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## **Latinx Students' Knowledge of and Inclination to Attend Public HBCUs**

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative study explored Latinx students' knowledge of and inclination to attend historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Current research on Latinx students at HBCUs primarily explores the experiences of current students. The study sought to understand what might interest Latinx students in HBCUs. The author conducted three focus group interviews of Latinx high school and community college students. Findings indicate that Latinx students are not as knowledgeable about HBCUs as they are about predominately White institutions in the same city. Academic programs and proximity to home can attract Latinx students to HBCUs. Admissions and diversity staff will benefit from the implications of this study.

*Keywords:* HBCU, Latinx College Students, College Choice

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## **Introduction**

Desegregation significantly shifted racial demographics in higher education enrollments. As more predominately White institutions admitted Black students, HBCUs no longer enrolled the lion's share of Black college students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the percentage of Black (African-American) students attending HBCUs has declined. In 1976, 18% of all Black college students attended an HBCU (NCES, 2004). In 2011, 9% of all Black college students attended an HBCU. Conversely, more non-Black students are attending HBCUs. However, the percentage increase in non-Black students has not matched the decline in the percentage of Black students. Enrollment of non-Black students at HBCUs has increased from 15% in 1976 to 19% in 2011 (NCES, 2004; 2013). While the share of all Black college students enrolled at HBCUs declined 50% between 1976 and 2011, the percentage of non-Black students only increased approximately 3%. Enrollment increases at HBCUs lag behind other post-secondary institutions. HBCU enrollment increased 45% between 1976 and 2011 while the total postsecondary enrollment in the United States increased 91% (NCES, 2012). The aforementioned statistics demonstrate the changes in HBCU enrollment prompted by desegregation: as a result of desegregation, HBCUs did not have as high a percentage of enrollment growth as the total higher education sector.

## **HBCUs Transition Through Desegregation**

HBCUs are post-secondary institutions founded prior to 1964 with the principal mission of educating Black Americans (Higher Education Act, 1965). The reader should note that the HBCU definition does not include a percentage of Black enrollment. Therefore, an institution can be predominately White and still be an HBCU. Though four HBCUs existed prior to the Civil War (Wilberforce University, Cheyney University, Lincoln University, and the defunct Avery Institute), the majority of HBCUs were established after the Civil War to educate newly freed slaves. Currently, there are 101 accredited HBCUs. This figure includes two-year institutions. Of the 101, forty-one are public, 4-year institutions. Segregation banned Black enrollment at colleges in the south while Northern colleges considered Black applications on a token basis. HBCUs have transformed from the main postsecondary option for Black students to one of several options for students of any background; hence, the decline in the percentage of Black student enrollment at HBCUs (Richardson & Harris, 2004). After the Reconstruction era (1865-1877), southern states implemented Jim Crow laws that mandated separate

accommodations for Blacks, and Whites. In *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that facilities separated by race were constitutional. Prior to the 1960's, HBCUs were the primary option for Black college-bound students. Today's Black, college-bound students have options beyond HBCUs. Legal and societal changes such as *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), the Civil Rights Act (1964), and *United States vs. Fordice* (1992) have forced HBCUs to broaden their institutional missions. While *Brown vs. Board of Education* did not directly address higher education, legal precedents from integrating graduate and undergraduate education were used to argue for the desegregation of public schools (Elwood, 1990; Martin, 2004). *Murray v. Pearson* (1936), *Sipuel v. Board of Regents of Oklahoma* (1948), and *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) desegregated graduate education in Maryland, Oklahoma, and Texas, respectively. The Civil Rights act of 1964 banned federal funding to entities that discriminated by race. This law forced colleges to open their doors to all races. The 2002 Ayers settlement rewards HBCUs for increasing their enrollments of non-Black students (Minor, 2008; Sum, Light, & King, 2004). While HBCUs never discriminated by race, the freedom of college choice allowed in today's desegregated society means that HBCUs are a realistic option for persons of all races. Today, trans demographic changes have shifted enrollment at two HBCUs, Bluefield State University and West Virginia State University to predominately White (Brown, 2002). Seven other HBCUs have White enrollments of over 10 percent (Education Trust, 2020).

However, the importance of HBCUs continues to be debated (Minor, 2008). Policy analysts argue that public funding of HBCUs competes with support of diversity initiatives at predominately white colleges (Seymore, 2006). The HBCU mission of educating Black Americans conflicts with the *Brown v. Board* (1954) argument that separate is inherently unequal (Samuels, 2005). This conflict forces HBCUs to defend their relevance in today's integrated society. This is the political climate in which HBCUs exist. The underlying perception is that HBCUs still exist only for Black students (Sum, Light, & King, 2004; Willie, 1994). Therefore, they are irrelevant in an integrated society. Though HBCUs remain critical safe spaces and cultivate healthy Black identity development for Black students, HBCUs would expand their relevancy by enrolling more of the largest racial minority in the United States: Latinx students. Though founded to educate former slaves and their descendants, HBCUs cannot continue to rely on a predominately Black recruitment pool to fill enrollment slots.

