The Impact of Male University Marching Band Members' Sense of Belonging on Retention at One Historically Black University (HBCU) in Tennessee

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The purpose of this study was to investigate how participation in university marching bands influences Black male students' sense of belonging. Sense of belonging refers to students' perceived feelings of support and connection within their campus community. For this study, sense of belonging was measured by levels of peer and faculty support, and isolation. Framed on Tinto's *Model of Student Involvement and Student Departure* (1975, 1993), this mixed-methods study explored the influence of Black males' involvement in a university marching band on sense of belonging at one HBCU. Through an online survey to approximately 80 members from the Tennessee State University's *Aristocrat of Bands* marching band and a focus group session, participants described their marching band experiences and perceptions of how the band influenced their feelings of connection and mattering. Major findings: (a) HBCU marching bands are about tradition and community-building; (b) HBCU marching bands promote student leadership development; and, (c) the more time the student participates in the band, the higher his sense of peer support and faculty support) and the lower his sense of isolation. Results may guide band and student affairs administrators in optimizing opportunities to strengthen students' integration and enhancing retention strategies of Black male students.

Keywords: marching band, sense belonging, black males, retention, HBCU

Introduction

Extensive research over the past several decades has been conducted on the factors contributing to student retention, attrition, and persistence. Vincent Tinto's (1987) pivotal work on the subject of student involvement, engagement, and student success has highlighted the relationships between "the willingness of institutions to involve themselves in the social and intellectual development of their students" (1987, p. 7). Moreover, if a key to student persistence is successful social integration on the campus community, it is important to develop pathways for students to become engaged (Raley, 2007; Tinto, 1987).

However, seen through the eyes of the students, persistence is but one manifestation of motivation (Bandura, 1989; Graham, Frederick, Byars-Winston, Hunter, & Handelsman, 2013). Students have to want to persist and put forth the energy and effort even when challenged with obstacles. Without motivation, persistence is not likely (Tinto, 2015). Given the original goals that led the student to begin college in the first place, it can be argued that the more time a student

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experiences with a social peer group in a college setting leads to a greater sense of belonging and motivation to persist in college.

According to Strayhorn (2018), "In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers" (p. 4). The work of Strayhorn is founded on the body of work of psychologist Abraham Maslow (1954). Maslow believed that people are motivated to meet their needs hierarchically on five levels—beginning with the basic safety needs and working up to self-actualization with needs of love and belongingness in the middle. It is at this mid-point, the sense of belonging, where academic outcomes have shown improvement (Freeman, Anderson, & Jenson, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Black male students face significant challenges with retention and degree completion in higher education. National data show that they graduate at lower rates than their peers from four-year institutions, with graduation rates on average 15% lower (NCES, 2018). This trend is also evident at the research site for this study. Over the past decade, graduation rates for Black male students have consistently trailed 15-20 percentage points behind the overall student body average according to university data.

Research has found that one key contributor to these disparities in retention and graduation outcomes is a lack of sense of belonging among Black male undergraduates (Strayhorn, 2012; Strayhorn, 2015). Students who feel marginalized on campus and do not have a strong sense of connectedness to their university community are less likely to remain enrolled and committed to degree attainment. Without developing meaningful attachments and integration both socially and academically, students have weaker motivation to persist through challenges that could otherwise lead them to drop out of college programs.

Participation in extracurricular activities and engagement opportunities has been shown to enhance sense of belonging for underrepresented student populations like Black males (Harper & Quaye, 2007). However, more research is needed to understand how involvement in specific programs, such as university marching bands, impacts sense of belonging. Examining the potential relationship between marching band participation and belonging could provide insight for improved retention strategies targeting Black male students. The lack of focus on this relationship in previous literature represents a gap that the current study sought to address.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how participation in a university marching band impacts Black male students' sense of belonging at their institution. Sense of belonging refers to students' perceived feelings of support, connection, and

importance within their campus community. While previous research has linked extracurricular involvement to higher belonging among Black males, few studies have examined marching band participation specifically. This study aimed to address this gap by exploring Black male band members' experiences and perceptions of how the marching band impacted their sense of belonging.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the understanding and improvement of the educational experiences and outcomes of Black males attending HBCUs. By specifically investigating the impact of peer groups, with a focus on the participation in the *Aristocrat of Bands* program, the study addressed a gap in the existing literature regarding the influence of peer dynamics on the success and retention of Black males at HBCUs.

First, this study holds significance for HBCU administrators, educators, and policymakers. The findings may provide valuable insights into the role of peer groups in fostering a sense of belonging and social integration among Black male students. By understanding the impact of peer groups within the HBCU context, institutions may develop targeted interventions and support systems to enhance the experiences and retention rates of Black males, ultimately contributing to their academic success and graduation.

Second, the study is significant for the Black male student population at HBCUs. By exploring how peer groups, such as the *Aristocrat of Bands* program, contribute to their sense of belonging and socialization, the research may highlight the importance of supportive peer networks in their educational journey. This understanding can empower Black male students to seek out and engage with peer groups that promote positive academic and social experiences, potentially leading to increased retention, persistence, and overall success.

Furthermore, the study's significance extends to the broader field of higher education research. By examining the influence of peer groups on the experiences of Black males at HBCUs, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on factors impacting the success and retention of underrepresented student populations. The findings may inform future research on peer dynamics, sense of belonging, and student support mechanisms, not only at HBCUs but also within diverse higher education contexts.

Overall, this study's significance lies in its potential to inform institutional practices, promote academic success and retention of Black males at HBCUs, and contribute to the broader understanding of factors influencing the educational experiences and outcomes of underrepresented student populations in higher education.

Theoretical Framework:
Tinto's Theory of Involvement and Student Departure

According to Vincent Tinto, the theorist credited with developing the most comprehensive theoretical model of persistence and withdrawal behavior (1975, 1987), higher education institutions are made up of distinct social and academic systems. Integration into these systems, which reflects a student's judgement of *fit* within the new environment, represents perceptions on the part of the student of shared values and support in the college community. See Figure 1. Tinto's theory seeks to explain the reasons why some college students drop out of school while others persist and graduate. The key components of the theory are the concepts of academic and social integration (the center part of Tinto's model). *Academic Integration* refers to a student's academic performance, their personal development of intellectual skills, and their satisfaction with the school's academic systems. Students who do well grade-wise and connect with faculty and staff are more integrated. *Social Integration* refers to how socially connected and involved students are in college life. Making friends, joining groups or clubs, and bonding with peers denotes higher social integration. Tinto argues that students who become more academically and socially involved in college life are less likely to drop out.

Figure 1. Tinto's Theory of Involvement and Student Departure (1975, 1987)
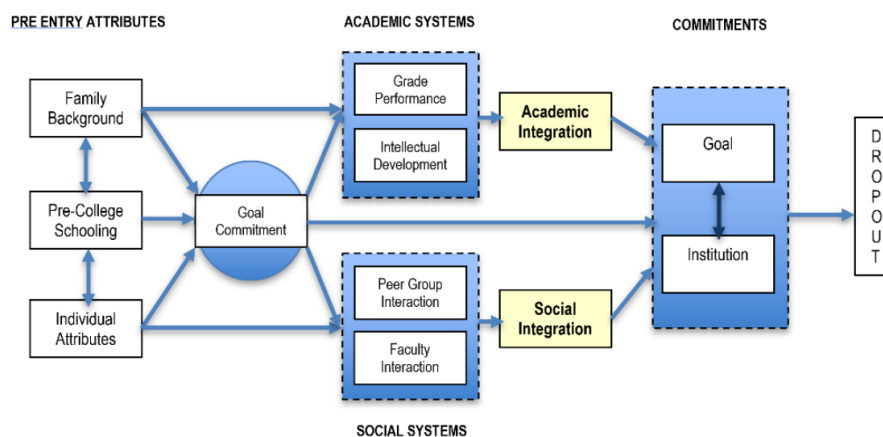
Other key aspects of the theory include: (a) *Pre-entry Attributes*, where students come to college with certain background characteristics and prior experiences that influence their commitment to completing college. This includes things like academic preparedness, personality traits, family background, etc.; (b) *Goals and Commitments*, where students have varying levels of commitment to the goal of college graduation and to the institution they are attending. High levels of commitment make students more likely to persist; and, (c) *The Departure Decision,* which is the result of students continually re-assessing their commitment to graduating and/or staying at the current institution. Levels of academic and social integration play a major role in these decisions. Poorly integrated students are the most likely to drop out. In

summary, Tinto argues that students who become more academically successful and socially connected are more likely to remain enrolled and persist through graduation. The theory has been very influential in higher education research.

This subjective sense of affiliation and identification with the university community is known as sense of belonging. Generally, the literature defines *Sense of Belonging* as "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment" (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patushy, Bouwseman, & Collier, 1992, p. 173). Defining attributes of *sense of belonging* are believed to be *fit* and *valued involvement* (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patushy, Bouwseman, & Collier, 1992). Fit refers to the perceptions that one's values or characteristics are congruent with others, and valued involvement refers to the perception that one is valued, needed, or important to others (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1996).

Research Questions

Four research questions framed this study:

1. How does participation in the university marching band impact Black male students' perception of belonging and community?
2. What aspects of the marching band experience most significantly contribute to Black male students' feelings of acceptance and value at the university?
3. How does marching band participation influence Black male students' decisions to remain enrolled at the university?
4. What recommendations should higher education administrators consider in support of Black males' sense of belonging through learning community as a marching band?

Literature Review

The literature review for this research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of peer groups on the sense of belonging of Black males attending a Historically Black College/University (HBCU). By synthesizing existing literature, this review contributed to the existing body of knowledge and inform future research and practice in the field. The review of literature included topics on (a) Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), (b) Marching Bands at HBCUs, (c) The *Aristocrat of Bands* at Tennessee State University (TSU), (d) Peer Groups in Undergraduate (UG) Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), (e) Sense of Belonging, (f) Student Persistence, (g) College Extra Curriculum on Retention, and (h) Impact of University Marching Band on Retention. See Figure 2.

