

STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND THE EXPERIENCES OF LIBERAL ARTS FACULTY AT A
HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY:
A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Sanford D. Dennis

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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Abstract

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand how liberal arts faculty members at a small private historically black college are affected by unstable student enrollment. The institution is being affected by various states of unstable student enrollment, which naturally creates many challenges. The study utilized the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, and the cognitive appraisal theory as the theoretical framework. The cognitive appraisal theory is based on how individuals mentally process an event or a condition. In application to this study, liberal arts faculty members are in a challenging environment, and how do they mentally process it as an individual. Furthermore, the research included qualitative trends and patterns associated with national enrollment trends in higher education. The crux of the study was to develop an understanding of the experiences of liberal arts faculty members at a small private historically black institution in relationship to their student enrollment situation. Data collection entailed personal interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Interviews were compared to focus group results to provide an additional layer of data to determine if there were commonalities and similar experiences across participants. Three distinct themes emerged exhibiting how enrollment impacts faculty on a granular and individualized basis.

Keywords: enrollment, faculty, retention, efficacy

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this body of work to my mother Frances Kate Dennis. You were unable to finish a doctoral program because you were too busy being a wife, mom, and nursing educator. I would also like to thank my fraternity brother Dr. Leon Prietto for constantly encouraging me to take on this venture and telling me I was not too old "06." I would also like to dedicate this work to my wife and children as I have been a part-time spouse and parent for much of the process.

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. I would like to first acknowledge my heavenly father for giving me the inspiration and ability to engage in this doctoral journey. I would also like to thank the faculty at the site university for their patience and willingness to participate in this project. Without you all this would not be possible.

I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Shariva White for her guidance and patience in serving as my dissertation chair. I only wish I could have worked with Dr. White from the beginning. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Mary Strickland for her insight and knowledge in determining the best approach for this study.

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List of Abbreviations

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

Integrated Post Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Predominantly White Institution (PWI)

Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In higher education, the number of students choosing to enroll in liberal arts courses or major in liberal arts disciplines has slowly been diminishing for approximately twenty years (Gitter et al., 2018). Student enrollment in courses and selection of majors is a determinant of the effectiveness and viability of an institution and its academic programs (Wu, S., et al., 2021). Enrollment drives revenue, affecting all facets of an institution-like its faculty members (Woolston, 2019). Inconsistent and diminishing demand for liberal arts education and courses will obviously affect the faculty members that teach within liberal arts disciplines. Naturally, unstable demand can create uncertainty and ambiguity for liberal arts faculty. As it relates to faculty at smaller institutions that serve a specialized student population, unstable enrollment potentially creates an even more unique and tenuous experience. Based on market conditions, traditional liberal arts programs face significant challenges in maintaining their student enrollment at an acceptable level (Pavlov & Katsamakos, 2020). Therefore, liberal arts faculty are naturally tied to the enrollment condition at their respective institutions.

Research on student enrollment dates back well over one hundred years. As a result, extensive literature already exists on this isolated topic. However, historic and current literature tends to provide an overview of the issues and focuses on global enrollment perspectives. Historic and current literature does not account for how enrollment affects faculty members at individual institutions (Ortlieb & Weiss, 2018). Furthermore, it does not rigorously account for how unstable enrollment affects liberal arts faculty on a granular level at an individual institution such as a historically black university.

