critical for Board membership. Fred said, “You have to be passionate about their mission. You have to care about what they're doing. You have to care about what they're doing in a way that allows you to be objective and clear on your thinking” (Fred).

Passion is multifaceted. The participants cited being passionate about service and passionate about the university’s mission. Other participants, including Beth, spoke about their passion for helping current and future students. Beth said, “I think it's really my passion around the student experience and the underrepresented student experiences specifically too. Those have been the things that that I've focused on as a board member” (Beth). Thus, passion for the university and its students is an important facet of board membership.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I presented the findings of this study, which sought to understand the narrative of Black individuals serving on the Board of Trustees at their PWIs. One of the goals of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to expose the steps that Black people must take to serve on the Board of Trustees at PWIs. The participants answered this question in its entirety. For example, the participants illustrated the following pathway to board service: (a) appointment, election, or nomination, (b) an interview with the Governor and selection committee, (c)

confirmation hearings with the state Senate or legislature, (d) legislature approval, and (e) election or reelection. Notably, the selection process can involve either appointment via the Governor, nomination from the current Board of Trustees, or election, depending on the PWI.

This chapter's second portion examined why the participants believed they were nominated or appointed to the board. Notable themes included sustained commitment and support for the university, financial contributions, creativity, drive, passion, and diversity. All participants described their role on the board as aiding current and future students. Furthermore, participants' engagement and experiences in undergrad prepared them for success and continued engagement after graduation, which helped them be noticed or nominated for their board roles. This involved cultivating relationships, building/maintaining social capital, and leveraging that capital to secure their board position and advocate for the issues they care about. Additionally, the participant experiences showed that being involved, working hard, giving back, contributing, and being brave enough to step into an environment that does not favor you, can lead to being able to have influence and make an impact later. All the participants stepped out of their comfort zones to attend the PWI, they were open to being involved, they networked (in school and after), they worked hard in their careers and either stayed connected or got involved with their time. Finally, they were all recognized by those in positions of power or influence and their contributions were valued. In Chapter 5, I will discuss these findings in the context of the existing academic literature and the theoretical framework chosen for the study. Chapter 5 will also include a discussion of implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the narratives of Black alumni serving on governing boards at PWIs to determine common themes in their experiences with and paths to service. The primary motivation for this research was to understand the landscape for existing and future Black alumni serving on governing boards at PWIs and to help bring awareness of existing issues to encourage and assist PWIs in diversifying their governing boards and achieve insight into strategies for historically underrepresented students to achieve success in the future. A narrative inquiry was used as the qualitative research method to guide the inquiry. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, explore and create narratives from the participants' responses. The data was structured by the participants' explanation of their experiences and pathways to service on their respective Boards of Trustees and by my interpretation of those experiences. Specifically, in this investigation, I used a narrative inquiry approach to explore the participants' narratives regarding their experiences.

This chapter will present a summary of the dissertation's findings. The total collection of the narratives in this study consisted of approximately 16 hours of in-depth, semi-structured, and transcribed interviews with 12 participants. All participants were Black people leading distinguished careers who also served on the Board of Trustees at their PWIs. I will describe the emergent themes from the participants' narratives and revisit the study's theoretical framework. I will also give advice to other Black alumni seeking service on the Board of Trustees at their PWIs, make recommendations for future research, and elucidate the conclusions that may be drawn from the study.

Study Overview

This research study was an exploration of the narratives of 12 Black alumni who serve on the Board of Trustees at their PWIs. The study addressed: (a) the experiences of Black alumni while enrolled at their PWIs, (b) the pathways that Black people used to become Board of Trustees members, and (c) the experiences that contributed to or mitigated Black alumni's interest in board service. The study also used Tillman's (2002) culturally sensitive research (CSR) theoretical framework to inform this narrative inquiry, in which ethnicity and culture are recognized and acknowledged as fundamental to the research process.