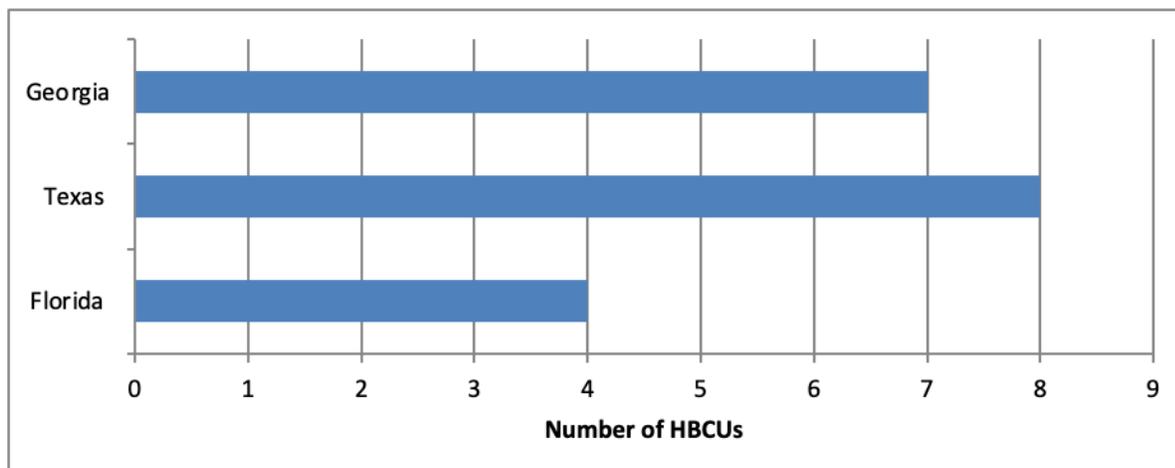
## **Tuition Dependency and Financial Stability**

While enrollment decreases are problematic for any institution, they can be devastating for HBCUs since HBCUs tend to be weakly endowed, and tuition-dependent (Hernandez, 2010; Rivard, 2014). An enrollment drop of 100 students can be financially tragic to an HBCU, as demonstrated by the 2013 Pell grant crisis (Carey, 2013). HBCUs depend on tuition as their main revenue source (Hernandez, 2010). A decrease in enrollment could have severe financial consequences since a smaller enrollment means less tuition revenue. Of the 300 largest college and university endowments, only 3 are HBCUs: Hampton University, Howard University, and Spelman College (Gasman, 2009). HBCUs continue to recruit non-Black students in order to demonstrate their relevance and expand their recruitment pool (Moore, 2000; Seymore, 2006). By expanding their recruitment pool and recruiting more non-Black students, HBCUs will strengthen their financial standing. Mangan (2015) explains further, "Diversity has always been celebrated at the 105 public and private historically black campuses across the country but it's become an economic imperative today. Sagging enrollments and financial troubles have prompted the colleges to court students who might never have been on their radar" (p. 2).

Three of the top 10 states with the largest Hispanic populations are Texas, Florida, and Georgia, which are home to 19 HBCUs (see Figure 1.). Seven of the 10 states with the fastest growing Latinx populations are home to 37 HBCUs (see Figure 2.). Therefore, the Latinx population is growing the fastest in states where HBCUs exist. Considering the aforementioned statistics, HBCUs may find a burgeoning recruitment pool in the Latinx population. HBCUs are tailoring recruitment efforts to attract Latino students (Stewart, 2014; O'Connor, 2018; Oguntoyinbo, 2015). Texas, with its nine HBCUs and large Latins population is an ideal setting for HBCUs and Hispanic students to connect. Paul Quinn College, Huston-Tillotson College, and Prairie View A&M are just some of the HBCUs in Texas that employ Latinx staff charged with recruiting students (Mangan, 2015; Oguntoyinbo, 2015). Texas Southern University in Houston hosts a Día del Tigre recruitment day for Hispanic students. Outside of Texas, Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia has implemented a Latino recruitment initiative to increase cultural awareness as well as recruit students (Williams, 2015). In an effort to attract more Latinx students, Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina began admitting undocumented students in 2011 (Stewart, 2014).

**Figure 1**

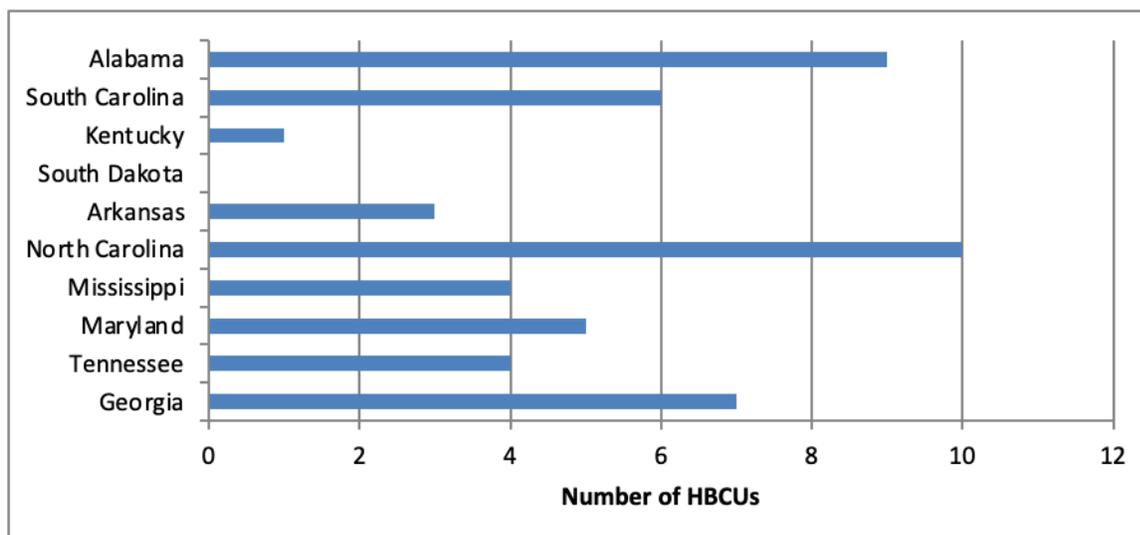
*The Number of HBCUs in HBCU States with the Largest Latinx Population*



Note. The 10 states with the largest Latinx populations are California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, New Jersey, Colorado, New Mexico, Georgia, and Nevada (Coyle, 2017). Of those states, there are only HBCUs in Texas, Florida, and Georgia (Education Trust, 2020).