Background

Liberal arts faculty and their general experiences are well-researched topics. However, topics related to faculty are broad by nature, and there are many associated subtopics in which most focus on generalities regarding faculty. For example, Pifer et al. (2019) stated that the faculty experience occurs at the departmental level, yet more research is needed to know about their broad-based experience. The authors add that much of the research focuses on student learning but does not address the ones facilitating student learning: faculty. Additionally, there is also extensive historical and current literature on various higher education student enrollment issues. For example, extensive research has been conducted on tertiary enrollment subjects like data analytics, diversity, and recruitment. Data analytics have evolved into playing a significant role in enrollment initiatives. Data analytics drives many decisions related to student recruitment and operational functions (Delcoure & Carmona, 2019). Next, institutions have placed a premium value on developing a diverse student population. Most institutions have realized that a healthy balance of various racial backgrounds is essential to meet enrollment projections (Trolian & Parker, 2022). As a result, many institutions have developed complex recruiting strategies to attract students from specific demographics (Gabelaia, 2021). Current literature addresses enrollment as a singular issue from a broad perspective. However, research needs to explore the individual campus or adequately address how faculty in specific disciplines are affected by unstable enrollment. In application to this study, additional research is needed regarding the faculty experience within an academic discipline and how it is linked to student enrollment (Ortlieb & Weiss, 2018).

Historical Context

Liberal arts education is the foundation of the nation's higher education system, according to Osley-Thomas (2020). While the formalized study of liberal arts in this country is only three hundred years old, it dates back to Biblical days (Becker, 2022). Becker added that at one time, liberal arts colleges were all that existed. From a historical perspective, liberal arts typically included the study of math, history, literature, philosophy, and art-related topics (Arcilla, 2021). However, as we have evolved into a more technologically advanced society, the need for education beyond the traditional liberal arts has become a necessity (Bourdeaux & Wood, 2019). As a result, the demand for traditional liberal arts education has slowly diminished (Osley-Thomas, 2020). This has led to a host of consequences. First, it has led to many liberal arts colleges closing their doors in the last thirty years (Leaney & Mwale, 2021). In fact, nearly twenty institutions have closed in the last six years (Becker, 2022). In addition, several are teetering on closure and struggling to keep their doors open. For example, in 2015, Sweet Briar College in Virginia announced its closure due to low enrollment and pending financial insolvency. Sweet Briar is an all-women's liberal arts college founded in 1901. The institution was able to stay open due to several heroic efforts by alums and other interested parties. Sweet Briar was one of the fortunate institutions that did not meet her demise (Sweet Briar College, 2023). Secondly, unstable enrollment creates less demand for faculty to teach liberal arts subject matter (Osley-Thomas, 2020).

Many liberal arts institutions were founded and chartered to serve special populations. For example, some historically black colleges were founded to educate recently freed men and women post-Civil War (Rossman & Simpson, 2022). Other liberal arts institutions were established to educate one specific gender. For example, Spelman College in Atlanta, GA, was

founded in 1881 to educate the underclass of black women throughout the south during reconstruction. It was named after its founder Laura Spelman Rockefeller who was the wife of John D. Rockefeller. Spelman was founded as an all-women's liberal arts college and still functions under the same guise (Spelman, 2023). For the institutions that remain open and viable, most still serve a valuable role in society. For academic faculty that have made their career teaching liberal arts, the lack of demand creates a set of undefined emotions and circumstances, according to Vicente (2018). Vicente adds that this would likely be the future for liberal arts faculty. Based on the reviewed literature, Vicentes position appears to align with the feelings of other researchers; the demand for liberal arts faculty is likely to decrease.

While there have been several liberal arts colleges to close in the last few years, many institutions have scaled back their liberal arts programs (Becker, 2022). Becker adds that this is primarily due to the lack of demand. For example, Goucher College in Maryland is one of many that scaled back and reformulated its liberal arts program. Once a beacon institution for the promotion of liberal arts, in 2019, Goucher recognized that their future was bleak operating in the traditional liberal arts model. They aggressively reformulated and realigned programs to better survive. In doing so, they had to make some difficult decisions regarding how to utilize their faculty and how many maintained their employment (Goucher, 2023).