Statement of the Problem

While the importance of board diversity has been established, the perspective of Black alumni serving on governing boards at PWIs is unknown but may lend important insight into replicating their successes. Governing boards have different degrees of power and influence both in higher education and within their institutions (Barringer et al., 2020; Bastedo, 2005). The role of governing boards may also vary depending on the type of institution they serve and their mission. Some governing boards may take an activist position, focusing on policy changes, whereas other boards may be primarily figureheads that do not pursue meaningful action to drive institutional changes (Bastedo, 2005). Governing boards must remain cognizant of student experiences, including those of historically underrepresented students.

There has been ample research focusing on the experiences of Black students at PWIs, finding that retention of these students is a challenge (Thompson, 2020). However, existing research on the Black college student experience at PWIs has only slowly led to the development of programs and practices that would address Black student retention or improve their overall

educational environment (Tanner-Anderson & Walker, 2023). Governing boards play a critical role in shaping and executing higher education institutions' missions, including diversity and inclusion (Wise et al., 2020). However, homogeneous boards may be less likely to prioritize or appropriately respond to these issues; there is thus a critical need for research focused on the perspectives of those historically underrepresented individuals who have successfully navigated a path to board service. Diversifying governing boards could lead to better and more effective diversity practices that will result in a better overall historically underrepresented student experience.

Research Questions

There were two research questions that guided this narrative inquiry into the narratives of Black alumni serving on the Board of Trustees at PWIs. These two research questions were:

1. How do Black alumni board members at PWI talk about their path to service?
2. What experiences contributed to or mitigated Black alumni's interest in board service?

Thematic Discoveries

The study participants offered in-depth, open, and candid descriptions of their experiences as undergraduates at PWIs and their pathways to service on the Board of Trustees. The participants' experiences at their PWIs were the impetus for their service on the Board of Trustees. Consequently, it was essential to understand their undergraduate experiences. The themes that emerged from the participants' discussions of their undergraduate experiences or in conjunction with RQ1 were: (a) fostering community with other Black students, (b) joining a sorority or fraternity, (c) integrating with White students, (d) mentorship, and (e) programs for Black students.

The main goal of this study was to expose the pathways that Black people took to become members of the Board of Trustees at their alma mater PWIs. Through their narratives, the participants identified the following themes that chronologically described their pathway to board service: (a) nomination, (b) appointment, (c) asked to be nominated, (d) interview, (e) confirmation hearings, and (f) election or re-election. The participants described three main pathways to board service. The majority of the participants (9 participants, 75%) were nominated for service by other board and committee members. However, two participants spoke about being appointed to their respective boards, and two participants were actively elected to their boards every four years. One participant asked to be nominated for their position. Thus, there were three main pathways to board service: nomination, appointment, and election. These findings are congruent with the literature in Chapter 2, explaining that though the pathway to board service can differ between institutions, members are generally elected or appointed, which includes nominations, interviews, and confirmation hearings as a part of the process (Pusser et al., 2006; Kezar, 2016).

Black Students' Experiences at PWIs And Connection to Alumni Engagement

In Chapter 2, Black students' experiences at PWIs and alumni engagement were discussed in conjunction with this theme. Specifically, the literature posited that when students build social networks within their school, they tend to experience a sense of satisfaction and success after graduating (Daniels-Osaze, 2016; Rau & Erwin, 2015; Weerts & Ronca, 2008). The findings of this study are congruent with the literature as despite being at PWIs, the participants described environments where they could find and enjoy the company of other like-minded, high-achieving Black students. The participants joined sororities and fraternities, played college

athletics, served on college leadership committees, and integrated with Black and White students. They described the role of mentorship as instrumental to their successes, and they openly discussed taking advantage of every opportunity available to them as Black students, including programs designed for Black students transitioning to higher education.

Public Service Motivation

Several key themes emerged from the data analysis when exploring RQ2 and the experiences that contributed to or mitigated Black alumni's interest in board service. These themes include (a) Didn't ask for or seek to be appointed or nominated, (b) sustained commitment to the university, (c) financial contributions, (d) creativity, (e) diversity, and (f) passion. Compared to the literature review, these findings associated with RQ2 were unanticipated in that the participants would cite public service motivation (PSM) as reasoning for becoming a part of the Board and continuing to serve on it.