**Figure 2**

*Number of HBCUs in the States with the Fastest Growing Hispanic/Latinx Populations*



Note. Alabama, South Carolina, Kentucky, South Dakota, Arkansas, North Carolina, Mississippi, Maryland, Tennessee, and Georgia have the fastest growing Hispanic/Latinx populations in the United States (Stepler & Lopez, 2016). This figure displays the number of 4-year HBCUs in these states.

## **Literature Review**

HBCUs are enrolling more non-Black students (Mangan, 2015; Williams, 2015; Oguntoyinbo, 2015; Sum, Light, & King, 2004). While some HBCUs such as Kentucky State University and West Virginia State University have grown their White enrollments to over 20 percent, others such as Paul Quinn College (PQC) and Huston-Tillotson University (HTU) have made similar increases in Latinx enrollment. Both located in Texas, PQC and HTU each have Latinx enrollments over 20%. The largest growth in college enrollment is expected to occur among the Latinx population. According to the NCES (2011), the enrollment of Latinx students in higher education is expected to grow by 46% between 2009 and 2020, only 25% for Black students, and 1% for White students.

HBCUs have a reputation for educating who are either the first in their families to attend college or from low-income families (Abdul-Alim, 2016). Approximately two-thirds of HBCU enrollments are eligible to receive the Pell grant (Education Trust, 2020). While HBCUs comprise only 3% of all colleges and universities in the United States, 13% of Black college graduates earned their undergraduate degree from an HBCU (NCES, 2020; Gasman, 2013). There are other characteristics of HBCUs that appeal to any student, regardless of race. For example, student affairs practitioners at HBCUs tend to be very nurturing towards students and provide students more individual attention (Hirt et al., 2008). HBCUs are noted for increasing upward income mobility among their graduates: “Nearly 70% of students at HBCUs attain at least middle-class incomes and there is less downward mobility at HBCUs than at PWIs” (Nathenson, Samayoa, & Gasman, 2019, p. 19). Particularly in STEM fields, HBCUs maintain a strong pipeline that sends Black students into STEM careers (Jett, 2013; Gasman & Nguyen, 2016). Students of any background who are disadvantaged because of race or class may be attracted to the nurturing environment exemplified at an HBCU.

With a legacy of support systems helping Black students overcome the aforementioned challenges, HBCUs are particularly equipped to help Latinx students meet their educational goals: “The support systems, which are an integral part of an HBCU, benefit all minority students, as well as the traditional African American student body and are evident throughout the students’ experience at an HBCU, from recruitment through graduation and beyond” (McQueen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 52).

## College Choice

Latinx students are more likely to apply to only one college than other ethnic groups (Excelencia in Education, 2018). This narrows the opportunity for colleges to receive applications from Latinx students. There is minimal research on the recruitment of Latinx students to HBCUs. Existing studies focus on college choices and experiences of Latinx students already enrolled at HBCUs. Studies examining college choice and HBCUs focus on Black students (Tobolowsky, Outcalt, & McDonald, 2005). Reputable academic programs as well as affordability and proximity to social networks are major themes in research on the college choices of Latinx students at public HBCUs (Maramba et al., 2015; Palmer et al., 2015). Diversity scholarships increased affordability for Latinx students at HBCUs. While participants were encouraged to attend a public HBCU because of the school's low tuition and proximity to their homes, they all discussed how the school's diversity scholarship motivated them to attend. (Palmer et al., 2015).

The findings of research about why Latinx students choose HBCUs mirrors that on why Latinx students choose Hispanic-serving Institutions (HSIs). Cost, proximity to home, and campus environment prompted Latinx students to attend an HSI (Santiago, 2007). Cost and location are linked within the college choice process: "Most students in the focus groups said it was more economical to live at home with their parents because they did not have to add housing to their college education expenses and could continue the jobs they currently held" (Santiago, 2007, p. 8). While HSIs do not promote their federal designation, as noted by Santiago (2007), HBCUs do promote their HBCUs status in promotional materials. While history created HBCUs, student choice created HSIs. Half of all Latinx students attend an HSI, which only represent six percent of post-secondary institutions. The influence of support networks manifests in the educational paths of older relatives and friends attending college.

Proximity to social networks also provides the opportunity for students to place the needs of their family above their own, or *familismo*, a term coined by Marin and Marin (1991). Martinez (2013) explored the role of *familismo* in Latinx students' college choices by conducting interviews of Mexican college-bound high school students and high school guidance counselors. The needs and desires of participants' families were a strong factor in their college choice process. *Familismo* and proximity themes are also present in Hernandez's (2015) study on the college choice process for Latinas. Attending college close to home, yet far away allowed high

achieving young women to maintain family ties while living as independent students. Since Hispanic students are overrepresented among community college enrollment, a review of literature should address Hispanic two year to four-year transfer to HBCUs.

Pérez and McDonough (2008) also used interviews to discover that Latinx students used family and high school contacts, not college admissions officers, to determine where to apply to college: “Similar to the college planning stage, Latino/a students went to similar sources for guidance when considering which institutions to consider, apply, and select. In this regard, student cited peers, acquaintances, and siblings, and relatives most often” (Pérez & McDonough, 2008, p. 256) Focusing on a Mexican community in south Texas, Martinez (2012) also discovered community members such as church acquaintances and physicians provided social capital for navigating the college choice process.