Figure 2. Outline of Literature Review
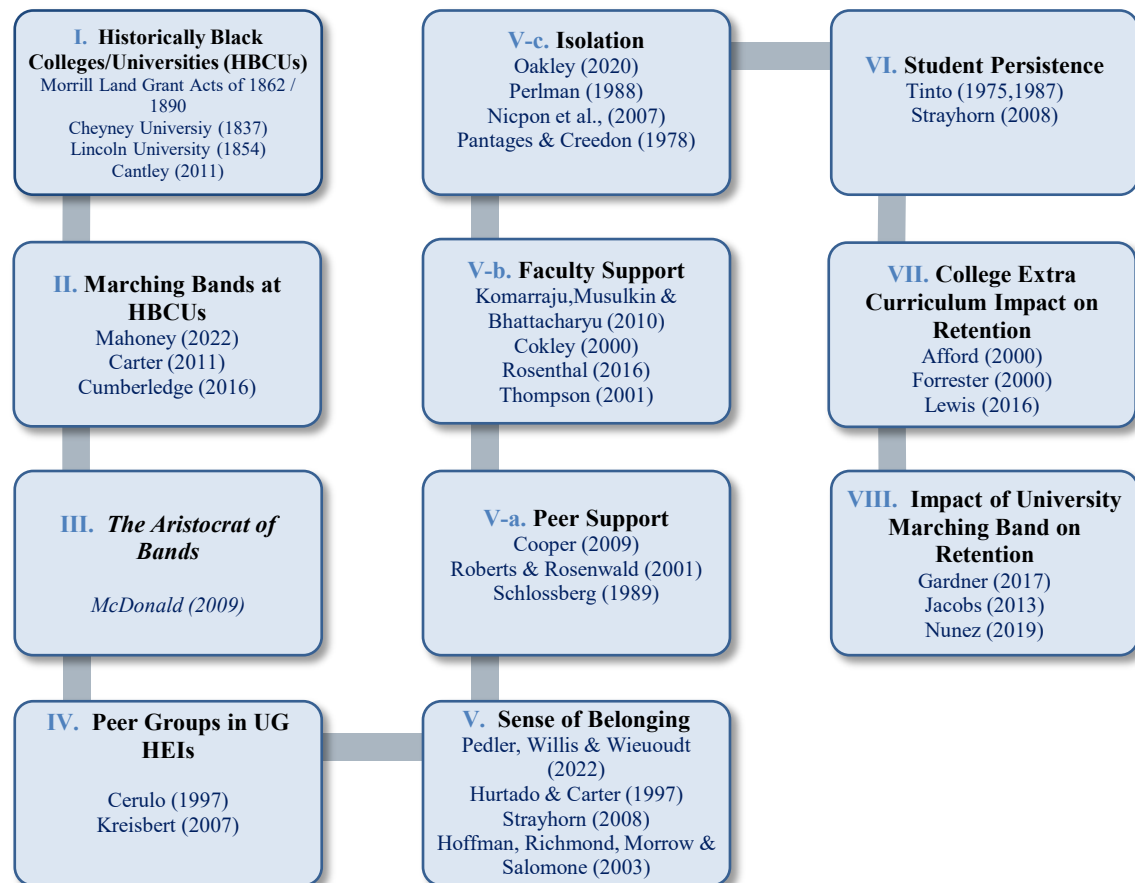
Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have played a crucial role in expanding access to higher education for Blacks, particularly during the era of legalized segregation when Black students were systematically excluded from predominantly White institutions (Ebright, 2019).The establishment of the first HBCUs in the early to mid-19th century, such as Cheyney University (1837) and Lincoln University (1854), aimed to provide education to freed Blacks and were supported by religious missionary groups and philanthropy (Evans et al., 2002).

The Morrill Land Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890 marked an important milestone for public HBCUs by allocating federal funds to establish public colleges focused on agriculture, science, and engineering (Cantey, 2011). This act led to the founding of public HBCUs like Alcorn State University and Prairie View A&M, although these institutions often faced inadequate funding compared to their White counterparts (Evans et al., 2002). Nevertheless, land-grant HBCUs made significant strides in making higher education accessible for Blacks in fields related to agricultural science and teaching in the late 19th century (Brown, 2020).

Private HBCUs saw a surge in establishment during the early 20th century, exemplified by institutions like Morehouse College and Spelman College in Atlanta (Turner, 2015). These private Black colleges, supported by philanthropic organizations like the United Negro College Fund, became important centers for liberal arts education for an emerging Black middle class (Gasman, 2007). HBCUs experienced further growth after World War II when federal policies, such as the GI Bill, contributed to increased Black enrollment. By the mid-1960s, there were over 100 operating HBCUs (Evans et al., 2002). Currently, there are 107 HBCUs in the United States.

Marching Bands at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Marching bands have a rich history and hold a special place in the traditions of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). As discussed by Mahoney (2022), HBCU marching band performances seamlessly blend music and dance, reclaiming Black joy, community, and self-expression. The roots of these bands can be traced back to the late 19th century when early Black college bands faced resource limitations but became a source of pride and unity (Milburn, 2022). At the present time, there are 40 HBCUs with marching bands.

Today, famous HBCU marching bands like Florida A&M's *Marching 100* and Southern University's *Human Jukebox* not only entertain sports fans but also serve as ambassadors, promoting their schools and highlighting HBCU culture (Carter, 2013). Essoka (2014) highlights how these bands invigorate campus life and convey an empowering message through their themes of "representation, excellence, and pride."

Beyond their performances at football games, HBCU bands open their rehearsals to community members and participate in battles of the bands events both on and off campus (Carter, 2013). Milburn (2022) explains that their distinctive musical and performative styles are characterized by intense section rivalries and creative drumlines. Researchers have also delved into specific traditions within these bands, such as the call-and-response interaction between drum majors and the band (Carter, 2013).

Participating in HBCU marching bands can deeply influence students' identities and experiences. Carter (2013) conducted life history interviews with gay Black male band members, revealing a sense of inclusion, racial pride, and increased confidence. However, these spaces also uphold certain heteronormative expectations regarding masculinity, sexuality, and hazing rituals (Carter, 2013).

Early HBCU Bands

HBCUs have played a vital role in the education and advancement of Black Americans in music since their establishment after the Civil War. These institutions were pioneers in establishing collegiate band programs specifically for Black students (Smith, 1976). Between 1860 and 1900, more than 60 HBCUs were founded, many of which included instrumental music offerings and bands.

During their early years, most HBCU bands relied on volunteer efforts, facing limited resources and support. Student leaders often took on the responsibility of

directing these bands, as dedicated faculty positions for band directors were not yet established (Smith, 1976). Lincoln University in Pennsylvania can be recognized as one of the earliest collegiate bands, existing as early as 1842, although not continuously (McCarrell, 1970).

Other early bands include those at Alabama A&M, established in the late 1890s, and Florida A&M, formed in the early 1900s. Despite facing various challenges and disparities in resources and support, these early HBCU bands provided invaluable musical training and experiences for many aspiring musicians (Smith, 1976). Their development laid the foundation for a tradition of instrumental music education within HBCUs that perseveres to this day.

The Aristocrat of Bands

The *Aristocrat of Bands* is a high-stepping, show-style marching band from the HBCU Tennessee State University in Nashville, Tennessee. The band's name is commonly abbreviated to the moniker, "AOB." The band is known for playing a variety of music such as jazz, classical, contemporary, and popular pieces, and is heralded for its distinct musical style using clean articulation, expressive dynamics, balance, and technical ability. Tennessee State University athletics is an Ohio Valley Conference member institution.

Dr. Reginald A. McDonald has served as the Director of Bands at Tennessee State University since 2014 after being hired as Associate Director of Bands and Assistant Professor of Music in 2006. By this time, the Director of Bands, Professor Edward L. Graves, chronicled a historical overview of this not one-time, but two-time Grammy award-wining marching band for his dissertation entitled *The Aristocrat of Bands: A Historical Investigation of the Tennessee State University Instrumental Music Program and Its Directors,* 2009.

McDonald begins his research from the perspective of what most would be familiar with the current mainstay band ensemble. In the fall of 1946, after six weeks of practice, a 100-piece marching band took to the field at Tennessee State University (TSU) and a tradition of excellence was born. The idea for a show band at TSU originated with its second president, the late Dr. Walter S. Davis. President Davis selected J. D. Chavis to serve as the first band director. Under Chavis' leadership, the marching band grew and developed into a premier university band that gave spectacular performances in parades and half-time shows at football games.

Students who achieve membership in *The Aristocrat of Bands* adhere to high standards today. Noted as one of the finest and most spectacular university bands in the United States, the *Aristocrats* are the featured attraction during pre-game and half-time performances at all home games and at most out of town competitions.

Still in demand for halftime performances, parades, and other special events, the bands' special appearances include a spot in the 1981 CBS television movie *The Concrete Cowboy*, a 1982 ad for WSMV, Nashville's NBC affiliate, a 1984 performance at the *Mirage Bowl* football game in Tokyo. Japan, and a performance at Disney World. The band would later return to Washington, D.C. in 1993 and 1997 for the Inaugural Parades of President Bill Clinton.

Dr. McDonald has assembled a well-seasoned group of creative assistant directors, along with his entire staff of professionals, the AOB has kept its rich tradition going taking it to unimaginable heights recently with making history again as the first college marching band to play the legendary Grand Ole Opry. The showmanship of the Drum Majors known as the *Fantastic Four*, the majorettes, now called the *Sophisticated Ladies,* and the *Royal Elegance*, Flag Corp Auxiliary has been the enhancements that the dynamic sounds and style of their *community* better known as the *Aristocrat of Bands.*

Peer Groups in Undergraduate Higher Education Institutions

When considering the issue of student success and its relationship to student engagement, one may wonder why students do or do not choose to get involved in their campus communities. Students consider their identity. In addition to considering self, however, it is also useful to consider the notion of *collective identity*. Collective identity refers to the elements of identity related to belonging to a particular group or social category (Cerulo, 1997; Kreisberg, 2007).

Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging is important as it incorporates feelings of being valued, included, and accepted by peers groups and friends at a university or college setting. Research suggests that higher education students who have a deeper understanding a sense of belonging tend to have a higher motivation, more academic self-control and confidence, and higher levels of academic engagement and achievement (Pedler, Willis, & Nieuwoudt, 2022). From their research they developed a questionnaire to explore the relationships between university students' sense of belonging and student retention. They found a significant difference in the level of belonging between first-generation students and students whose parents had both completed university. Additionally, students who frequently considered leaving university without completing their degree (i.e., dropping out) had a significantly lower sense of belonging than students who did not.

When considering both the Armstrong (2019) and Carter (2013) studies, both offer valuable perspectives on the experiences of Black male students in campus organizations at HBCUs. Armstrong's (2019) focus is on Black Greek letter fraternities (BGLFs), while Carter (2013) examines the role of HBCU marching bands.

A key similarity between the studies is their exploration of how participation in these student groups influences the development of racial and masculine identities. Armstrong's research reveals that membership in BGLFs fosters an enhanced sense of Black consciousness, solidarity, and connection to Black history among the interviewed men. Similarly, Carter demonstrates how the supportive environment of HBCU bands nurtures racial pride and confidence in one's *Blackness*, particularly among gay band members.

However, there are notable differences in their findings. While Armstrong highlights the masculine socialization process within BGLFs, Carter uncovers the complexities of gender and sexual identity negotiations within HBCU bands. Band

members, particularly those who identified as Black gay men, experienced both inclusion and pressure to conform to masculine heteronormative expectations. Carter's research also reveals the prevalence of competitive hazing rituals within the band setting, which contrasts with the structured mentorship approach reported by Armstrong.

Methodologically, both studies employed qualitative inquiry, but Armstrong utilized a basic interpretative approach, whereas Carter relied on life history interviews. Armstrong's study focused specifically on the perspectives of BGLF members, while Carter explored the intersectionality of identities, encompassing race, gender, and sexuality, within the band context.