According to Taylor et al. (2015), PSM, a hypothesis that Perry and Wise first introduced, refers to a person's propensity to react to motivations primarily rooted in public institutions and organizations. PSM can also be described as "beliefs, values, and attitudes that go beyond self-interest or organizational interest, that concern the interest of a larger political entity and that motivate individuals to act accordingly whenever appropriate" (Vandenabeele, 2007, p 547). Wang et al. (2020) created a causal map for PSM by comprehending the social cognition process and concentrating on the five inherent moralities of PSM: care, fairness, authority, loyalty, and sanctity.

Care and fairness are centered on the individual's rights, liberties, and autonomy. According to Wang et al. (2020), fairness aims to recognize kindness, promote reciprocity, and

guard against unfair defection. Additionally, authority values the perceived validity and attraction of social hierarchy, the recognition of rank and the obligation for subordinates to follow orders (Wang et al., 2020). Furthermore, loyalty promotes selflessness for the in-group and vigilance against traitors and outsiders. Finally, sanctity is the foundation for the spiritual purity that results from trying to live in a higher, less sensuous, and more noble way (Haidt, 2012). Sanctity creates strict criteria for the proper use of the body and emphasizes the importance of the soul above the body (Giner-Sorolla et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2020). The five themes of PSM will now be discussed in relation to the themes of RQ2.

Loyalty

The findings from the participants' perspectives align with the PMS theme of loyalty, particularly in the context of the themes of financial contributions and sustained commitment to the university. Participants highlighted the importance of making financial contributions to demonstrate loyalty and commitment to the institution. For example, Brandon emphasized that financial commitment is a way to show continued support and dedication to the university, indicating a strong sense of loyalty. Dorothy also stressed the significance of financial contributions, stating that it signifies a commitment to the university and is a prerequisite for board membership. These perspectives indicate that the participants perceive financial contributions as an expression of loyalty to the institution.

Furthermore, the participants emphasized the importance of sustained commitment to the university as a key factor in their nomination or appointment to the board. They believed that their ongoing dedication and involvement in various leadership roles within the university showcased their loyalty and commitment. Specifically, Myra's experience of being urged to

apply for board membership based on their drive, creativity, and commitment demonstrates how sustained commitment to the institution is valued in the selection process. This aligns with the notion of loyalty as a motivating factor, as individuals who consistently demonstrate their commitment to the university are seen as valuable assets to the board due to their loyalty and long-term dedication (Wang et al., 2020).

Care

The findings regarding creativity about Board service align with the PSM theme of care. Specifically, some participants emphasized the importance of creativity in their effectiveness as board members. Myra specifically mentioned that their drive, creativity, and commitment played a role in their appointment to the board. This suggests that their ability to think innovatively and bring fresh ideas to the table was valued in the context of board governance (Wang et al., 2020). Moreover, Dorothy expressed that their work and ideas on other committees were "out of the box," indicating that their unique and creative perspective brought added value to the board. By acknowledging the significance of creativity in their role as a board member, Dorothy demonstrated a care-oriented approach that seeks to explore new possibilities and contribute fresh insights to the governance process. The participants demonstrated their dedication to bringing fresh perspectives to the boardroom and eventually improving the institution they work for by connecting their experiences with the public service motivation theme of care (Wang et al., 2020).

Authority

The findings of this study reveal an intriguing aspect regarding the PSM theme of authority. While one participant, Clarence, explicitly expressed his desire to be appointed to the

Board of Trustees, it was found that many other participants did not actively seek such appointments or nominations. Surprisingly, their network and relationships seemed to be working on their behalf without their knowledge. Many participants specifically discussed this phenomenon. Despite not originally seeking it, they described how their board membership holds significance for them. For Bill, in particular, this opportunity to serve on the board is crucial because it gives him a chance to impact current and future students positively. The participants' commitment to making a difference and serving the public interest, as demonstrated by Bill's focus on helping students, underscores their sense of duty and responsibility. The findings highlight how authority, when coupled with a genuine desire to serve, can create opportunities for individuals to fulfill their PSM (Wang et al., 2020).