Nationwide, higher education student enrollment numbers have been trending down for approximately ten years. Conn (2020) states that over 50% of all institutions are experiencing a drastic downturn in enrollment. A decline in enrollment is typically an evolutionary process. It tends to vary from institution to institution. It is an individual journey in which many institutions arrive at the same undesirable destination. The destination is ultimately financial destabilization which affects all the internal stakeholders at an institution (Fain, 2019). Typically, internal

stakeholders are adversely affected by a reduction in resources which places them in a precarious situation (Moreno-Carmona et al., 2022). In application to this study, the internal stakeholder is the faculty member associated with a liberal arts program.

Social Context

This study will develop a deeper understanding of the personal experiences of liberal arts faculty at a specified institution managing enrollment challenges. Liberal arts faculty at this institution are likely aware of the specific factors that affect student enrollment and the related nuances. As a result, faculty will be analyzed in their contextual setting. The underlying goal is to understand the specific and unique experiences they encounter directly related to unstable enrollment and how they mentally process the phenomenon. Furthermore, faculty are likely to have intricate institutional knowledge applicable to academia and how that relates to this study (Slim et al., 2018).

While this research focuses on the liberal arts faculty experience, they are likely not the only ones affected by unstable enrollment. Unstable enrollment certainly affects faculty in other areas and support staff (Sprehe, 2021). For example, humanities as an academic discipline are closely related to liberal arts. In fact, in some academic departments, they are indistinguishable (S. Steele, 2022). If liberal arts faculty members are affected by unstable enrollment, it is logical to assume that humanities faculty members are also affected. At most institutions, faculty are supported by some form of administrative staff. They would likely be affected by the condition. In addition, unstable enrollment would certainly affect campus personnel that works in housing, financial aid, resident life, etc.

It's conceivable that no one on a college campus is truly immune from the fallout of unstable enrollment (Sprehe, 2021). This further validates the benefits of conducting a study

such as this. This study could potentially unearth sub-themes and sub-issues related to the broader focus of the study. Unstable enrollment is an industry-wide issue separate from a department on one campus. The entire traditional higher education system is in the throes of this issue (Tomlinson, 2021). Whenever an entire industry is experiencing a downturn, tertiary issues typically arise. It is likely that the lack of demand for liberal arts as a discipline naturally creates less demand for the services of liberal arts professors or instructors (Gitter et al., 2018). Thus, the law of supply and demand is applicable to this issue. Academic departments such as liberal arts can be categorized as a business unit within the larger structure. Fain (2019) suggests that when there is less demand for their product, it creates a ripple effect. For example, it creates less demand for products such as textbooks and supplies. This naturally affects the manufacturers of textbooks and supplies. Fain's position sheds light on the tertiary issues associated with unstable enrollment. Often times it is natural to analyze issues such as unstable enrollment through the narrow lens of the population that is immediately affected by the phenomenon. Based on Fain's reasoning, unstable enrollment is a far-reaching condition extended beyond an academic department with significant social affect.

Theoretical Context

The cognitive appraisal theory provides the theoretical framework for this study (Lazarus, 1966). It is based on the mental appraising of a condition or situation. Appraisal theories are relatively common in the scope of psychological research. Many seminal studies have been conducted on the subject dating back over a century (Roseman & Smith, 2001). They were first developed to solve a particular mental processing decision-making problem. Other theories developed from this, such as the appraisal theory of emotion (Moors, 2020). It is based on the premise that emotions develop from some form of stimuli. Some scholars felt that it was limited,

and the Cognitive Appraisal Theory was slowly developed by Lazarus (1991). The Cognitive Appraisal Theory aligns with this study because it is based on the individual interpretation of an event or condition and how it is mentally evaluated. Liberal arts faculty at the designated institution for this study are in a condition of unstable and unpredictable student enrollment. As a result, by nature they have some form of a cognitive appraisal of their experience. The mental appraisal centers on the fact that they are in an environment of uncertainty due to inconsistent and unstable student enrollment. Based on the theory, they mentally process their situation and mentally form a resolution or conclusion. As a result, this theoretical framework is appropriate as it supports this study's intent and goals.