In summary, these two research studies employed complementary insights. Armstrong shed light on the perceived advantages of BGLF membership at HBCUs, while Carter offered a more critical analysis that uncovered both positive and negative aspects of the marching band experience. Together, these studies illustrated the profound impact that student organizations exert on the formation of identity and socialization processes among Black male students at HBCUs. They also highlighted the importance of further research to promote inclusion and support for diverse identities within these traditionally Black spaces.

In addition, university students with a higher sense of belonging reported higher motivation and enjoyment in their studies whereas students who reported lower levels of belonging reported lower levels of motivation and enjoyment in their studies, which can impact on student achievement and reduces the likelihood of students considering leaving university before completing their studies, thus contributing to student retention. More specifically, previous studies have found that sense of belonging for students of color is linked to persistence (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2008).

Perceived Peer Support

When considering the issue of student success and its relationship to student engagement, issues arise concerning why students do or do not choose to get involved in their campus activities or communities. This concern relates to how students perceive themselves and construct their identities as college students (Cooper, 2009). Cooper goes on to explain,

> In order to persist in their education, however, all students need to feel they are in a campus community that supports and values them, where learning opportunities are developmental, and where they feel a strong sense of identity and affinity with the school. This feeling that they are cared about and seen as part of the campus community is tied to students' sense of belonging; this feeling in turn is tied to student persistence (2009, p. 1).

This sense of belonging has been referred to as "embeddedness" (Roberts and Rosenwald, 2001, p. 112) and has also been associated with "mattering" (Schlossberg, 1989). One of the key factors to consider in creating and fostering a sense of belonging for students is that of campus culture. Peers are instrumental in influencing

college outcomes because students can work together to form study groups, share notes, and experiences, and offer advice and support (Richardson & Skinner, 1992).

Similarly, research on living communities shows positive retention outcomes. For example, in 2011, Buch and Spaulding studied the impact of a psychology learning community with six groups of students. The students were required to complete common courses, a service-learning project, and they were exposed to academic support resources on campus. When compared to their non-learning community peers, they received higher GPAs earned more credit hours, and had a higher first-year retention rate.

Perceived Faculty Support

Student-faculty interactions can be critical in developing students' academic and social self-concept and enhancing their motivation and achievement. Colleges and universities that actively nurture close and frequent contact between their students and faculty members are more likely to gain many benefits from such initiatives (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharyu, 2010). Faculty members taking an interest in their students' academic progress could potentially make significant contributions in increasing their intellectual and professional development (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Cokley, 2000; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980).

There is evidence that students successful in knowing even one faculty member on a close level are likely to feel more satisfied with their college experience and aspire to go further in their careers (Rosenthal et al., 2000). Although most faculty interactions tend to occur within the formal classroom environment, students who experience informal interactions tend to be more motivated, engaged, and actively involved in the learning process (Thompson, 2001; Woodside, Wong, & Weist, 1999). In fact, informal interaction between students and faculty has been identified as a primary agent of college culture and has an important influence and role on the attitudes, interests, and values of college students (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Lambert, Terinzini, & Lattuca, 2007; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Thompson, 2001).

Although previous research has established that student-faculty interactions are important, this research identifies which aspects of student-faculty interactions are helpful and how these could significantly influence students to stay in college, increase their desire to work hard, stimulate them to enjoy learning, and encourage them to strive toward high achievement (Bean, 1985).

Perceived Isolation and Loneliness

According to Lee Oakley (2020):

Loneliness is one of the most personal, and ironically one of the most social, feelings that a person can experience. It is something which affects our sense of who we are, and our place in the society in which we inhabit. It affects some for only brief moments, and still others their entire lives. It is human universal which everyone is likely to have experienced, however briefly, at one point or another in their lives. Many scholars have variably defined this phenomenon over the years as an emotion, a feeling, a perception or even as a biological mechanism for survival (p. 1).

What this tells us is that loneliness is a complex process which many individuals have reflected on in many different ways.

Loneliness has been defined as an unpleasant and distressing subjective experience that arises from a qualitative or quantitative deficiency in a person's relationships (Perlman, 1988). It can vary in intensity and frequency (Russell, 1982) and has been associated with many negative consequences, such as reduced life satisfaction (Goodwin, Cook, & Yung, 2001), decreased academic performance and persistence (Nicpon et al., 2007), and psychological distress (DiTommaso & Spinner, 1997).

Changes and transitions are common for everyone throughout life. There is a growing body of research suggesting that attending higher education, especially for the first time, entails a transition in young adults' lives which includes a great deal of stress (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). It was suggested that these difficulties might be so serious, that up to 40% of the students may fail to complete their degrees (Pantages & Creedon, 1978). Estimates indicate that as many as 30% of college students reported experiencing loneliness and up to 60% experienced it as a major problem during their college years (McWhirter, 1997). In a study conducted by Bernardon, Babb, Hakim-Larson, & Gragg, 2011), results indicated that participants with greater attachment security reported lower levels of all types of loneliness compared to those with less attachment security, and this was partially mediated by perceived social support.

Student Persistence

It is often believed that students are more likely to persist if they immediately get involved, engaged, or integrated into college life (Astin, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Involvement is defined by Astin (1985) as the extent to which students invest in learning by studying, spending time on campus, participating in student organizations, and interacting with faculty and other students. Astin's definition of involvement is closely related to Tinto's (1993) concept of integration, which suggests that students are more likely to persist when they perceive congruence between their intellectual and social needs at an institution. Simply put, increasing students' level of involvement in an institution was directly linked to student development and success (Astin, 1985). This congruence, which has been referred to as academic and social integration, has been defined by Tinto (1993) as the student's level of involvement in the social and academic life of the college.

Sense of Belonging and Persistence in College

The research shows that "a sense of belonging is an influential factor in whether a student succeeds and develops in college" (Hamrick, Evans, and Schuh, 2002, p. 86). Tinto' Theory Student Departure (1987, 1993) focuses primarily on the critical importance of social and academic integration into college for student success and persistence. His theory has been widely adopted by many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and propels many of the programs and services provided for the students (Tierney, 1992). Tinto (2006, 2007) recognized that there was a disconnect on factors that supported student persistence and the lack of improvement in student retention rates, especially for at-risk students.

Braxton and Lee (2005) did an exhaustive review of the research on student persistence and found that there was a link between social integration, institutional commitment, and a student's decision to persist at a four-year residential institution. Out of the nineteen studies they reviewed, sixteen supported the fact that students were more likely to be committed to the institution and persist to graduation if they experience social integration (Braxton & Lee, 2005). Moreover, Pascarella and Ternzini (2005) concluded from their research on engagement and persistence that student engagement, purposeful campus involvement, positive interactions with faculty, and time spent studying outside of the class were all strongly related to persistence and graduation. Reason (2009) supported those findings in an extensive review of the retention research, finding that involvement in co-curricular activities (i.e., student organizations, fraternities, marching bands, campus groups) helped students gain experiences with purposeful activities that could lead to retention.

Previous research investigated sense of belonging, motivation, and persistence using quantitative methods (Freeman, Anderman, & Jenson, 2007; Morrow & Akermann, 2012). Freeman, Anderman, and Jenson (2007) studied the sense of belonging with a group of college freshmen. The purpose of that study was to examine the relationship between the students' sense of class belonging and their academic motivation. Two hundred thirty-eight participants were surveyed at a southern university, and it was found that there was a relationship between the students' feeling of belonging in class and their level of academic motivation. Moreover, students who felt a connection to their classes felt a great sense of belonging within the university community (Freeman et al., 2007).

Morrow and Ackermann (2012) also examined sense of belonging of first-year college student to assess the importance of sense of belonging and motivation in predicting persistence from the first year to the second year. One hundred fifty-six students completed the survey. The overall finding for sense of belonging and intent to persist were not significant; however, faculty and peer support were significant in predicting first- to second-year retention.

Research conducted on sense of belonging by race has determined that Black and Hispanic students seek membership in peer groups as a way to feel a part of the campus community (Carter & Hurtado, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008). Carter and Hurtado (2007) studied the experiences of first-year Latino students, seeking to discover how racial and ethnic minority students viewed their participation in college in relation to the process of engagement in diverse learning communities of a college. Findings

from this study were consistent with those of Ingelmo (2007), who studied the perception of belonging of six Hispanic students at a predominantly White institution (PWI) in the Midwest and found that establishing a sense of belonging was difficult for students who did not fit in with the dominant campus population. Sense of belonging was established by creating relationships withing the community and organization with members who shared the same values and experiences.

Museus, Yi, and Saelua (2017) sought to generate a clearer understanding of how campus environments influenced a sense of belonging. They were interested in determining whether culturally engaging campus activities were related with students' sense of belonging. They found that Hispanics show a stronger sense of belonging than Whites, and women exhibited a stronger sense of belonging than men. Additional research has been conducted regarding first-year student persistence by race and social class. Hausman, Schofiled, and Woods (2012) studied sense of belonging as a predictor of persistence in Black and White first-year students. The purpose of their study was to examine the role of sense of belonging in predicting college students' intention to persist. The study found that students who had regular interactions with their peers, interacted with faculty, had support from their friends, and had support from their family had a greater sense of belonging.

College Extra Curriculum Impact on Retention

The link between student involvement and retention has been firmly established. Tinto (1975) was among the first to emphasize how social and academic integration impacted a student's commitment to their institution and decision to persist in college or withdraw. Subsequent research has consistently found significant positive correlations between participation in extracurricular activities and student retention rates (Alford, 2000; Astin, 1984; Bower, 2003; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Students who engaged socially and educationally beyond the classroom were more likely to continue into their second year and beyond.

Involvement in specific activity types also showed benefits. Participation in club or intramural sports had high impact, particularly for marginalized student populations by developing leadership skills, social networks and support systems (Forrester, 2006; Greive, 2016). Involvement in performing ensembles increased a sense of belonging and meaningful connections to peers which supported retention (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2003). Membership in campus organizations led to strengthened institutional commitment through shared school spirit traditions and community (Kuh, 1995; Lewis, 2016). Even employment on campus in positions that were socially enriching, such as resident advising roles, positively influenced persistence (Purdie & Rosser, 2011).

However, some discrepancies persisted for underrepresented groups. While involvement was generally linked to higher retention across race, Black and Latino students reported lower retention rates than White students in multiple studies (Murtaugh et al., 1999; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). Fischer (2007) found small effects favoring White students involved in honors programs and experiential learning trips. Research aimed at understanding gaps is still developing but beginning to consider intersectional identities and varied experiences (Tull et al., 2021).

Schlossberg (1989) emphasized the need to tailor supports and create welcoming communities for all, especially those with marginalized social identities.

There are also opportunities to explore specific types of activities in more depth. While performing groups are well-studied, less is known about other creative outlets like campus media, visual and performing arts clubs. The impact of academic and pre-professional organizations is under-researched as is involvement through religious and spirituality groups which are significant for some students. Further, most studies utilize quantitative methods, yet qualitative inquiries could provide richer insights into how various experiences are perceived and shaped by individual contexts and social locations. Tinto (2012) later asserted models must consider external factors beyond the institution that influence student commitment and success.