Sanctity and Fairness

The findings of this study resonate strongly with the PSM themes of sanctity and fairness, particularly concerning the participants' commitment to diversity and addressing critical issues within their university's Board of Trustees. Specifically, Kerry, emphasized the importance of board membership in ensuring diversity. As an Black board member, Kerry acknowledged the need to raise awareness of existing issues and actively encourage PWIs to diversify their governing boards. Furthermore, Kerry expressed a desire to gain insight into the paths and strategies that can help historically underrepresented students achieve success in the future. This dedication to promoting diversity aligns with the sanctity theme of PSM, which emphasizes a commitment to moral and ethical principles. The participants' support for diversity and inclusivity reflects their conviction in the worth and justice of giving all students the same chances (Giner-Sorolla et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2020).

The participants' focus on bringing much-needed diversity to the Board of Trustees further underscores their commitment to fairness. For example, most of the participants spoke about the significance of addressing diversity issues within the board. Their collective efforts are aimed at creating an equitable and representative governing body that reflects the diverse student population. Some of the participants openly acknowledged that they believed one reason they were asked to serve on the board of trustees was to increase the diversity of the board. Such a reason for a board appointment could be viewed in a negative manner, much the same way that some Black people view affirmative action negatively (Yi & Todd, 2021). These findings are congruent with the literature stating that new concerns have been arising over governing boards not reflecting the diversity of the institution, creating political disruptions within institutions (Siqueiros, 2020). Additionally, the literature dictates that board nominations are highly political decisions; therefore, the participants may be justified in their viewpoints on their nominations (Alacbay, 2021). However, all of the participants were resoundingly proud that they were chosen to serve as trustees. As a group, they believed that increasing diversity at PWIs was an important goal, and they all looked at that part of their mission seriously and spoke about it with pride.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are critical to the success of our colleges and universities. DEI, contrary to popular belief, is not about indoctrination or division. It is about making learning more just and equitable for all students and alumni. BOT members must embrace this and fight for it to keep our institution of higher learning focused on their missions. DEI is important in higher education and society for a variety of reasons. First, DEI assists students in preparing for the workforce. The world is becoming more diverse, and employers are looking for employees who can effectively collaborate with people from various backgrounds.

DEI programs assist students in acquiring the skills and knowledge required to succeed in a global marketplace. This shows up in the corporate board room as well as the board at our HIED. Second, DEI contributes to a more inclusive campus climate. Students are more likely to engage in their educational pursuits and succeed academically when they feel included and valued. DEI programs contribute to the creation of a campus climate that lets all students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, or other identity factors, feel welcome and respected. We know that a positive campus experience will lead to future engagement and alumni who want to provide a better environment for future generations.

DEI promotes social justice. DEI programs help to raise awareness of and promote social change by teaching students about the long history and impact of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. DEI programs also aid in developing leaders dedicated to fostering a more just and equitable society. We see that in how the Civil Rights Movement impacted our board members and that fighting for a seat at the table is necessary to remain at the table and bring others with diverse thoughts and backgrounds to the table. A number of negative political views, actions, and consequences have emerged in recent years. These negative attitudes and behaviors are diametrically opposed to the goals of DEI, which are intended to promote social justice and to make society more just and equitable. Unfortunately, the numerous assaults on DEI programs have been motivated by a number of factors, including the belief that DEI programs are "divisive" or "indoctrinate" students. There has also been a concerted effort to disseminate incorrect information about DEI. This misinformation has frequently been used to justify attacks on DEI programs.