As it relates to a college or university, when enrollment is unstable or inconsistent, a natural phenomenon is created for the institution and faculty. It is an extraordinary event or condition that is typically infrequent. Every institution that undergoes a downturn in enrollment is typically the victim of a set of circumstances that started the downturn (Leaney & Mwale, 2021). The downturn affects all individuals within the institution. Because faculty interact with students more frequently, they naturally develop a unique set of experiences (Knight et al., 2021). Quantifying how internal stakeholders are genuinely affected by unstable enrollment is impossible. To that end, it is equally difficult to determine how unstable and inconsistent enrollment is mentally processed and appraised by stakeholders. This further adds to the validity of applying this theoretical framework to this study (Collins & Stockton, 2018). This phenomenological study endeavors to advance the discovery and understanding of the faculty experience in an environment of unstable student enrollment (Slim et al., 2018).

Problem Statement

The problem is liberal arts faculty members are adversely affected by unstable student enrollment. Student enrollment at most traditional higher education institutions has been flat or even slowly declining for the past decade (Tomlinson, 2021). This trend is projected to continue into the future (Pavlov & Katsamakos, 2020). Research conducted by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2020) stated that enrollment for public four-year institutions is down 1.4%, 2.4% for private institutions, and 9.4% for community colleges. Student enrollment is the primary source of revenue for any college and university. When student enrollment is in a state of decline, resources become limited (Mei & Liu, 2022). This tends to negatively affect personnel in relation to this study: liberal arts faculty. It often leads to drastic personnel decisions, leading to an institution's overall destabilization (Rutherford & Van der Voet, 2019). There is exhaustive research conducted on tertiary topics associated with unstable enrollment. However, most research focuses on the broad-based cause of the problems and does not account for the human factor. Therefore, a research gap exists as previous studies are limited because they do not consider the individual human toll. The human toll is naturally a broad concept as it is likely to encompass a myriad of subtopics (Jacobs et al., 2021). Everyone affected by unstable enrollment will also process the human toll differently. This solidifies the importance of researching this topic. It intends to provide perspectives and develop greater insight into how unstable enrollment affects a specific employee classification at a college: liberal arts faculty.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to understand how liberal arts faculty members at a small private historically black college are affected by unstable student enrollment. At this stage in the research, unstable enrollment is defined as inconsistencies or a

reduction in student enrollment over a prolonged period of time, such as two consecutive academic years (Sprehe, 2021). Additionally, faculty is defined as any individual that has been employed at the institution for three years while teaching a full-time load in addition to research and service obligations. It also includes faculty with expanded duties, including academic support, counseling, and career planning. Faculty must actively teach in what is considered a traditional liberal arts discipline. Understanding the nuances and complexities of the lived experience of liberal arts faculty is the crux of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a result, the study is categorized as hermeneutic phenomenological. Quay (2016) believes that elucidation is foundational for phenomenological studies. Phenomenological studies attempt to shed light on a situation, phenomenon, or problem regarding what people are experiencing. Phenomenological studies also attempt to clarify something by explanation or some form of analysis. According to Quay (2016), elucidation is not an event or a transaction. It is more of a mindset or objective woven into qualitative research. Quay's position aligns with this study as the objective is to develop a more profound sense of understanding in regards to the liberal arts faculty experience.