The literature clearly demonstrates participation in extracurricular activities benefits retention overall, but key gaps remain regarding differences across student demographics. Filling these voids could aid in developing more inclusive and targeted involvement initiatives proven to support retention, especially for marginalized populations at risk for lower persistence. This proposed study seeks to address some of these gaps through a mixed methods exploration of diverse involvement experiences and outcomes among first-year students across racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Impact of University Marching Band and Retention

Research has found that participation in university marching bands positively impacts retention. Studies show that members of marching bands are more likely to persist into their second year of college compared to non-band students (Goodrich, 2018; Lowman, 2020). This is likely due to the increased sense of belonging and community that marching bands can provide. Tinto's (1975) theory of student departure emphasizes that feeling connected to the campus environment is key in retention.

Several factors associated with the marching band experience may foster this sense of belonging. Marching bands require significant time commitments for rehearsals, performances, and traveling that promote bonding between members (Cooper et al., 2007; Kim & Jin, 2020). Members develop close peer relationships that serve as a strong support system (Gardner, 2017). The visible leadership roles and responsibilities students hold within the band also provide an avenue to find purpose and feel important on campus (Jacobs, 2013; Lowman, 2020). Performing at high-profile sporting events in front of large crowds further bolsters pride in one's university (Adderly et al., 2019).

Despite research showing marching bands may boost retention overall, there is limited research on potential differences across demographic groups. One study found that involvement in campus activities such as marching band had an even stronger positive relationship with retention for minoritized students compared to White students (Nuñez, 2009). However, more examination is still needed on diversity within bands and the experiences of students with marginalized identities. Qualitative approaches could provide a deeper understanding of whether and how membership uniquely impacts belonging and commitment to school among different populations.

The sense of connection and support that marching bands help foster appears to encourage students to persist in their education. The regular contact hours spent in marching band activities serve to integrate members into the social and academic realms of campus life that Tinto argued were crucial for retention. While gaps remain regarding disaggregated data, research has generally found positive connections between participation and continued enrollment into the second year of college and degree completion. Further study across student identities could help marching band directors optimize their programs' recruitment and sense of inclusion.

Development of Leadership Skills

In the expansive landscape of higher education, delving into the intricate dynamics of leadership skill development illuminates a narrative deeply embedded in the experiences of Black males at HBCUs. This literature review aspires to synthesize existing research, contributing to a nuanced understanding of how participation in peer groups and organizations, particularly within the unique context of HBCUs, significantly shapes the cultivation of leadership qualities. By navigating through this body of knowledge, the review aims to inform future research and practice, offering insights and recommendations for administrators, policymakers, and stakeholders.

The Imperative of Leadership Development

Komives, Lucas, and McMahon's seminal work (2013) serves as a guiding compass in understanding leadership development in college. Their exploration of leadership as a dynamic process highlights the transformative potential embedded in extracurricular involvement, encouraging students to actively engage in leadership roles within peer groups. Dugan and Komives' compilation (2010) further expands the discourse, presenting a collection of essays that delve into the multifaceted dimensions of leadership development.

Tailoring Leadership Development to College Contexts

Harper and Quaye's research (2007) on student organizations as venues for Black identity expression and development among Black male student leaders sheds light on the specific experiences of Black male students. Gasman, Baez, Turner, and Trujillo's (2008) work contributes to this exploration by emphasizing the unique environments of minority-serving institutions, including HBCUs, as fertile grounds for leadership development among a diverse student body.

The HBCU Context: A Catalyst for Leadership

The unique cultural and social milieu of HBCUs introduces an additional layer to the development of leadership skills. Gasman and Drezner's (2014) theoretical exploration lays the groundwork for comprehending the intricacies of leadership development within these institutions, recognizing the historical and cultural significance of HBCUs. Palmer, Maramba, and Gasman's (2011) exploration enriches our understanding of how HBCUs contribute to the development of leadership skills among Black male students.

Leadership Beyond the College Gates

As students traverse the corridors of higher education, the development of leadership skills holds implications that extend far beyond the college experience. Posner's (2017) renowned work offers practical insights into leadership principles applicable in various contexts, including the workplace. Northouse's (2018) comprehensive text serves as a guide for understanding leadership within diverse contexts, emphasizing the dynamic and adaptable nature of leadership.

The literature on the development of leadership skills within the context of higher education paints a vibrant portrait of the transformative potential inherent in extracurricular involvement. The dynamic interplay between peer group participation, identity development, and the unique environments of HBCUs shapes a narrative that extends beyond the confines of traditional leadership models. The current study, centered on the impact of marching band participation on leadership development among Black male students at an HBCU in the Midsouth, seeks to add a nuanced layer to this discourse. By building upon these scholarly insights, the study aspires to contribute to the development of tailored interventions and strategies, fostering the leadership potential of Black male students in higher education and beyond.

The Intricacies of Motivation

Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler's investigation (1996) into the transition experiences of Latino students offers profound insights into the challenges and triumphs that shape motivation to persist in higher education. Their work serves as a cornerstone in understanding how early stages of the college journey influence students' commitment to their academic pursuits. Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) longitudinal research enriches our comprehension of the complex nature of student motivation, emphasizing the lasting impact of early engagement on students' motivation to return to school.

Specific Challenges and Retention Dynamics

Allen's exploration (1992) into the outcomes for Black students provides a nuanced perspective on the specific challenges faced by underrepresented groups.

Fries-Britt and Turner's (2001) work on *Uneven Stories* adds depth by presenting narratives of successful Black collegians, displaying the diversity of experiences and emphasizing the need for tailored interventions to foster sustained motivation to return to school.

Tailoring Interventions for Underrepresented Groups

Harper's (2012) comprehensive research sheds light on the unique challenges faced by Black male students, urging institutions to recognize and address systemic barriers. His work challenges prevailing narratives and underscores the importance of acknowledging individual needs to cultivate sustained motivation among this demographic.

Leadership in the Workplace

Within the expansive realm of higher education, the cultivation of leadership skills stands as a pivotal element shaping individuals for success in the professional landscape. This journey from academic development to professional leadership involves a nuanced interplay between the college experience, particularly within the distinctive context of HBCUs, and the subsequent application of learned skills in diverse workplaces.

Foundational Significance of Belonging

Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods' research (2007) accentuates the foundational significance of a sense of belonging for students in higher education. This transcendent concept encompasses not only social connections but also a perception of support, significance, and integration within the campus community. Strayhorn's seminal work (2012) adds layers to this understanding, emphasizing the transformative role a strong sense of belonging plays in shaping an individual's identity and worldview.

Challenges Faced by Underrepresented Groups

For underrepresented groups, particularly Black males, the pursuit of a sense of belonging becomes a distinctive journey. Harper's (2012) comprehensive research illuminates the unique challenges faced by Black male students in higher education, underscoring the intersectionality of race and gender. Recognizing and addressing these challenges is pivotal for crafting interventions tailored to the diverse experiences within the student body.

Summary of Literature Review

The literature reviewed provides strong evidence that involvement in university marching bands can positively impact retention and sense of belonging for students. The close-knit communities and time commitments associated with band membership appear to facilitate the social and academic integration emphasized in Tinto's model as key to student persistence. However, more comprehensive exploration is still needed to fully understand potential variations in these outcomes based on student demographics. Given marching bands' prevalence on college campuses and their visible leadership roles representing university spirit, further research disaggregating retention data and exploring diverse student experiences could yield valuable insights for enhancing bands' inclusive excellence and support of all members.

The literature on sense of belonging in higher education provides a rich tapestry of insights into the complexities of student experiences. Understanding the dynamic interplay among peer group participation, identity development, and the unique environment of HBCUs lays the groundwork for the current study. Centered on exploring the impact of marching band participation on the sense of belonging among Black male students at an HBCU in the Midsouth, this study aspires to build upon this scholarly foundation, offering nuanced insights and recommendations for enhancing the sense of belonging and overall success of Black males in higher education.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of peer groups on the experience of undergraduate Black males attending Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs) in the Midsouth. The study aimed to explore the sense of belonging and socialization skills of these students within their peer groups and investigate how these factors contributed to their retention and success at the HBCU. This section describes the study's research design, the target population, the instrumentation, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis techniques to answer the study's research questions.

Research Design

This study employed a sequential mixed-methods study and was conducted in two phases to investigate how university marching band participation impacts Black male students' sense of belonging (i.e., peer support, faculty support, isolation, and classroom comfort). Phase I was a quantitative portion, and Phase II was a qualitative portion.

Phase I (Quantitative)

An online survey was administered to approximately 80 current members of the university marching band. The pre-existing survey utilized a five-point Likert

scale to measure (a) perceptions of sense of belonging (on four scales), (b) intentions to remain enrolled, and (c) demographic information.

Phase II (Qualitative)

A focus group was conducted with a purposeful sample of seven Black male band members and several band staff members. The focus group was conducted with participant consent and was about 60 minutes in duration. The session was conducted through Zoom and was audio recorded, and transcripts were auto generated. A semi-structured protocol guided discussion was conducted exploring topics of sense of belonging, university engagement, social supports, and impacts of band involvement.

Target Population

Approximately 80 Black undergraduate male student marching band members currently attending an HBCU were invited to participate in this study. Marching band staff members were also invited to participate in a focus group session.

Instrumentation

Two forms of data were used for this study: (a) an online questionnaire and (b) a focus group protocol. These data collection instruments are each described in the sections that follow.

The Sense of Belonging Scale - Revised

The survey used in this study was *The Sense of Belonging Scale – Revised* (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2003). See Appendix A. The researcher had permission from the author to use the survey for this study. The survey with consent form was housed on the Qualtrics^{TM} server.

The 26-item questionnaire was designed to measure the degree Sense of Belonging on four dimensions: Perceived Peer Support (eight items), Perceived Classroom Comfort (4 items), Perceived Isolation (4 items), and Perceived Faculty Support (10 items). Respondents were asked to answer questions on a five-point Likert scale: 1=completely untrue, 2=mostly untrue; 3=equally true and untrue, 4=mostly true, 5=completely true. Each factor scored is the arithmetic mean of the items making up the scale. No answers were reverse scored. The total sense of belonging score is the arithmetic mean of all 26 items. Permission was received to send an email with the anonymous link to the survey to the current AOB members.

Focus Group Questions

The band member focus group questions were asked to a group of current students within a group setting. Seven students of varied classifications and a cross-reference of instrumentalists were selected for the session. The focus group session was conducted via Zoom and was recorded and transcribed. This format allowed for individuals to piggy-back off each other's responses and add to them. See Appendix B for the complete set of focus group questions and follow-up probing questions. Students were asked to volunteer to participate in the focus group by providing their name and email address at the conclusion of the online questionnaire.

All documentation, procedures, and protocols were provided by email prior to the interview. Participants were read an Informed Consent script at the start of the interview to ensure full understanding of the purpose of the study, the intent of the interview, confidentiality, and federal regulations governing human subjects' research. A verbal agreement was required and recorded before the interview questions started. In addition, the consent form, and participant's pre-qualifying questionnaire were discussed with each participant. The researcher conducted individual interviews virtually on the Zoom (web-based) platform to allow video and audio recording which were later transcribed through Otter.ai software.