Latinx students are also more likely to begin post-secondary study at a community college (Gonzalez, 2012). Even when controlling for socioeconomic status, Latinx are more likely to attend community colleges than White or Black students (Kurlaender, 2006, p. 11). Taggart and Crisp (2011) suggest that discriminatory experiences may contribute to Latinx students being tracked into community colleges. However, the literature mainly addresses factors impacting two-year to four-year transfer instead of the college transfer choice of Hispanic community college students. As HBCUs enroll more Latinx students, more research will be needed on the confluence of this student demographic and this institutional type.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how familiar Houston-area Latinx students are with Texas' public HBCUs, what characteristics Latinx students find attractive in colleges, and to identify strategies HBCUs can implement to recruit more Latinx students. The following questions guide this study:

1. What do Latinx students know about public HBCUs in Texas?
2. What characteristics do Latinx students find attractive in colleges?
3. What recruitment strategies can public HBCUs in Texas implement to recruit more Latinx students?

## Methodology

This phenomenology uses participants' experiences to extract meaning about public HBCUs in Texas and college choice. For this group, the issue is broadly centered around navigating the college choice process and potentially choosing an HBCU as a Hispanic student. Therefore, a constructivist perspective supports this data collection method (Merriam, 2009 p. 93). Focus group interviews were employed because they allow participants to hear the responses of others to determine if others agree or disagree with their views. Furthermore, it allows participants to get the perspectives of others and see how their own views fit in the context of others.

Since the researcher is Black and the participants are Latinx, the focus group setting decreased resistance to discussing race that might be present in a one-on-one interview. Moreover, the conversations between focus group participants provided richer data than data obtained from a one-on-one interview. The three focus groups consisted of 13, 12, and 8 participants. Although it is recommended that focus groups have between 6 and 10 participants, the researcher overly anticipated little interest in participating in this study. Therefore, she was not prepared to randomly select participants to turn away. A constructivist perspective undergirds this data collection method since data is constructed during the group discussion (Merriam, 2009).

## Theoretical Framework

Chain migration theory is an appropriate theoretical framework for this study. The term chain migration was originally coined by MacDonald and MacDonald (1964) to describe how migrants develop and access social networks. Previous studies on Latinx college choice have used chain migration theory (Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006). This theory is applied to this study as the connections through which prospective students learn of college opportunities and are connected through the college choice process via applications, test taking, campus visits, and other steps. The college decision is the end of a chain with connections made at each link or contact. When college-eligible Latinx students are introduced to HBCUs at a link through a teacher, counselor, or admissions representative, HBCUs can be considered as a potential college choice.

## **Site Selection**

Texas is home to eight, four-year, historically Black colleges (Education Trust, 2020). Two of the eight, Texas Southern University and Prairie View A&M University, are publicly funded and located in the Houston metropolitan area. Houston's sizable Latinx population makes the city an ideal setting for a study on Latinx student recruitment to HBCUs. Three community colleges, Bayou City Community College (BCCC), Five Corners Community College (FCCC), and Nearward Community College (pseudonyms) are also located in the Houston area. Since Latinx students are overrepresented (Ma & Baum, 2016; Baylor, 2016) among community college students, this study is including community college students, in addition to high school students, as participants.

## **Participant Recruitment and Selection**

Once Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was secured from Texas Southern University, Bayou City Community College, Nearward Community College, and Five Corners Community College, participants were purposefully selected and recruited with the help of faculty and administrators at one charter high school and two of the three community colleges. At Five Corners Community College, the instructor of EDUC 1300, a course required of all students, invited students who self-identified as Latinx to participate in the focus group. Interested students were invited to participate in the focus group taking place in a different room from where the class was held. At Bayou City Community College, a Student Life Coordinator and an Associate Dean of Student Engagement recruited Latinx students by email and word of mouth to participate in a focus group held at two of BCCC's campuses. The third community college failed to respond to requests to recruit participants and for classroom space. At the high school, a 12<sup>th</sup> grade instructor of a mandatory college preparatory seminar invited his Latinx students to participate in a focus group if they were willing to return a signed permission slip. All participants received a \$30 gift card to Barnes and Noble as an incentive for participation. Purposive sampling was used to select participants.

Prospective participants were invited to meet at a designated time and place for the focus group. The first focus group, held at FCCC, consisted of 13 students (9 men, 4 women). The second focus group, held at BCCC, consisted of 8 students (4 men, 4 women). The third focus group was held at a public charter high school and consisted of 12 students (6 boys, 6 girls). See Appendix B for table of participants. Before each focus group began at the

community colleges, the informed consent letter was read aloud to participants and signed copies were collected. Signed parental consent letters were collected from high school participants under age 18. Participants were then verbally reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they could exit the room at any time.