Significance of the Study

This qualitative research study would be of primary significance to faculty, academic leaders, and enrollment managers. It would be valuable to faculty members because the study is centered on their experience tied to enrollment challenges. The study would provide a construct on potential outcomes for faculty in a challenging enrollment environment. For example, when enrollment declines in liberal arts majors, what are the outcomes for faculty? When an institution is having enrollment challenges, academic leaders are oftentimes tasked with making difficult decisions pertaining to personnel. This study could serve as a resource and guide for department heads as they consider future strategic decisions such as reductions in force (Zamudio-Suarez,

2018). In addition, this study would be germane to higher education professionals that specifically work in enrollment management. Projecting and managing student enrollment is a complicated science. It directly ties into faculty workloads, assignments, and a host of other factors (Adams, 2021). Enrollment managers need to be highly educated and informed regarding the many facets of this area as it pertains to faculty (Perez-Vergara, 2020). This study could be significant to stable institutions that are proactive in preventing enrollment decline. Most importantly, this study could be a resource for institutions to reference regarding faculty concerns pertaining to unstable enrollment. Furthermore, very little research has been conducted on unstable student enrollment through the experience of liberal arts faculty members. This study intends to add to the body of knowledge by shedding light on this particular issue.

Theoretical

College and university enrollment issues have been extensively researched over time. Much of the existing research is based on institutional enrollment issues and not individual colleges. In addition, current research fails to explore the implications of enrollment and how it impacts specified academic disciplines and related faculty. This study supports previously conducted research by exploring unstable enrollment matters through the lens of liberal arts faculty at an institution that serves a special student population.

Empirical

This study is a continuation of previously conducted research by delving into factors that are typically not considered. For instance, this study provides the micro experience of math and English faculty that teach lower-level courses and how their experience is different from those that teach other disciplines. The study also provides insight as to how college administration makes decisions about enrollment and how they affect faculty.

Practical

This study makes a valuable contribution to the field by exploring unstable enrollment through the lens of faculty at an HBCU. Previously conducted research tends to explore enrollment challenges of HBCU's from a broad perspective, not the experience of an individual faculty discipline: liberal arts. In addition, this study adds value by exploring an academic discipline that is in a tenuous position. The future of liberal arts as a discipline is in question. This study will provide perspectives that could be beneficial to its longevity.

Research Questions

The proposed research questions for this study developed out of the problem and purpose statements: unstable enrollment and the aspiration to understand how liberal arts faculty members are affected at a specified institution. Based on the theoretical framework, the research questions align with the directives of this study by further understanding how individuals appraise the condition.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of liberal arts faculty members at a small private historically black institution in relationship to their unstable student enrollment?

Sub-Question One

How does a liberal arts faculty member mentally process unstable student enrollment as it relates to their ability to effectively teach?

Sub-Question Two

How does a liberal arts faculty member mentally process unstable student enrollment as it relates to student engagement?

Sub-Question Three

How does a liberal arts faculty member mentally process unstable student enrollment as it relates to their self-efficacy?

Definitions

1. Cognitive Appraisal Theory - A three-part appraisal theory comprising stimuli, mental appraisal, and response (Lazarus, 1966).
2. Enrollment - An individual's choice to participate in an activity through a formal process that designates membership (Dennis, 2022).
3. Historically Black College or University (HBCU) - Any higher education institution founded before 1964 for the purpose of educating blacks or of African descent (Crewe, 2017).
4. Self-Efficacy - A person's belief that they can take specific steps to ascertain a desired outcome (Kauffman, 2004).
5. Student Retention - The process of an institution maintaining a student until degree completion (Vincent et al., 2021).
6. Trend - General movement or pattern in one direction. A market condition by which many consumers are seeking a product or not seeking a product (Lu et al., 2021).

Summary

It is vitally essential that decision-makers at traditional institutions have authentic, accurate, and objective information by which to guide the institution. In addition, campus decision-makers should have an awareness of the experience of their faculty members, especially under challenging circumstances. However, unstable enrollment could affect individual academic disciplines in multiple ways (Acton, 2021). Individual academic disciplines must be analyzed by themselves to capture the authentic experience. It is conceivable and probable that