For example, recent political news states that current efforts to promote and incorporate DEI are coming under attack. Specifically in Florida, the House of Representatives approved a bill blocking DEI funding (News Service of Florida, 2023). Furthermore, Texas lawmakers adopted adjustments to tenure procedures at public colleges and universities and the revisions would prohibit institutions from having diversity offices, setting up diversity offices, paying personnel to carry out DEI work, or mandating any DEI training as a requirement for employment or admission (Jaschik, 2023). The law would also prohibit universities from requesting written responses from job applicants regarding how they view diversity in the workplace. The bill's likely passage will result in Texas joining Florida in outlawing DEI activities at its public colleges (Jaschik, 2023). This is where our board members can step in and speak from their own experiences to show the fallacies of many of those arguments against DEI. Supporters of DEI must stand up and speak out. These board members are in positions of influence and can help slow the dismantling of programs that were created to provide support and equity for all.

Theoretical Model Revisited

The study used Tillman's (2002) culturally sensitive research (CSR) theoretical framework to inform this narrative inquiry. In this framework, ethnicity and culture are recognized and acknowledged as fundamental to the research process. The CSR approach relies on qualitative research methods, including interviews and observation, or in the case of this study, narrative inquiry. These interviews capture a comprehensive picture of the social, political, economic, and educational factors affecting Black people's daily lives, particularly in educational settings. The CSR approach also relies on the individual and distinct experiences of

Black individuals. Using CSR, I strived to maintain the cultural integrity of the participants, as well as that of the larger community.

With these ideas in mind, before conducting the participants' interviews, I believed there would be two theoretical outcomes for why the participants would choose to serve on the board of trustees at a PWI. First, an individual could have had such a positive experience at their undergraduate university that they were compelled to board service to further promote that positive impact. Second, an individual could have had such a negative experience at their undergraduate university that they were compelled to board service to effect change in a way that may reverse that negative experience for other minority students. Indeed, the academic literature contains both types of accounts from Black students attending PWIs. Some Black students have positive, inclusive experiences at their PWIs, noting that faculty and administrators truly fostered an inclusive, helpful environment and invested in their success (Dortch & Patel, 2017; Leath et al., 2021, 2022). However, other Black students feel isolated at PWIs and struggle to find inclusion (Goodwill et al., 2022; Turner & Grauerholz, 2017; Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2018). The same can be said for Black faculty teaching at PWIs. Some Black faculty members described their PWIs as being inclusive and supportive (Stokes-Brown, 2023). However, other Black faculty working at PWIs described a fight for recognition that parallels the discrimination rampant in the 1960s (Robinson et al., 2019; Tomlin, 2022). Due to the literature presence of both perspectives, I genuinely expected to hear both types of narratives.

All of the participants had positive narratives regarding their experiences at their PWIs. None of the participants spoke about choosing board service to “fix” negative experiences in the hope that other students would not share their experiences. On the contrary, the participants

spoke about their undergraduate PWIs and experiences with pride and spoke about choosing board service to further their own positive experiences. The participants did, in general, acknowledge the continued need for their PWIs to be cognizant and proactive about diversity, inclusion, and equity on their campuses. However, they also believed that their institutions were genuinely trying to enact change, and they were proud to serve as catalysts for that change.

Advice to Other Black Alumni Seeking Board Service

One of the interesting findings of this study is that the majority of participants did not seek board service. They were chosen based on their commitment to their universities, as well as their passion, drive, and creativity. Nonetheless, based on the participants' experiences and narratives, I can offer advice and recommendations to young Black alumni who may be interested in seeking board service as a trustee. First, individuals should desire to serve on PWI boards to increase diversity and promote equity and inclusion. Many of the participants spoke highly regarding their roles as agents of change and described the intricacies of designing programs and initiatives to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Second, those seeking Board service should bring diverse perspectives to the board, advocate for underrepresented students and faculty and promote cultural competence within the institution. To this end, the participants began their pathway to service many years prior to a board nomination. They served on committees and dedicated their time as young alumni and professionals to making their PWI more inclusive and diverse.