### **Data Collection**

Three focus groups were completed. The BCCC focus group lasted 40 minutes. The FCCC focus group lasted 30 minutes. The high school focus group lasted 45 minutes. During the focus groups, participants were asked about what colleges they were interested in, what attracted them to those colleges, how familiar they were with local HBCUs, and where they received information about colleges. A protocol was used as a guide for the researcher/moderator. However, the protocol was deviated from as the discussion became more conversational. Examples of focus group questions include: What colleges are you interested in attending (transferring to)? Where do you get information about colleges? What do you know about Texas Southern University? Additional questions are included in appendix A. Notes were taken on participants' disposition and willingness to respond to questions.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Merriam (2009) implores researchers to explain their biases and dispositions. I am a Black, non-Latinx woman who is affiliated with an HBCU. I am also a third-generation graduate of a private HBCU. Moreover, the HBCU I attended enrolled students from all over the United States. My scholarly interests include diversity at HBCUs. As some HBCUs flounder and struggle post-desegregation, I am passionate about strengthening and advocating for these institutions. In many ways, higher education is a business. I am motivated to explore the recruitment of Latinx students to HBCUs because Latinx students represent an opportunity for HBCUs to expand beyond a niche market of Black students and increase enrollment. I understand that my experience with and affinity for HBCUs may bias my interpretation of the data. Member checking and external audits will help ensure that participants' ideas are authentically reflected.

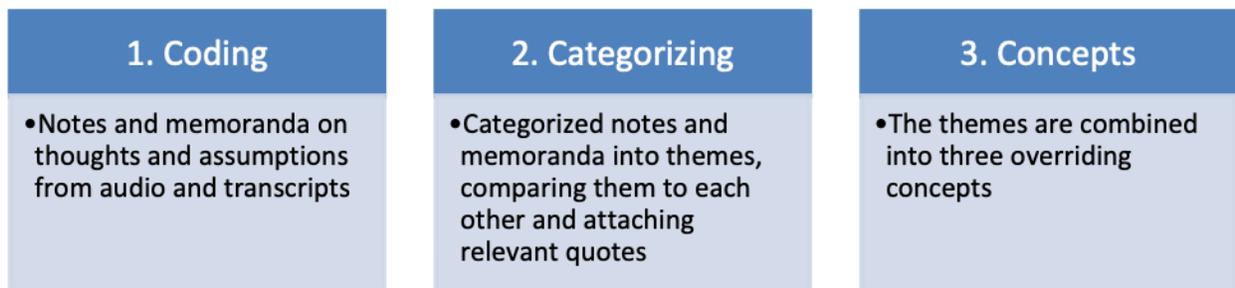
As a researcher, I am also passionate about access to higher education. I see the overrepresentation of Latinx students at community colleges as an opportunity for HBCUs to recruit more Latinx students directly from high school, therefore, increasing the baccalaureate

completion rate for this demographic. Though community college to baccalaureate transfer rates are low for all races, Latinx students lag behind Black and White students (Gonzalez, 2012). By starting post-secondary education at a 4-year institution, like the majority of HBCUs are, Latinx students could have better chances of completing a baccalaureate degree.

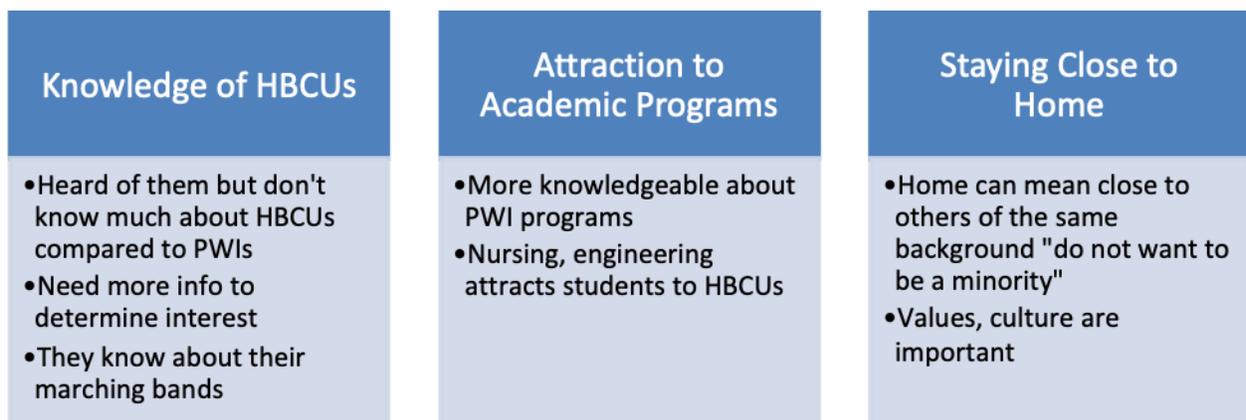
### Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2007), phenomenological data analysis involves collecting significant statements, quotes, or sentences that provide an understanding of participants' experiences (p. 61). For the qualitative researcher, analysis begins as data is collected. Lichtman's Three Cs process (coding, categorizing, and concepts) is used to analyze the focus group data (Lichtman, 2006) (See Figure 3). In step one, coding, I wrote memoranda on my thoughts and assumptions that occurred during the focus group interviews and while reading the focus group transcripts. In step two, I categorized my thoughts and assumptions, comparing them to each other while sorting themes, attaching relevant quotes from the transcript to each theme. Finally, in the third step, the themes were further combined into three overriding concepts (see Figure 4).

**Figure 3.** Lichtman's Three C's



**Figure 4.** Themes with Corresponding Memoranda



## **Trustworthiness**

Each participant was emailed a copy of the transcript file and audio recording with instructions to respond back with anything they wished to clarify, expand upon, or change. Requests were made in an effort to receive participant validation of my interpretation of the raw data. Though participants did not respond to the requests, the importance of allowing participants to review raw data cannot be understated. Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider member checks the most valuable method for establishing credibility. External audits were also conducted. The external auditor was a White male affiliated with a Predominately White institution (PWI) who also conducted all of his post-secondary study at PWIs. A Latinx male who attended an HBCU and PWI served as a second external auditor. External auditors were unaffiliated with the study and possessed different subjectivities from the researcher. The external audit helped diminish researcher bias and provided a general assessment of the study.