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to collecting any data, the researcher completed the *Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative* (CITI) Ethics in Research Modules. The researcher applied for Institutional Review Board (IRB) from Tennessee State University (TSU) approval to collect data and received approval.

A link to the *Sense of Belonging Scale-Revised* was emailed to current AOB members. An additional five questions were added to the end of the survey requesting demographic and persistence to continue in college information. The focus group session was held with a group of current AOB members. The focus group was held via ZOOM and lasted 30-45 minutes. Students were asked to volunteer to participate in the focus group session by providing their name and email address at the conclusion of the Qualtrics survey. The researcher selected a variety of class-levels and instrument players.

Data Analysis Techniques

After survey data were collected through the Qualtrics platform, data were exported into IBM SPSS, Version 29.0 and analyzed using descriptive statistics and frequencies and were displayed in tables and graphs. Focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim and were subject to thematic analysis. Text was coded, and emergent themes were identified using Creswell's (2028) *Visual Model of the Coding Process in Qualitative Research* (see Figure 2). An explanatory approach was integrated and elaborated on quantitative results with qualitative insights.

Figure 2. Visual Model of the Coding Process in Qualitative Research (Creswell, 2018)

| Initially read through the data | Divide the text into segments of information | Label the segments of information with codes | Reduce overlap and redundancy of codes | Collapse codes into themes |

| Many pages of text | Many segments of text | 30 to 40 codes | Codes reduce to 20 | Codes reduced to 5 to 7 themes |
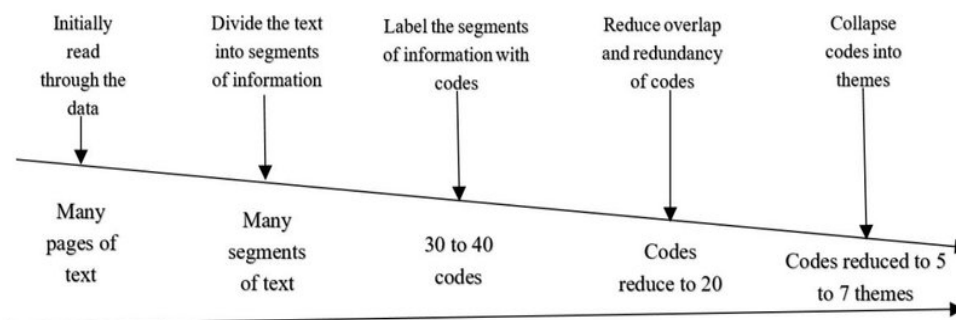
Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate how participation in a university marching band influences Black male students' sense of belonging at their institution. Sense of belonging refers to students' perceived feelings of support, connection, and importance within their campus community. This section reports on the response rate and the characteristics of the survey respondents. Next, the results of the data analysis are presented in the order of the study's research questions.

Response Rate and Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Eighty-three (83) Black male band students were sent an email requesting participation in taking the *Sense of Belonging Scale*. Three emails were sent back undeliverable. Out of the eighty emails sent, 61students completed the survey, with a response rate of 76%, which exceeded the 70% expectation. Table 1 displays the characteristics of the survey respondents. As seen in Table 1, all respondents were Black or bi-racial, which, besides being male, was the primary criteria for being a survey respondent. There was a fairly even distribution among the (a) classification of freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior, (b) age, and (c) number of semesters in AOB.

Table 1. Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Characteristic		N	%
Student Classification			
	Freshman (0-30 hours)	17	27.9
	Sophomore (31-60 hours)	24	39.3
	Junior (61-90 hours)	13	21.3
	Seniors (91-120 hours)	7	9.8
	Total	61	100.0
Age			
	17	1	1.6
	18	13	22.3
	19	18	29.5
	20	16	22.6
	21	10	34.4
	22+	3	4.9
	Total	61	100.0
Ethnicity/Race			
	Bi-racial	8	13.1
	Black	53	86.9
	Total	61	100.0
Number of Semesters in AOB?			
	1	2	3.3
	2	18	29.5
	3	7	11.5
	4	18	29.5
	5	3	4.9
	6	8	13.1
	7	0	0.0
	8-10	5	8.2
	Total	61	100.0

Results of Data Analysis by Research Question

Research Question One (RQ₁): *How does participation in the university marching band impact Black male students' perception of belonging and community at the university?*

To answer RQ$_1$, means and standard deviations were computed for each survey item on the *Sense of Belonging Scale*. A Likert scale from one to five was used for responding to each of the survey items, with 5=completely true; 4=mostly true; 3=equally true and untrue; 2=mostly untrue; 1=completely untrue. Then, survey items # 1-8 were collapsed to create a scale for Perceived *Peer Support*; items #9-12 were collapsed to create a scale for Perceived *Classroom Comfort*; items # 13-16 were collapsed to create a scale for Perceived *Isolation*; and, items # 17-26 were collapsed to create a scale for Perceived *Faculty Support*. See Appendix C.

Next, the total scale scores for each of the four scales were disaggregated by demographic factor, specifically classification, age, and number of semesters of participation in the AOB, to examine the impact of Sense of Belonging scale scores. See Table 2 for descriptive statistics (means).

Table 2. Means Scores for Sense of Belonging Scales by Demographic Factor

Characteristic	N	Peer Support M*	Classroom Comfort M*	Isolation M*	Faculty Support M*
Student Classification					
Freshman (0-30 hours)	17	3.98	4.49	3.34	3.97
Sophomore (31-60 hours)	24	3.92	3.83	2.89	3.51
Junior (61-90 hours)	13	4.11	4.21	2.96	3.64
Seniors (91-120 hours)	7	4.45	4.33	2.42	3.52
Total	61	4.04	4.16	2.95	3.68
Age					
17 years	1	3.75	5.00	5.00	5.00
18 years	13	3.96	4.31	3.33	3.82
19 years	18	4.07	3.92	2.78	3.64
20 years	16	4.04	4.26	3.03	3.66
21 years	10	3.99	4.05	2.73	3.47
22 years and older	3	4.50	4.58	2.08	3.73
Total	61	4.04	4.16	2.95	3.68
Number Semesters in AOB?					
1	2	3.38	3.88	3.13	3.45
2	18	4.14	4.61	3.33	4.09
3	7	4.18	3.82	2.79	3.55
4	18	3.88	3.69	2.85	3.38
5	3	4.25	4.33	2.83	4.30
6	8	3.84	4.28	2.91	3.37
7	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
8-10	5	4.45	4.55	2.25	3.60
Total	61	4.04	4.16	2.95	3.68

* 5=completely true; 4=mostly true; 3=equally true and untrue; 2=mostly untrue; 1=completely untrue

    Then, to examine the relationships among the three demographic factors (age, classification, and numbers of semesters as an AOB member) and each of the four Sense of Belonging scales (Peer Support Level, Classroom Comfort Level, Isolation Level, and Faculty Support Level) a Spearman Rho (r_s) correlational analysis for ordinal data was conducted. These results are displayed in the correlation matrix in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix of Sense of Belonging Scales and Demographic Factors (*N*=61)

Spearman Rho Correlation		1 PS	2 CC	3 IS	4 FS	5 CL	6 AG	7 SM
1 Peer Support (PS)	Corr. Coeff	1.00						
	Sig	-						
2 Classroom Comfort (CC)	Corr. Coeff	**.557***	1.00					
	Sig	<.001	-					
3 Isolation (IS)	Corr. Coeff	**-.478***	-.163	1.00				
	Sig	<.001	.209	-				
4 Faculty Support (FS)	Corr. Coeff	**.337***	**.507***	.028	1.00			
	Sig	.010	<.001	.831	-			
5 Classification (CL)	Corr. Coeff	.131	-.082	**-.268***	-.142	1.00		
	Sig	.320	.527	.037	.284	-		
6 Age (AG)	Corr. Coeff	.039	-.015	-.217	-.157	**.830****	1.00	
	Sig	.769	.910	.092	.236	<.001	-	
7.No. of Semesters AOB (SM)	Corr. Coeff	.026	-.130	-.223	-.235	**.872****	**.763****	1.00
	Sig	.846	.319	.084	.074	<.001	<.001	-

*=significant at .05 alpha level; **=significant at .01 alpha level

As seen in Table 3, there are eight statistically significant correlations among the variables and sense of belonging scales. The most notable relationships are the two negative correlations involving the isolation scale. First, the relationship with the peer support scale (r_s=-.478*). It is statistically significant at the .05 alpha level. This relationship suggests as peer support goes up, isolation goes down. You may also say, as peer support goes down, isolation goes up. The second statistically significant relationship with isolation is with classification (r_s=-.268*). It is statistically significant at the .05 alpha level. As classification goes up, isolation goes down. This relationship suggests as the students' classification progresses up from freshman to sophomore to junior, etc., isolation goes down.
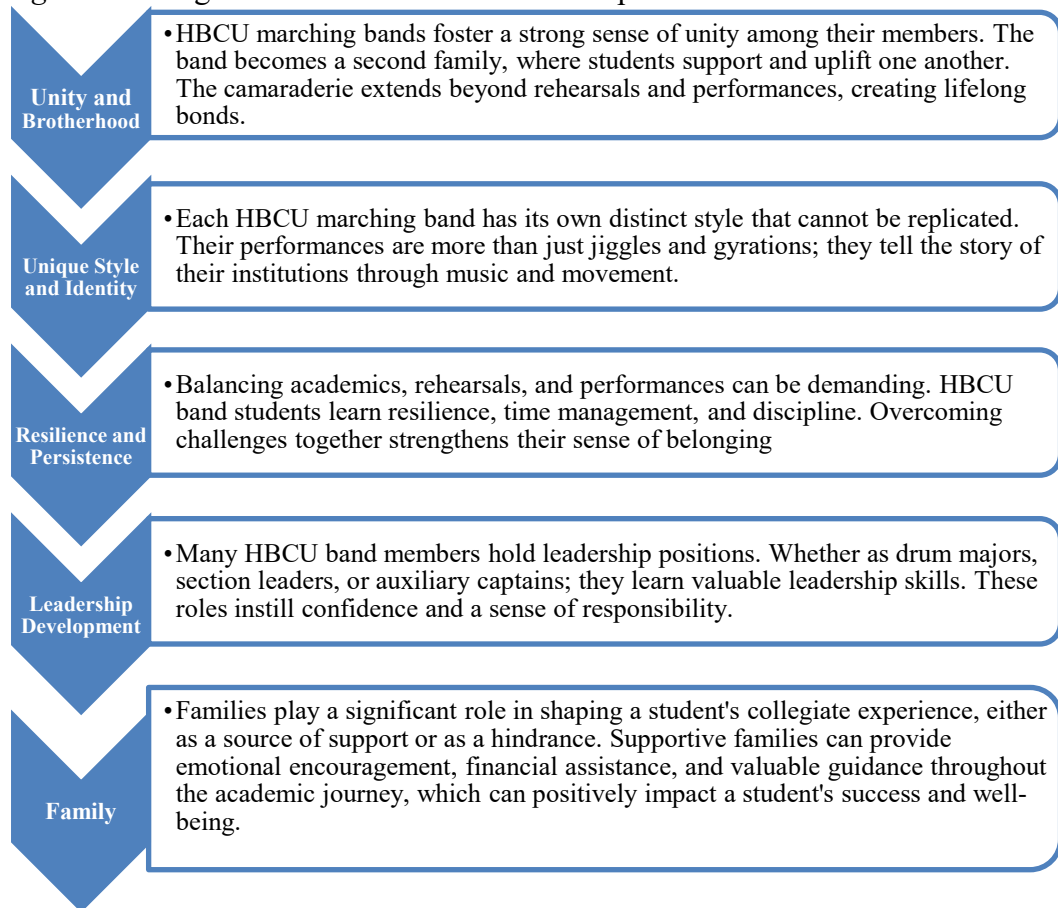
Also, as expected, there were strong positive correlations (*p*<.01) among the demographic variables of age, classification, and number of semesters participating in the AOB: age and classification (r_s=.830); number of semesters in AOB and classification (r_s =.872); age and number of semesters in AOB (r_s =.763).