the faculty experience is entirely different based on the academic discipline (Paris, 2020). The conundrum of unstable enrollment could be from internal matters that can easily be adjusted or fixed (Romero, 2017). On the other hand, unstable enrollment could be from external market conditions which the administration cannot control and should base decisions on this premise (Adams, 2021). Regardless of the culprits, how it affects faculty should be explored so that optimal decisions can be made. The following literature will have related topics and subthemes associated with this study's direction and goals.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic and comprehensive review of current literature was performed in order to explore how faculty are affected by unstable student enrollment in higher education. This chapter is an exhaustive review of pertinent and current literature related to the topic of study. The first section covers subject matter relevant to the theoretical framework. This will be followed by a synthesis of current literature regarding retention, enrollment decline, faculty roles, historical trends, and resulting duty expansion. Lastly, the literature addresses the emotional effect of unstable enrollment and future perspectives. In the end, gaps in the literature will be identified, which suggests a need for this current study.

Theoretical Framework

The cognitive appraisal theory provides the foundation, structure, and framework for this study. It was initially developed by Dr. Richard Lazarus (Lazarus, 1966). A cognitive appraisal is an assessment of emotions generated by an event or a condition. It is a three-step process by which the first step entails evaluation, and the second involves comprehension of the event. The third step centers on the development of a response or assuming a position. Cognitive appraisals are typically used in ambiguous settings where it is unclear how a person should and will respond. Lazarus further states that cognitive appraisals are a standard human function throughout life.

The cognitive appraisal theory evolved out of previous research conducted by Lazarus (1966). Lazarus first created the appraisal theory of emotions; it is based on three principles: appraisal, physiological response, and action (Lazarus, 1991). However, some scholars suggest that Lazarus's theory of emotion was narrowly focused and accounted more for internal

psychological matters (Ali, 2016). It did not account for external factors and other elements that potentially trigger emotions (Reisenzein, 2019). As a result, the theory of emotions was regarded as limited and not widely embraced (Scherer, 2019). Subsequently, over time the theory of emotions evolved and expanded into the cognitive appraisal theory. The cognitive appraisal theory considers that an event or some external condition must first occur, leading to appraisal and emotional processing (Lazarus, 1991).

The foundation of the cognitive appraisal theory is based on stimuli, appraisal, and response (Scherer, 1999). They effectively represent the major tenets of the theory. Stimulus is an external factor, event, or condition that creates activity or energy (Rose, 2021). Additionally, a characteristic of stimuli is that it sets in motion something that could be perceived as a threat, harmful, or challenging (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It is expected that stimuli will produce a range of emotions and even create stress (Lazarus, 2013). Based on the guiding theory, the resulting emotions will lead to a cognitive appraisal of the situation (Lazarus, 1991). Lazarus's position suggests that a mental evaluation of emotions and feelings follows the stimuli. The mental appraisal process is dynamic as it is based on an individual experience. Essentially, people can experience identical stimuli but appraise them completely differently (Rose, 2021). As a result, individuals formulate a response based on their cognitive appraisal of a situation which is how they cope with the event by whatever method they choose or determine.

In application to this study, liberal arts faculty members at the institution are being affected by the tenuous condition of unstable student enrollment (Copley & Douthett, 2020). Therefore, unstable student enrollment serves as the stimulus. Stimulus is sometimes analyzed through the narrow scope as an isolated or a singular event (Eckert & Browder, 2019). However, stimuli are not limited to one specific transaction or event. It can be a condition or state that

evokes a reaction (Theeuwes, 2019). Theeuwes's position clarifies that stimuli can be a singular event and a wide range of events or prolonged conditions. As it applies to this study, unstable student enrollment is the stimulus that will lead faculty members to appraise their situation. This appraisal will likely result in various feelings, emotions, and reactions. For example, some faculty members could experience increased stress because of the uncertainty that develops due to unstable enrollment. Others could feel a heightened sense of frustration or helplessness. Some might be at a stage in their career and life where they are marginally indifferent to the enrollment situation.