## **Limitations**

Conducted in Houston, Texas, this study does not reflect the diversity within the Latinx demographic in the United States. Specifically, differences in background and experiences exist between Latinx students from different regions within and beyond the United States.

## **Findings**

Concurring with previous research, participants received much of their college information from family members who had attended college. The internet also served as a source of college information. Participants also mentioned prestige and reputation as a factor in choosing a four-year school, conflicting with Santiago's (2007) research on Latinx at HSIs. Like the participants in Palmer et al. (2015), scholarships make HBCUs attractive to Latinx students. The focus group conversations leaned toward education requirements for professional occupations such as a physician and psychologist. This section summarizes the findings from data analysis, which are highlighted in three themes: Knowledge of HBCUs, attraction to academic programs, and proximity to home.

## **Knowledge of HBCUs**

Analysis of the data indicated that participants were relatively unknowledgeable about HBCUs, which is consistent with findings from Maramba et al. (2015). When prompted, participants named several, local PWIs they were interested in attending but no HBCUs.

Though some participants were familiar with the two HBCUs in the Houston area, they were not familiar at all with the acronym “HBCU”. They may have heard of Texas Southern and Prairie View and knew that many of the students that attended those institutions were Black, but they did not have a general understanding of what an HBCU is. By using the Apply Texas application, participants can apply to the public HBCUs in Texas as well as all public universities. Participants mentioned friends who attended HBCUs and Latinx Greek organizations available at HBCUs. The FCCC participants were generally unfamiliar with the two HBCUs in the Houston area. When prompted, they named two predominately White colleges they were interested in transferring to: Sam Houston State University and Texas State University. Of the BCCC participants, 4 of the 8 were familiar with Texas Southern or Prairie View. Other participants learned about HBCUs like Texas Southern and Tuskegee University from their high school teachers who attended these institutions. Applying the chain migration theory, these teachers represent a link in the chain connecting expanded college opportunities. Jose commented that he did not know what Texas Southern had to offer. Therefore, he could not say definitively whether or not he was interested in Texas Southern. Meeting students and faculty was mentioned as an ideal to learn more about HBCUs. Participants attended high school graduation ceremonies and summer enrichment programs at HBCUs. Miguel visited the Texas Southern campus and participated in a summer program at Prairie View. He also attended high school near Texas Southern. He describes his experiences thusly:

I know just a little, not a lot. I used to go visit [HBCUs] because our high school was an E-STEM Academy. Our principal Miss Jameson-she usually had some connections with TSU [Texas Southern] and since we were nearby sometimes, we would go on Fridays to have some labs with-I forgot the name-of one of the professors. Also, one of the summers in high school, we actually went to Prairie View and stayed for two months over there in the dorms and took a few classes, but [I] don't know if they were actually like any credit for them or if they were for high school [enrichment].

Miguel does not share why he decided to attend a community college after participating in academic enrichment at two baccalaureate institutions that happen to be HBCUs. Perhaps he applied to four-year institutions and was not accepted. However, it is doubtful that Texas Southern would have rejected him since the institution is transitioning from open admissions to

selective admissions. I should have determined if he applied to Texas Southern or Prairie View since he spent so much time on those campuses and if he did not, why not.

Marco was familiar with Texas Southern and Prairie View but did not realize that both campuses were in the Houston area. He describes how his college visits in the Houston area omitted TSU and Prairie View:

**Marco:** Our high school only toured local colleges and I think that was more so because of location. We went to the main campus U of H here in Houston. I don't think TSU and Prairie View are here.

**Facilitator:** TSU is actually...do you know where Scott street is? Where they've built the light rail?

**Marco:** No

**Facilitator:** You can take the light rail and walk to TSU or U of H from the same exit.

**Marco:** Oh ok.

**Facilitator:** Yeah, they [TSU and U of H] are really close.

**Marco:** Oh, I don't know why they didn't take us there, but I never heard of them.

HBCUs have a tradition of producing show stopping bands. For many HBCUs, the marching band is a major part of their brand. Participants knew of some HBCUs through the school's marching band. When asked had he heard of PVAMU, Eduardo replied: "I've heard of them. I don't know much about them though. I know they're a big band school. That's about it." Estella was familiar with student organizations and the nursing programs at HBCUs. She explains:

**Estella:** I know they have Latinx sororities or fraternities at Texas Southern and Prairie View and Prairie View also has a nursing program in the Medical Center. I toured it but they have large classrooms just for projection screens. There was no instructor in the class.

**Facilitator:** You want face to face?

**Estella:** Yeah, I want someone there.

BCCC participants indicated that HBCUs should direct more marketing and outreach to Latinx communities. In particular, they would like to talk to current HBCU students and faculty to learn more about HBCUs. When asked about recruitment materials in Spanish, participants

pointed out that college applicants should be fluent in English, but acknowledged that family and friends might prefer to read college recruitment material in Spanish. However, participants cautioned that Spanish materials should be available upon request instead of offered. Eunice explains:

I think they should probably [be] available upon request because I've met people that get offended when you give them Spanish literature. They're like I don't speak Spanish or I don't know Spanish. I think it's kind of like stereotyping just because of the color of the skin or the way they look people automatically assume that they are Mexican or they don't know English. You know what I mean?