Research Question Two (RQ₂): *What aspects of the marching band experience most significantly contribute to Black male students' feelings of acceptance and value at the university?*

To answer RQ₂, a focus group session was conducted with seven individuals. Email invitations were sent out to individuals who provided their email addresses on the questionnaire indicating that they would be willing to participate in the focus group session. The focus group protocol questions and consent form were emailed to each participant prior to the ZOOM session. See Appendix B for a list of the questions. Seven students attended the session which lasted about an hour. There were two freshmen, two sophomore, two junior, and one senior band member. There were also two associate band directors who participated in this focus group session. The session was recorded, and the interviews were transcribed. The transcripts were sent to the participants for member-checking prior to the analysis. The transcripts were then analyzed to extract themes using Creswell's (2018) *Visual Model of the Coding Process in Qualitative Research*. Refer to Figure 2.

The themes that emerged included: (a) unity and brotherhood, (b) unique style and identity, (c) leadership development, (d) resilience and perseverance, and (e) family. Each of these themes are displayed and briefly described in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Emergent Themes from the Focus Group

Unity and Brotherhood
- HBCU marching bands foster a strong sense of unity among their members. The band becomes a second family, where students support and uplift one another. The camaraderie extends beyond rehearsals and performances, creating lifelong bonds.

Unique Style and Identity
- Each HBCU marching band has its own distinct style that cannot be replicated. Their performances are more than just jiggles and gyrations; they tell the story of their institutions through music and movement.

Resilience and Persistence
- Balancing academics, rehearsals, and performances can be demanding. HBCU band students learn resilience, time management, and discipline. Overcoming challenges together strengthens their sense of belonging

Leadership Development
- Many HBCU band members hold leadership positions. Whether as drum majors, section leaders, or auxiliary captains; they learn valuable leadership skills. These roles instill confidence and a sense of responsibility.

Family
- Families play a significant role in shaping a student's collegiate experience, either as a source of support or as a hindrance. Supportive families can provide emotional encouragement, financial assistance, and valuable guidance throughout the academic journey, which can positively impact a student's success and well-being.

Research Question Three (RQ$_3$): *How does marching band participation influence Black male students' decisions to remain enrolled at the university?*

To answer RQ$_3$, responses from the last items from the survey were examined. These two items were added to the survey to provide data to help address this question:

Item #32: If you did not return to school next semester, what would be your primary reason for not returning?
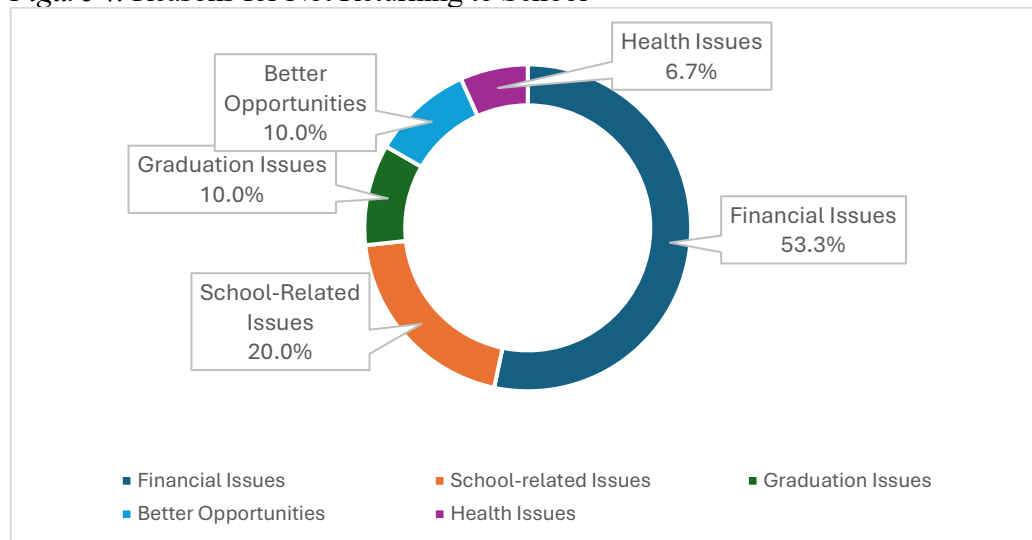
A textbox was provided for student responses. These comments were coded, summarized, and categorized into themes. See Table 4. The themes that emerged included: (a) Financial Issues, (b) School-Related Issues, (c) Graduation Issues, (d) Better Opportunities, and (e) Health Issues. As seen in Table 4 just over one-half, or sixteen divided by the total of thirty of the respondents' comments (53.3%) reported that the main reason for not returning to school would be financial issues.

Table 4. Summary of Responses from Survey Item 32: Reasons for Not Returning to School

Themes (total = 30 comments)				
Financial Issues (n=16)	School Issues (n=6)	Graduation Issues (n=3)	Better Opportunities (n=3)	Health Issues (n=2)
1-a high balance 2-balance issues 3-financial mishandling 4-financial 5-financial aid 6-financial aid 7-funding 8-if I didn't have the funds to pay for school 9-money 10-money problems 11-my scholarship not being added correctly 12-no money 13-not being able to pay for tuition 14-not having money to pay for school 15-scholarship 16-tuition	1-classes availability 2-advisors aren't the best 3-issues with the school 4-organization and student life 5-the band 6-unorganized	1-graduation 2-I will be graduated 3-graduation	1-dreams, goals, passion 2-I found a better engineering program plus a scholarship at a different HBCU that also has a good band. 3-Better opportunities	1-burnout 2-if anything happens to me in terms of family or health
53.3%	20.0%	10.0%	10.0%	6.7%

The second main reason students would not return to school would be for School-Related Issues (20.0%), followed by the fact that they would be graduating (10.0%), then taking advantage of better opportunities (10.0%), and Health Issues (6.7%). Figure 4 displays the relative frequency of the reasons why students would not return to school.

Figure 4. Reasons for Not Returning to School

Item #33: If you were to return to school next semester, what would be your reason for returning next semester and enrolling in courses?
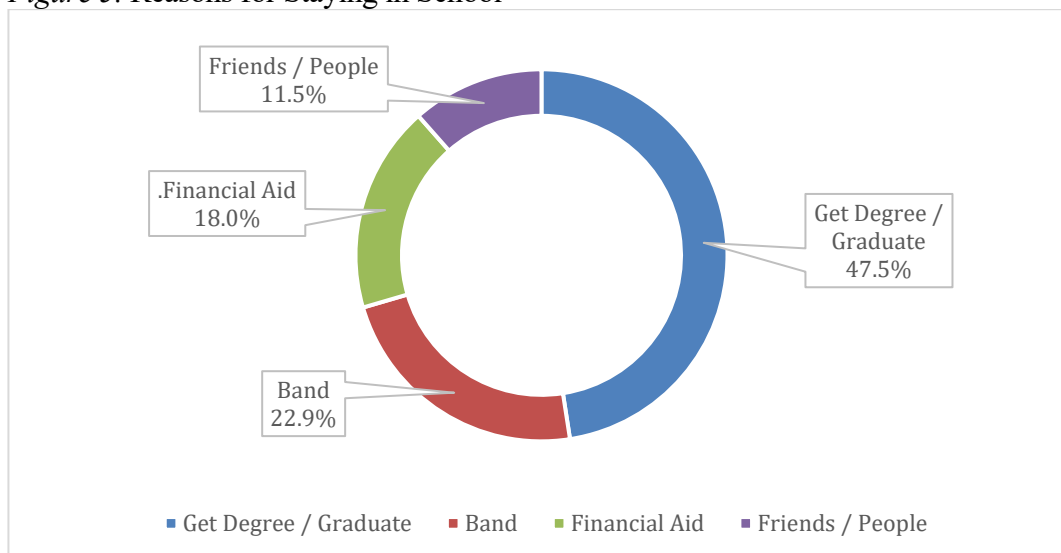
A textbox was provided for a response. These comments were coded, summarized, and categorized into themes. See Table 5 for the 61 comments and the four themes that emerged. These themes were: (a) Getting Degree and Graduating, followed by (b) Band, then (c) Financial Aid, and finally (d) Friends and People. As seen in Table 5, nearly half (47.5%), of the respondents' comments were focused on graduating, receiving a degree, and moving on to graduate school. The rest of the responses made up the other half. Nearly twenty-three percent (22.9%) was participation in the band, followed by the receipt and benefit of financial assistance (18%), and finally being with friends and people (11.5%). Figure 5 graphically portrays the relative frequency of each of these reasons for staying in school.

Table 5. Summary of Responses from Survey Item 33: Reasons for Staying in School

Themes (total = 61 comments)			
Get Degree (Graduate) (n=29)	Band (n=14)	Financial Aid (n=11)	Friends People (n=7)
1-complete my degree 2-continuing with my education 3-degree 4-degree 5-education 6-for a better future 7-get my degree and graduate 8-getting a degree 9-getting my degree to move on to graduate school	1-band 2-band 3-band 4-band 5-band and my passion for the school	1-a low balance 2-financial aid 3-band scholarship 4-I couldn't find anywhere that pays for most of the school	1-friends 2-I love it here 3-my friends

10-getting my masters 11-grad school 12-i will be graduating next semester 13-I'm close to finishing 14-I'm committed to getting my degree 15-I'm going to get my degree 16-my college degree 17-my degree 18-my reason for staying here would be to obtain my degree 19-the degree 20-to finish college and to finish my degree 21-to get a degree 22-to get a degree 23-to get my degree 24-to get my education 25-to graduate 26-to get my degree 27-to get my education 28-to get my education 29-to graduate	6-band 7-being a part of the band 8-education and the band 9-I couldn't find anywhere else that had a good band 10-AOB 11-my love for music 12-the band 13-the band 14-the band program	5-I wouldn't be able to pay for anywhere else 6-money 7-my scholarship fund would be my reason for staying 8-my scholarship for being here 9-scholarship 10-scholarships and internship connections 11-most of school is paid for	4-My love for music and my friends 5-my friends 6-the people that I have met 7-ties
47.5%	22.9%	18.0%	11.5%

Figure 5. Reasons for Staying in School

Research Question Four (RQ4): *What recommendations should higher education administrators consider in support of Black males' sense of belonging through learning community as a marching band?*

To answer RQ4, a focus group session was conducted with AOB administrators and band members. Some themes that emerged from this focus group session contribute to a strong sense of belonging for university marching band students at HBCUs. These themes included (a) traditions, rituals, and cultural ambassadors, (b) community engagement and pride, and (c) showmanship and entertainment. Each of these themes is described in the sections that follow.