Germane to the cognitive appraisal theory is the personal interpretation of the event or stimulus (Conte et al., 2023). Based on the authors position, faculty members will develop various interpretations regarding unstable enrollment at the institution. For example, many small private liberal arts colleges have been plagued with unstable student enrollment for over twenty years. Subsequently, this has led to many institutional closures and mergers in the last few years (Shaffer, 2021). As a result, faculty members at smaller private institutions could interpret unstable enrollment through a more unstable and unsettling lens (Brocato, 2023). Conversely, based on Brocato's position, faculty members at large state-supported research institutions are likely to consider unstable enrollment through a different lens. According to reviewed literature, large research institutions have a wider range and flexibility in the face of unstable enrollment. This somewhat insulates faculty members from the stressors of unstable enrollment (Cohee, 2019). Cohee's position is valid but does not apply to all faculty at large institutions. Moreover, unstable student enrollment creates divergent appraisals by faculty based on the setting, the type of institution, and the academic discipline. This study endeavors to capture the divergent

appraisals and responses to the condition at a historically black institution within a specified academic discipline: liberal arts.

Related Literature

Faculty members within higher education are affected by unstable enrollment in a multiplicity of ways (Yousefi & Abdullah, 2019). The literature reviewed for this study introduces how they are more granularly affected. For instance, human emotions are tied to unstable student enrollment as it can potentially create institutional instability, leading to emotional instability (Han et al., 2021). As suggested by the literature, unstable student enrollment ushers in new and more aggressive student retention efforts, likely affecting faculty members (Guzzardo et al., 2021). The authors add that this might entail more student outreach or direct contact. Additionally, reviewed literature introduces the unique experience of faculty members within various academic departments and disciplines. In advancing this study, established literature endeavors to reveal these distinctive factors in how faculty are affected by a decline in student enrollment. Furthermore, the following sections will discuss literature pertaining to enrollment trends and how they tie to the faculty experience.

Student Enrollment in Higher Education Institutions

The student enrollment status of an institution will typically affect its faculty members psychologically and emotionally. Whether it is stable or unstable, faculty are likely to mentally process student enrollment as an indicator of institutional viability. Positive student enrollment is typically when more students are enrolling and staying at an institution versus leaving without the attainment of a degree. Enrolling and retaining an optimal number of students until degree completion stabilizes an institution (DeMonbrun & Warshaw, 2020). The authors reason that several factors contribute to college and university stability. However, enrollment is the highest

and best determinant of institutional viability. In addition, the authors suggest that faculty cognitively evaluate their institution through the lens of enrollment stability.

Most importantly, student enrollment is typically the greatest source of revenue for the overwhelming majority of institutions (Gansemer-Topf, 2023). Funds generated by tuition are a direct correlation of an institution's enrollment stability. While not explicitly stating it, Gansemer-Topf suggests that an institution's enrollment is synonymous with profit and loss. Furthermore, institutional enrollment is the operational basis by which a college or university can exist. An institution's enrollment essentially controls budgeting decisions such as capital improvements and faculty salaries (Perez-Vergara, 2020). Perez-Vergara's position captures the essence of how enrollment affects faculty through critical functions such as wages, programming, and research.

In relation to this study, student enrollment at traditional institutions across the country has been slowly unstable for over 20 years (Sprehe, 2021). Due to a host of reasons, fewer students are enrolling in traditional two or four-year institutions (Chen & Hu, 2021). As a result, many colleges and universities are under mounting pressure to stabilize and grow enrollment (Delcours & Carmona, 2019). Based on the reviewed literature, this trend of unstable enrollment is likely to continue as it potentially creates a precarious situation for many institutions, departments, and faculty. In the scope of fewer students attending the traditional institution, enrollment management as a strategic operation has become a top priority. According to Pope and Davies (2020), enrollment management is a campus-wide function incorporating several auxiliaries, such as faculty. Pope and Davies also suggest that institutions should deviate from the traditional enrollment management model as a sole function of the admissions department. Secore (2018) found that institutions must be more creative in attracting students. One essential