The participants noted that board service is an opportunity to give back to their university communities and make a positive impact on higher education. As noted above, this pathway began long before the participants were nominated to the board. They served on university

committees and at university events dedicated to their university communities. Just like the participants took advantage of opportunities as undergraduates, they also took advantage of opportunities as alumni. When an opening was announced on a university committee, they volunteered their time and efforts, adding value to the committees on which they served. The participants also noted the importance of networking, both as undergraduates and as professionals. They spoke of the importance of maintaining relationships and friendships with their fellow alumni. Those relationships and friendships, in turn, led to other opportunities on their pathway to board service.

Politics is an important aspect of board service. To serve on a board, it is imperative to understand the political structure and process of service. Some participants described being appointed; others were nominated. Still, other participants were elected. Therefore, it is essential to understand the process. Exposure is also important. Involvement on alumni boards and committees within the institution, at any level, is an important mechanism for both networking and exposure. Gaining leadership experience in the community, through politics, or at the institution itself can also increase an individual's exposure and allow for important networking interactions. Such exposure can also lead to relationships and friendships with other alumni who may advocate for you. The factors notwithstanding, the participants noted that passion must underlie all individuals seeking board service. For example, Fred said, "You must be a fan. Otherwise, why are you doing it?" Indeed, potential board members must be passionate about the mission of the institution and "must be committed to serving" (Dorothy).

Recommendations for Governing Boards

The narratives of the participants and the findings of this research study have important implications for the board of trustees at PWIs. Based on the results of this study, I have the following recommendations for the governing boards of PWIs.

1. Criticize different perspectives on the board by actively seeking out and including individuals with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives on the governing board. Encourage open discussions and constructive debates to foster a rich and inclusive decision-making process.
2. Speak to current DEI issues at the state level (policy recommendation) and the role of state by engaging with state-level policymakers to address diversity, equity, and inclusion issues in higher education. Advocate for policies that promote equitable access to education and support underrepresented communities.
3. Address changing period/temporal conceptions of HIED-Black relations for students and alumni by recognizing that the relationship and climate between the university and Black students and alumni can evolve over time. Understand and acknowledge historical contexts to create a more inclusive and responsive environment for current and past generations of students and alumni.
4. Conduct a diversity audit to assess the current board members' diversity and identify areas for improvement. This step can help establish a baseline and set goals for increasing diversity on the board. An audit can also ensure that the current board reflects the diversity of the institution's stakeholders. The participants in this study spoke about their

efforts in identifying areas of improvement and their work in setting goals for increasing board diversity.

5. Support board member development by offering mentoring and training opportunities.

The participants in this study all spoke highly of individuals who mentored them.

However, they noted that their pathways to service would have been easier if mentoring and training opportunities were available. Training opportunities would also allow for the identification and cultivation of diverse individuals passionate about the university.

6. Develop policies that prioritize diversity on governing boards. Boards should establish goals for increasing the representation of underrepresented populations. Such policies could include specific recruitment targets or require that a certain percentage of board members be from underrepresented populations, allowing for the diversity of the university community to be equally represented by board diversity.
7. Ensure a diverse candidate pool for board governance. This may include requiring the nominating committee to include members from underrepresented populations or establishing partnerships with organizations serving diverse communities to identify potential candidates.
8. Establish committees or task forces specifically focused on issues important to the university. Such task forces could include committees devoted to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
9. Offer diverse opportunities for alumni to engage or reengage with the university.

Engaging alumni may allow for the identification of potential board members from underrepresented populations. Alumni may also have connections with diverse

communities and can help identify candidates who may not have been reached through other recruitment efforts.

10. Increase diversity on governing boards through targeted outreach and recruitment efforts.

11. Host events and forums to engage with underrepresented communities and promote board service as a way to give back to the institution. These events can provide an opportunity to share information about board service and answer potential board members' questions.