Tradition, Rituals, and Cultural Ambassadors

HBCU bands honor rich traditions passed down through generations. From pre-game rituals to halftime shows, these customs connect students to their institution's history. Alumni often return to witness these rituals, reinforcing a sense of continuity. As Professor X aptly states, "I was also in the band. So, this is very literal for me." This sense of belonging stems from the university's enduring traditions, which serve as pillars of unity and identity. Whether it is the annual homecoming festivities, longstanding rituals within academic departments, or the spirited performances of the university band, these traditions contribute to a vibrant and cohesive campus culture. Through active participation in these traditions, students not only forge lasting memories but also develop a sense of pride and attachment to their alma mater. Furthermore, these traditions often transcend generations, fostering a sense of continuity and shared legacy among students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

HBCU bands are central to campus culture. They act as ambassadors, representing their universities off-campus at events like Mardi Gras, Rose Bowl parades, and presidential inaugurations. Their performances resonate with both current students and alumni, reinforcing a sense of community and pride. Student D's observation, "If they're near, they hear us practicing, and sometimes during the morning on Friday," underscores the band's omnipresence and influence. Whether it is the spirited melodies echoing across campus during rehearsals or the lively performances energizing Friday morning rituals, the band's presence is felt by all.

Beyond musical contributions, the band fosters a sense of belonging and unity among students, faculty, and alumni. Its performances at sporting events, campus celebrations, and community outreach activities not only enhance school spirit but also strengthen connections with the broader community. Through its tireless dedication and passionate performances, the university band leaves an indelible mark on the institution's cultural landscape, enriching the collegiate experience for all who encounter its harmonious melodies.

Showmanship and Entertainment

HBCU marching bands are known for their high-stepping precision and dynamic showmanship. They blend musicianship with style, creating a hip and current mix that captivates audiences. Whether it is playing a trumpet, flute, or clarinet while on the move, or smashing cymbals, these bands exude confidence and flair. Reflecting on their involvement, Student B remarked, "I've never been in such a good band." Meanwhile, for Student C, being part of the AOB fulfilled a long-held desire. Expressing their contentment, Student C stated, "Being in the AOB is what I wanted."

These individual narratives underscore the importance of personal fulfillment and the pursuit of passions in shaping one's collegiate experience.

HBCU halftime shows are electrifying. Students take pride in entertaining the crowd with intricate formations, dance routines, and musical excellence. The thrill of performing in front of thousands fuels their passion. Being in the band fills students with satisfaction, with Student D describing how "people look at us like, kind of like stars." This recognition reflects the high esteem and admiration band members receive for their talent and contributions to campus life, highlighting their role as influential figures within the university community.

Community Engagement and Pride

HBCU bands actively engage with their local communities. They perform at parades, community events, and fundraisers. Being part of a band allows students to give back and connect with the broader community. Student B's affirmation, "I am involved in a community at Tennessee State," underscores the sense of belonging and connection fostered through such engagement. One prominent avenue through which marching bands interact with their communities is through parades. Whether it is a local holiday parade, a celebration of culture and heritage, or a commemorative event, marching bands add color, energy, and musical flair to the festivities, captivating audiences of all ages.

Additionally, marching bands often participate in community events such as fundraisers, charity walks, and cultural festivals, where their performances serve as a centerpiece of entertainment and celebration. By actively participating in these community engagements, marching bands not only display their musical talents but also reinforce their commitment to service, unity, and cultural enrichment. Moreover, such interactions strengthen the bond between the university and its surrounding community, fostering mutual respect, appreciation, and support. Thus, marching bands serve as ambassadors of goodwill, spreading joy and camaraderie as they actively engage with and enrich the communities they serve, as exemplified by Student B's involvement in the vibrant community at Tennessee State University.

Participating in HBCU marching bands carries a legacy of pride and tradition. Band members understand that they are part of something bigger than themselves. The commitment to precision in drills and movements fosters a unique bond among members, boosting their confidence. Student A aptly articulates this sentiment by stating, "As far as I'm concerned, they want you to succeed and do well in life." This supportive environment extends beyond musical endeavors, as band members often find themselves well received by the university community at large. Faculty and staff recognize the dedication and discipline required to excel in the band, which translates into positive perceptions of students' work ethic and character. Additionally, fellow students admire the camaraderie and talent displayed by band members, further solidifying their status as respected members of the campus community. Overall, being in the band not only enriches students' collegiate experiences but also enhances their reception and integration within the university ecosystem.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to focus on exploring the sense of belonging specifically among Black males in the marching band at Tennessee State University, better known as *The Aristocrat of Bands*. The study aimed to understand the factors influencing their feelings of connection and inclusion within this particular context, providing insights into how their experiences contribute to their overall sense of well-being and satisfaction within the university community. This chapter reports on the major findings of this study, implications for educational leaders, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

Major Findings

HBCUs boast vibrant marching bands and traditions that go beyond mere musical performances. From the results of the survey administered to the AOB members and the focus group session conducted with the AOB faculty members and selected students, the current study revealed four major findings that emerged as a result of the study's research questions. These findings include:

- HBCU marching bands are about tradition, community-building, and cultural representation.
- HBCU marching bands promote student leadership development.
- The longer HBCU marching band students participate in the band program, their sense of belonging increases,
- Students seek goal attainment (i.e., College Graduation)

Each of these of major findings are described as follows:

Tradition, Community-Building, and Cultural Representation

Administrators emphasize that HBCU marching bands powerfully merge music with identity, community-building, self-presentation, and cultural representation. They dynamically transmit and reinvent traditions, serving as a cherished part of HBCU heritage. HBCU administrators appreciate the historical significance of marching bands within their institutions. They understand that these bands have a long-standing tradition that dates back decades and that they are an integral part of the cultural fabric of HBCUs. This finding aligns with what Mahoney (2022) reported about how HBCU marching band performances seamlessly blend music and dance, reclaiming Black joy, community, and self-expression.

Administrators recognize the importance of upholding these traditions and providing support to ensure the continued success and growth of the bands. They may allocate resources for band scholarships, equipment, uniforms, and facilities to help maintain the band's legacy and promote its traditions.

Leadership Development

The insights on the importance of patience, diligence, and hard work emerged from the input provided by faculty and staff during the focus group discussions. These faculty and staff members shared their observations and experiences, guiding students to recognize the significance of these qualities in their academic and personal development. Through their guidance and mentorship, faculty and staff encouraged students to reflect on the role of patience in navigating challenges, the necessity of diligence in maintaining focus, and the transformative impact of hard work in achieving success. By drawing on their expertise and fostering an atmosphere of open dialogue, faculty and staff effectively facilitated discussions that underscored the importance of these virtues in shaping students' growth and achievements.

As Cumberledge (2016) summarized in his work, band involvement also offers students leadership development, a sense of discipline and commitment, and overall well-being. Given the financial constraints faced by HBCUs, it is crucial to protect the continued vitality of these marching bands. Students staying in school directly impacts their personal growth, career opportunities, and financial stability. It equips them with valuable skills, fosters critical thinking, and expands their horizons, preparing them to succeed in life.

Higher Sense of Belonging as Time Spent in HBCU Marching Band Increases

Higher Peer Support and Faculty Support, and Lower Isolation

The themes that emerged from the focus group discussions centered around the participants' positive experiences and perspectives regarding their college journey. Students expressed genuine happiness and appreciation for being in school, highlighting the value they placed on their education and the opportunities it affords them. Moreover, the participants emphasized the importance of fostering strong relationships with fellow students, faculty, and staff members, recognizing the significant role these connections play in their overall satisfaction and success within the college community. This finding is consistent with Cooper's (2009) research where he describes that in order to persist, students need to feel they are in a campus community that supports and values them.

Students may consider leaving school if they have a solid plan for their future that does not rely on traditional academics. It is essential to have a clear direction and pursue opportunities that align with their goals, whether it is entrepreneurship, vocational training, or gaining practical experience through internships. However, having a well-thought-out plan is crucial to ensure success outside of the academic environment, and faculty support is essential. Balancing academic responsibilities, band commitments, and other obligations can be challenging for HBCU band members. However, with careful planning and effective time management, it is possible to navigate these demands successfully. Here are some ways faculty can support students as they attempt to balance everything towards graduation: (a) *Develop a structured schedule*, (b) *Prioritize academics*, (c) *Communicate with professors and band directors,* (d) *Seek academic and time management resources*, and (e) *Self-care*. Remember, everyone's circumstances and commitments are

different, so it is essential to find a balance. By prioritizing academics, effectively managing time, seeking support when needed, and practicing self-care, students can successfully navigate their band involvement while working towards graduation.

Students Seeking Goal Attainment

And there was unanimous agreement among all the focus group members regarding the pivotal significance of graduation in the college experience. They viewed graduation as not only a symbolic milestone marking their academic achievements but also as a culmination of their growth, learning, and personal development throughout their college journey. This finding was consistent with Braxton and Lee's (2005) study where they found in their exhaustive review of literature on student persistence that there was a link between social integration, institutional commitment, and a student's decision to persist at a four-year residential school.

Conclusions

The dynamic interplay between early engagement, a sense of belonging, and the unique challenges faced by underrepresented groups forms a complex tapestry. The current study, centered on understanding the impact of marching band participation on motivation to return to school among Black male students at an HBCU in the Midsouth, aims to contribute to this evolving discourse.

By building upon these scholarly insights, the study sought to offer nuanced recommendations for interventions tailored to the unique context of HBCUs, fostering sustained educational motivation among Black male marching band members. When referring back to Tinto's *Model of Involvement and Student Departure* (1975, 1993), we are referring specifically to the Academic and Social Systems. Refer to Figure 1.

Gasman and Drezner's (2014) theoretical exploration also offer a framework for comprehending the intricate dynamics at play within HBCUs. Palmer, Maramba, and Gasman's (2008) exploration further underscores the role of HBCUs in shaping students' motivation to persist in academic pursuits, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions within the HBCU context.

Implications for Leadership of the Aristocrat of Bands and HBCU Marching Bands

Some effective implementation recommendations for educational leaders may include: (a) transition assistance, (b) early contact and community building—perhaps showcasing, or highlighting, the AOB in high school venues; (c) providing academic support; (d) monitoring and early warning of academics and providing tutoring, (e) counseling and advising, and (f) providing more resources for band program development.