### **Attraction to Academic Programs Offered**

Participants are primarily attracted to colleges because of the academic programs offered. Business, education, engineering, and nursing were the main programs in which participants desired to earn a 4-year degree. The local HBCUs offer all of those programs and are particularly strong in engineering and education. With the exception of nursing and engineering, participants are unfamiliar with academic offerings of local HBCUs. By contrast, participants could name program offerings from local predominately white schools such as the University of Houston and Sam Houston State University. Martin discusses his interest in engineering: "Well, mainly, I was looking for a university that had something to do with environmental engineering or an engineering program and I looked up both U of H downtown [University of Houston-Downtown] and UH main [University of Houston]. They said that they'll have an environmental engineering program which is more specific not just engineering and that would help me also because I don't want to go out of state and have to pay extra fees for studying out of state." Mike mentions strong graduate outcomes as a trait that would attract him to an HBCU. He explains: "Another thing I'm worried about –that I would like to learn more about is like the statistics, like how many students that graduate over there actually get jobs afterwards like right after they graduate."

Regarding residence halls, BCCC participants indicated that they would be interested in living in residence halls. However, those participants with children and families acknowledged that residence halls may not be ideal for them. Also, the majority of participants indicated that they did not wish or intend to leave the Houston area to attend a 4-year institution, which

concur with research. Latinx students travel a median of 39 miles from home to attend college, less than African-American students (98 miles) and White students (102 miles) (Mattern & Wyatt, 2009). Since Latinx students tend to stay close to home, HBCUs may be more successful recruiting local Latinx students rather than recruiting long distance students. Living in a residence hall in their hometown would give Latinx students the best of both worlds: the benefits of a living/learning environment and the social connections of family.

When asked which schools they were interested in transferring to for a four-year degree, none of the BCCC students listed TSU or PVAMU, two local and public universities. Participants mentioned wanting to attend four-year schools that friends or family attended. This is a disadvantage to HBCUs because they are less likely Latinx students. They won't know "a lot of people" that attended Texas Southern the way they might know many people who attended the University of Houston.

### **Staying Close to Home**

Both community college and high school participants preferred to stay in Houston or in Texas to complete their baccalaureate education. Juan elaborates: "Not Houston specifically, but I definitely want to stay in Texas because I mean it's Texas. Why would you want to leave Texas? People come to Texas. I like Texas. It's a good state to live in. I couldn't imagine moving somewhere for an extended period of time away from here." While Texas's public HBCUs are both in the Houston area, there are private HBCUs in other parts of Texas. When asked about campus housing, participants viewed it as an unnecessary expense. Kenneth explains why he does not want to stay on campus: "It's about affordability. I'm going to U of H [University of Houston]. It's pointless to stay on campus because I can take the metro there. It takes 10 minutes to go there. So, I'll save my money for later on."

**Facilitator:** What if you get a scholarship that pays for you to stay in a dorm?

**Kenneth:** Yes, I'll take it. But then again, I can stay home and keep the extra.

**Facilitator:** No, you don't get to keep the money.

**Kenneth:** It's like coupon that you can't cash in.

Campus housing is only desirable if it's paid for with scholarships.

The community college participants were not interested in campus housing unless family housing was available. Most of the schools participants visited, such as Texas A&M Kingsville, Texas A&M Corpus Christi, were in a few hours radius of Houston. However, some participants lamented on the perceived benefits of college residence life. Alicia elaborates: “I think it will give you more of an opportunity to actually be out of your comfort zone because I mean, you grew up with your parents and although you may or may not agree with their decisions, you are still influenced by them. If you live on your own, you will have more of an independent kind of feel for it and you will have to be determined by yourself to go to class and wake up and do what you need to do.” When students do not have the resources to explore out of town campuses, they tend to pick local institutions by default. Felicity explains how provided resources helped her visit campuses away from Houston:

**Facilitator:** What’s stopping you from visiting other colleges?

**Felicity:** Transportation. For example, Texas A&M International, they do a bus trip and it’s like all for free... I never even heard about the school until Miss Kristal brought up the free trip

**Facilitator:** Where is that?

**Felicity:** It’s in Laredo [5 hours from Houston]. So, they provided us like transportation and food so it was easier to visit the campus when a college actually provides the resources.

### **Discussion**

Although the data collected in this study is limited to three focus groups, the findings contribute to the literature on Latinx students and HBCUs. While previous qualitative studies have focused on the experiences of Latino students already enrolled at HBCUs (Maramba et al., 2015, Palmer et al., 2015), this study focuses on Latinx, high school students and community college students interested in enrolling at a baccalaureate institution. The college choice process begins as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> grade (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). Therefore, research on Latino student recruitment to HBCUs should include research on prospective students. Why Latinx students choose not to attend HBCUs is as important as why they do choose to attend. Future research should explore why a Latinx student who is knowledgeable about HBCUs ultimately decides not to attend such an institution.

Information is an important part of college access. Regarding HBCUs, prospective Latino students are largely ignorant about HBCUs. When underserved, prospective college students lack information about college offerings, their access to higher education is limited. The findings suggest that the participants in this study do not have enough information about HBCUs to consider them as options for beginning post-secondary study or for baccalaureate transfer destinations. The burden is on the HBCUs staff and administrators to effectively inform and recruit Latino students.

Participants generally expressed a desire to stay in or near the Houston metropolitan area to complete their baccalaureate studies. Therefore, HBCU practitioners may find it easier to recruit local Latinx students, as opposed to students from out of town or state who would require on campus housing. Latinx college students travel an average of 39 miles from home to attend college (Mattern & Wyatt, 2009). However, participants did not mention a specific desire to remain close to familial contacts or *familismo*, as research by Hernandez (2015) and Martinez (2013) suggests. Participants associated campus housing with unnecessary cost. Therefore, living at home with family has financial and social benefits. However, students living at home may not benefit from the thriving and supportive living/learning environment that campus housing can offer. When Latinx students decide to enroll at an HBCU and live at home with family, the institutions should maintain strong student engagement of off-campus students.