Any or all of these recommendations have the potential to facilitate increasing the diversity of governing boards at PWIs. These recommendations necessitate understanding the current sociopolitical context when addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion on governing boards by recognizing the challenges and opportunities presented by the sociopolitical climate to develop more effective strategies for advancing DEI work. When operating in legislative climates unfriendly to DEI work, boards that are no longer only figureheads but actively involved in setting the campus climate may experience conflicts. Board members must tread cautiously through these tensions, keeping the institution, its community, and the ideals it strives to uphold in mind. They must push for DEI initiatives in the face of external challenges. Board members have a political obligation to advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion measures and defend them against legislative attacks. They should use their roles to influence policy decisions while remaining committed to creating an inclusive campus climate. Incorporating these principles into PWI governance can help enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion on governing boards and foster good change in higher education institutions. These activities can establish more inclusive campuses and support the success and well-being of all students and stakeholders by promoting representation and different perspectives.

Recommendations For Future Research

There are several areas of future research implicated by the findings of this study. First, the participants in this study represented six PWIs, five in the south or southeastern United States and one in the northeastern United States. Thus, an area of future research is the repetition of this study among PWIs nationally. The geographical limitations of this study may limit the transferability of this study to all Black alumni serving on PWI boards in the United States. It would be interesting to discern whether the experiences of the participants in the study were similar to other participants serving on PWIs in the northern, midwestern, and western United States. Another area of future research is to investigate the pathways of other ethnic minorities to board service at PWIs. As noted in the participant section in the discussion of the six PWIs included in this study, Black people were the highest-represented minority group at most of the PWIs. Indeed, the average percentage of Black students at the six PWIs in this study was 10.8%. Other minority groups were less represented, including Hispanics (4.1%) and Asians (3.3%). It would be interesting to investigate the experiences of these underrepresented populations on their pathway to board service. Such information could add to the body of knowledge of the experiences of underrepresented minorities at PWIs, laying the foundation and framework for increased diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, policies, and practices. Furthermore, given the recent legislature in Florida banning funding for DEI initiatives, further studies should include the aftermath of this ruling and how the perspectives of Board members have changed and what next steps forward would be (News Service of Florida, 2023).

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to investigate the experiences of Black alumni who chose to serve on the governing boards of their PWIs. The focus was to describe the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of Black alumni on PWI governing boards and understand the pathway to service on these important institutional boards. Twelve participants participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews that resulted in 16 hours of transcribed data of the narrative experiences of Black Board of Trustee members. The findings of the study not only revealed the pathways to service but also highlighted the important characteristics and motivations of the board members as well as their PSM.

Culturally sensitive research informs this narrative inquiry. This approach allowed me to enlighten and understand Black alumni's cultural experiences with inclusion, diversity, and service at their PWIs. The perspectives of these trustees in their own voices and through their own narratives lend critical insight into actions that PWIs can take to increase the diversity, equity, and inclusion of their governing boards. The participants' experiences highlighted a critical set of recommendations that PWIs can implement to increase the diversity of their governing boards, increase alumni engagement and promote diversity on their campuses.

This study has practical significance for researchers, PWI governing boards, and university administrators. The findings can prove helpful in determining policy and factors that may contribute to establishing leadership that fosters diversity, equity, and inclusion. Understanding the perspectives of successful Black alumni in leadership positions at PWIs can aid universities in promoting and creating leadership opportunities for other underrepresented minorities.

In closing, as the racial and cultural demographics in the United States change, universities must be prepared to promote diversity on their campuses to the growing multiracial and multicultural society. Change must come from within, and it must be embraced at all levels of leadership. The inclusion of diverse individuals on university governing boards has the potential to lead to policies that will ensure equity and inclusion for students, faculty, and administrators at all university levels. It is imperative that higher education policies not only acknowledge diversity but embrace it. The voices of the underrepresented must be heard. In the echelons of higher education, those voices are valuable, and their inclusion at all levels of administration is immeasurably useful, with the potential to effect the necessary change to truly promote a fair and equitable education for all who seek it.

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