Most importantly, however, would be for higher education leaders to improve student retention processes. Higher education leaders can take specific actions to

enhance student retention processes for marching band members at HBCUs. Here are some specific suggestions:

- *Foster a Sense of Community*: Create a welcoming environment for marching band members. Encourage social interactions, mentorship, and bonding. Organize band-specific events, workshops, and mixers to strengthen connections among students.
- *Early Engagement and Orientation*: Include band participation in new student orientation programs. Highlight the band's traditions, expectations, and benefits. Pair incoming students with mentors (e.g., upperclassmen band members) to ease their transition.
- *Academic Support Services*: Provide academic advising tailored to band members' schedules and commitments. Offer tutoring services specifically for music courses or other challenging subjects.
- *Performance Opportunities*: Prioritize regular performances. Concerts, halftime shows, and community events are essential for band members. Celebrate their achievements publicly and within the campus community.
- *Financial Assistance*: Offer band-specific scholarships to recognize talent and commitment. Assist with instrument costs, uniform fees, and travel expenses.
- *Health and Well-Being*: Monitor physical and mental health of band members. Long rehearsals and performances can be demanding. Provide access to counseling services and wellness programs.
- *Retention Data Tracking*: Collect data on band members' retention rates, academic progress, and satisfaction. Identify early warning signs and intervene promptly when needed.
- *Alumni Engagement*: Connect band members with alumni who can offer guidance, career advice, and networking opportunities. Highlight successful alumni who were part of the marching band.
- *Celebrate Diversity and Culture*: Embrace the unique cultural identity of HBCU marching bands. Celebrate Black excellence and heritage. Incorporate cultural events into band activities. Remember, investing in the success of marching band members contributes not only to their retention but also to the vibrancy of the entire campus community.

Recommendations for Educational Leaders

HBCU bands serve as vital recruiting tools for their universities. Every note played and formation executed supports student enrollment, retention, and fundraising efforts. Tennessee State's *Aristocrat of Bands* even made history by becoming the first-ever marching band to win not one, but two Grammys for their gospel album, *The Urban Hymnal*. Students take immense pride in their band's achievements, recognizing them as a cornerstone of university spirit and identity. This sentiment is echoed by Student D, who emphasized the band's significant impact on campus culture by stating, "A lot of people go to the football games to see us."

Such recognition underscores the band's central role in fostering a vibrant and engaging atmosphere at university events. Beyond enhancing school spirit, the

band's visibility and reputation also contribute to increased university recruitment efforts. Prospective students are drawn to institutions with renowned band programs, recognizing them as vibrant communities where they can contribute to and participate in rich traditions. Thus, the band's accomplishments not only bolster school pride but also serve as a powerful recruitment tool, attracting students who seek to be part of a dynamic and spirited campus community.

Remember, these themes intertwine, creating a vibrant tapestry of experiences for HBCU marching band students. In summary, HBCU marching bands are more than musical ensembles; they embody excellence, culture, and a shared sense of belonging.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several suggestions for future research are recommended. First, a similar study which would include only female black AOB members and then comparing results to the current study. Another study might include a replication study including more than just this one HBCU. There are approximately forty HBCU marching bands. Perhaps, surveying and interviewing 30% of the HBCU marching band population may produce findings and results that would be generalizable to the population. An additional study may also include a similar study using only PWIs (Predominantly White Institutions) and their respective marching band members. There are many possibilities—all focused on sense of belonging and student retention.

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Appendix A. Copy of Instrument

Sense of Belonging Scale – Revised (2003)

5=completely true; 4=mostly true; 3=equally true and untrue; 2=mostly untrue; 1=completely untrue

Perceived Peer Support (8 items)

1. I have met with classmates outside of class to study for an exam

2. If I miss class, I know students who I could get notes from

3. I discuss events which happened outside of class with my classmates

4. I have discussed personal matters with students who I met in class

5. I could contact another student from class if I had a question

6. Other students are helpful in reminding me when assignments are due or when tests are

approaching

7. I have developed personal relationships with other students in class

8. I invite people I know from class to do things socially

Perceived Classroom Comfort (4 items)

9. I feel comfortable contributing to class discussions

10. I feel comfortable asking a question in class

11. I feel comfortable volunteering ideas or opinions in class

12. Speaking in class is easy because I feel comfortable

Perceived Isolation (4 items)

13. It is difficult to meet other students in class

14. No one in my classes knows anything personal about me

15. I rarely talk to other students in my class

16. I know very few people in my class

Perceived Faculty Support (10 items)

17. I feel comfortable talking about a problem with faculty

18. I feel comfortable asking a teacher for help if I do not understand course-related material

19. I feel that a faculty member would be sensitive to my difficulties if I shared them

20. I feel comfortable socializing with a faculty member outside of class

21. I feel that a faculty member would be sympathetic if I was upset

22. I feel that a faculty member would take the time to talk to me if I needed help

23. If I had a reason, I would feel comfortable seeking help from a faculty member outside of class time (office hours etc.)

24. I feel comfortable seeking help from a teacher before or after class

25. I feel that a faculty member really tried to understand my problem when I talked about it

26. I feel comfortable asking a teacher for help with a personal problem

Source: Hoffman, M.B., Richmond, J.R., Morrow, J.R., & Salomone, K. (2003). Investigating *Sense of*
        Belonging in First-Year college students. *Journal of College Student Retention, 4*(3), 227-256.

DEMOGRAPHICS

27. What **Instrument** do you play? [text box]
28. **Age**: (choose one) 17   18   19   20   21   22   23   24   25
29. **Classification**: (choose one) freshman   sophomore   junior   senior   alumni
30. **Number of semesters in AOB**: (choose one) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15
31. **Ethnicity** (choose one) Black Bi-racial Other
32. If you did **not return to school** next semester, what would be the primary reason for not enrolling in courses? [text box]
33. If you **were to return to school** next semester, what would be the primary reason for returning to school? [text box]

PROVIDE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE INCLUDED IN A FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SESSION:
_____.

Appendix B. AOB Focus Group Questions and Consent Form

The primary research questions for the study are the following:

RQ₁: How does participation in the university marching band impact Black male students' perceptions of belonging and community?

RQ₂: What aspects of the marching band experience most significantly contribute to Black male students' feelings of acceptance and value at the university?

RQ₃: How does marching band participation influence Black male students' decisions to remain enrolled at the university?

RQ₄: What recommendations should higher education administrators consider in support of Black males' sense of belonging through learning community as a marching band?

<div align="center">

Focus Group Guide
The following questions ask students to think about their experiences at TSU.

</div>

Focus Area	Question	Probe
Background Questions	Please tell me little about your life right now.	What led you to become a student at TSU? How long have you been attending TSU? Did you attend school uninterrupted? If not, why were there breaks in attendance of school?
College Life	Please describe your college experience at TSU.	What were some of your experiences inside and outside of the classroom, in general?
Peer Interaction	Tell me about your relationship with other students.	Were/are you popular with your classmates? Did/do you communicate with your classmates outside of school?
Involvement	What types of involvement, if any have you had in student organizations or student leadership roles on campus?	*If no involvement*: Can you discuss what factors contributed to not being involved. *If involved:* What have you gained/learned from your involvement on campus?
Sense of Belonging Faculty/Staff	What is your connection with the staff and faculty, if any, while you have been enrolled at TSU?	Was it something that you did, something done by the school, or a combination of both? If so, what was done?
Sense of Belonging Students/Peers	What is your connection with the students, if any, while you have been enrolled at TSU?	Was it something that you did, something done by the school, or a combination of both? If so, what was done?

Motivation / Persistence	Was there a particular motivation for pursuing your degree? At any point of your college career did you take time off or withdraw from school?	Why have you continued your education despite your challenges? Were there any influences outside of college that impacted your decision to take a break or withdraw?
Support – Family	How did your family and friends feel about you going to college? How did they feel about you being in the band?	Were your family and friends supportive during your time in school? Did you ever feel alienated because of your enrollment in college?
Support	What has helped you succeed in college? What other resources or opportunities assisted you in staying in college?	Before you enrolled in college, what programs were you aware of that could assist in your endeavor to obtain an education? Who made you aware of the programs?
Barriers	Are there any other challenges that you can think of that affect your success or ability to stay in school?	How did you overcome these challenges?
Suggestions for Students	What advice would you offer other students who are entering the university experience?	Is there anything else that you want to tell me about your experiences of being in college.
Closing	If you have questions about this study, you can email me at gwinrow@tnstate.edu	Thank you for your time, I look forward to transcribing this interview and following up with your for accuracy.

Appendix C. Means and Standard Deviations for all Survey Items by Scale

	n	M*	SD
Survey Item for **Perceived *Peer Support* Scale**			
1. I have met with classmates outside of class to study for an exam.	61	4.11	1.17
2. If I miss class, I know students who I could get notes from.	61	4.46	0.18
3. I discuss events which happened outside of class with my classmates.	61	4.18	0.99
4. I have discussed personal matters with students who I met in class.	61	3.64	1.19
5. I could contact another student from class if I had a question.	61	4.20	1.09
6. Other students are helpful in reminding me when assignments are due or when tests are approaching.	61	4.07	1.09
7. I have developed personal relationships with other students in class.	61	4.10	1.06
8. I invite people I know from class to do things socially.	61	3.52	1.31
Total	61	4.04	0.75
	n	M*	SD
Survey Items by Perceived *Classroom Comfort* Scale			
9. I feel comfortable contributing to class discussions.	61	4.23	0.86
10. I feel comfortable asking a question in class.	61	4.30	0.86
11. I feel comfortable volunteering ideas or opinion in class.	61	4.10	0.99
12. Speaking in class is easy because I feel comfortable.	61	4.03	1.05
Total	61	4.16	0.85
	n	M*	SD
Survey Items by Perceived *Isolation* Scale			
13. It is difficult to meet other students in class.	61	2.80	1.22
14. No one in my classes knows anything personal about me.	61	3.21	1.71
15. I rarely talk to other students in my class.	61	2.79	1.86
16. I know very few people in my class.	61	3.00	1.23
Total	61	2.95	1.01
	n	M*	SD
Survey Items by Perceived *Faculty Support* Scale			
17. I feel comfortable talking about a problem with faculty.	61	3.51	1.01
18. I feel comfortable asking a teacher for help if I do not understand course-related material.	61	4.28	0.74
19. I feel that a faculty member would be sensitive to my difficulties if I shared them.	61	3.31	1.06
20. I feel comfortable socializing with a faculty member outside of class.	61	3.57	1.04
21. I feel that a faculty member would be sympathetic if I was upset.	61	3.37	1.03
22. I feel that a faculty member would take the time to talk to me if I needed help.	61	3.89	0.95
23. If I had a reason, I would feel comfortable seeking help from a faculty member outside of class time (office hours, etc.)	61	3.97	0.99
24. I feel comfortable seeking help from a teacher before or after class.	61	4.13	.092
25. I feel that a faculty member really tried to understand my problem when I talked about it.	61	3.61	1.04
26. I feel comfortable asking a teacher for help with a personal problem.	61	3.38	1.99
Total	61	3.68	0.73

* 5=completely true; 4=mostly true; 3=equally true and untrue; 2=mostly untrue; 1=completely untrue