While Black students understand what HBCUs are and may be attracted to an institution because it is an HBCU, the acronym “HBCU” has very little meaning to prospective Latinx students. Being an HBCU will not likely attract Latinx students to Texas Southern University or Prairie View A&M University. Despite recruitment and marketing efforts already geared toward Latinx students, HBCUs must find creative ways to attract more Latinx students. One effective recruitment method could be to utilize HBCU alumni who are high school teachers and administrators in predominately Latinx high schools since two participants mentioned they learned about HBCUs from their high school teachers. Latinx alumni from HBCUs can also be used to recruit more Latinx students to HBCUs. In addition to inviting Latinx students to their campuses, HBCUs can provide bus transportation and meals to groups of Latinx students. Participants mentioned sponsored transportation as a way to bring more Latinx students on HBCU visits.

The differences in familiarity with HBCUs between FCCC and BCCC are likely due to geographical differences in the Houston area. One campus is located in an urban area with close proximity to an African-American community while the other campus is more suburban and less racially diverse. However, Texas Southern University recently ended a partnership with FCCC where Texas Southern offered courses on FCCC's suburban campus. Therefore, the researcher expected FCCC participants to at least be familiar with Texas Southern University's name. BCCC participants indicated a familiarity with local HBCUs, having spent time at these institutions. Additional questioning should explore what prompted these students to attend a community college after touring and taking enrichment courses at a 4-year HBCU. Specifically, the researcher should explore if the participants who visited HBCUs ultimately applied and were not accepted or decided not to attend, considered applying, or did not even consider applying. Community college to baccalaureate transfer rates are about 20% (Soliz, 2015). Therefore, students have a better chance of completing a baccalaureate degree when they begin their postsecondary education at a baccalaureate institution.

### **Conclusion**

The HBCU mission has relevance for prospective Latinx students. HBCUs were founded to provide opportunities to a population with limited access and resources. Their current missions address the needs of a diverse population. This excerpt from Prairie View's mission is an example: "It [Prairie View A&M University] seeks to invest in programs and services that address issues and challenges affecting the diverse ethnic and socioeconomic population of Texas and the larger society including the global arena" (Prairie View A&M University, 2020a, para. 2). Latinos represent 39% of Texas' population in which Prairie View seeks to invest (U.S. Census, 2019b). Texas Southern's mission uses similar language:

Texas Southern University is a student-centered comprehensive doctoral university committed to ensuring equality, offering innovative programs that are responsive to its urban setting, and transforming diverse students into lifelong learners, engaged citizens, and creative leaders in their local, national, and global communities. (Texas Southern University, 2020a, para 1).

While Prairie View is in a rural county outside of Houston, Texas Southern is located in the city of Houston, which is 44% Latinx (U.S. Census, 2019a).

Acknowledging the importance of representation and seeing role models that look like oneself, hiring more Latinx faculty and administrators would support efforts to recruit Latinx students to HBCUs. Applying Chain Migration Theory, the presence of Latinx faculty and administrators may attract Latinx students to HBCUs. Prospective Latinx students would be able to say: There are leaders and role models in this HBCU campus that are familiar with my background and experiences. Moreover, Latinx faculty and administrators can help Latinx students build a connection with the institution (Ortiz, 2004). Latinx faculty represent 3% and 4% of faculty at Prairie View and Texas Southern, respectively (Prairie View A&M University, 2020b; Texas Southern University, 2020b).

HBCUs need larger recruitment pools while the underrepresentation of Latinx students represents an untapped market in college recruitment. Students applying to college should consider all options available to them. Latinx students are not even considering HBCUs as an option, despite their affordability, desirable academic programs offered, and their proximity to the social connections of home. Aligning with the literature, participants expressed a desire to attend college close to home. The researcher aims to have this research influence HBCU administrators to market the campus and programs more effectively to Latinx students. Future research should replicate this study with HBCUs in Florida, Georgia, and other HBCU states with since with large or growing Latinx populations. Future research should also explore the experiences of recruitment personnel from HBCUs while recruiting Latinx students.

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**Appendix A. Focus Group Protocol**

- What colleges are you interested in applying or transferring to?
- What are you interested in studying in college?
- What colleges are you interested in applying to outside of Texas?
- What draws you to a particular college?
- How far away from home are you willing to move for college?
- How familiar are you with Texas Southern University or Prairie View A&M University?
- Where do you get information about colleges?
- What was the racial makeup of the high school you attended?
- How much do you think about race when considering what college to attend?
- What do you know about HBCUs?
- What do you think about attending a college where most of the students are Black?
- When you transfer, do you think you will live at home or find a spot in student housing?
- When you were in high school and thinking about college, did you imagine yourself living at home or in a residence hall?

**Appendix B. Table of Participants**

<b>FCCC</b>	<b>BCCC</b>	<b>High School</b>
Dina, F	Sandy, F	Cassie, F
Joyce, F	Arianna, F	Gracie, F
Inez, F	Estella, F	Mari, F
Melissa, F	Miguel, M	Alicia, F
Elliot, M	William, M	Yvellise, F
Richard, M	Catherine, F	Mary Ann, F
Ethan, M	John, M	Paul, M
Zalik, M	Maxwell, M	Alex, M
Oliver, M		Jesus, M
Johnathan, M		Juan, M
Edward, M		Herman, M
Milton, M		Marc, M
Aria, M		