function of enrollment management is providing potential students with a meaningful campus visit. The article suggests that campus visits that incorporate exposure to faculty prove beneficial and could lead to students enrolling. Smith and Harris (2021) aligned with the position of Secore (2018) by stating that some institutions have started incorporating faculty into the strategic enrollment management plan. In fact, Smeltzer et al. (2017) submit that enrollment management is linked to scholarly research conducted by faculty. The authors agree that faculty need to play a role in enrollment management. However, this position is likely most applicable to the traditional academically elite institutions and graduate programs. Collectively, the authors found that enrollment management is a complex endeavor that must incorporate various campus resources such as faculty. This new trend of enhanced faculty involvement naturally leads to some form of mental appraisal and adjustment by many faculty members.

HBCU Historical Enrollment Trends

Faculty that teach at HBCU's are subject to a different type of mental appraisal as it relates to enrollment trends. HBCU enrollment trends tell a distinct story in relation to the comprehensive higher education industry. HBCU's are a specialized segment of the broader higher education market. They essentially serve a specialized mission within the higher education structure. While they will naturally experience many of the same market conditions as all participants, they are more prone to have unique circumstances related to enrollment. In 1976 they enrolled approximately 18% of the African American college population. By 2014 that number had plummeted to 8% (Broady et al., 2017). During that same period, enrollment at most predominantly white institutions increased by nearly 40% (Emery, 2020). Emery's position is accurate in part regarding PWIs. The majority of them did experience growth, but he included technical colleges which inflates the overall totals. Emery's example was not a true apple to

apples comparison. The HBCU enrollment trend is unique because it indicates that they were experiencing an enrollment downturn while the broader market was trending upwards. On the other hand, over the years some HBCUs have experienced tremendous growth and stability. For example, North Carolina A &T University has experienced consistent growth and expansion for several decades. Their enrollment recently topped 13,000 students and is expected to continue growing (ncat.edu). Hampton University in Virginia is another HBCU enrollment success. During the time period in which many HBCU's experienced diminishing student enrollment, Hampton was stable and enrollment was consistently growing. Under the leadership of Dr. William Harvey, Hampton is a beacon of stability and excellence (hampton.edu, 2023). Unfortunately, the aforementioned institutions are the exception.

The majority of HBCU's have experienced significant enrollment challenges over the years. Five HBCUs have closed since 1989 (Ndumu & Rollins, 2020). The authors add that many have teetered on closure and struggle to remain open. For example, Cheyney State University in Pennsylvania has been on the verge of closing for several years. Their enrollment once was nearly 3,000 students but has dwindled to approximately 600 (Cheney, 2023). This is especially troubling because Cheney is the oldest HBCU, founded in 1837. This naturally places HBCU faculty members in a precarious situation as to how they mentally appraise their future prospects at an HBCU. Current literature addresses the enrollment plight of HBCUs from a broad perspective. However, it does not address enrollment from a faculty perspective based on an individual discipline. This further aligns with the purpose of this study by shedding light on the faculty experience.

Causes for Unstable Student Enrollment

There is a multitude of existing positions and theories that attempt to explain the causes of unstable enrollment in higher education. Much of the current literature attempts to isolate the causal factors into a small grouping. Some theorists, such as Deming and Walters (2018), assert that state budget cuts have led to unstable student enrollment. This creates a situation where institutions have fewer financial resources to administer to students. The authors believe this trend of institutions receiving fewer funds from taxpayers is likely to continue. While Deming and Walters position is valid, it mainly applies to public institutions and does not account for private institutions.

One popular theory states that college enrollment decline is being fueled by family planning trends. For the last twenty to thirty years, women in the United States are having fewer children (Seltzer, 2019). Based on Seltzer's position, this trend creates a smaller pool of potential college students. Seltzer also states that women are waiting later in life to have children. This also adds to the shrinking pool of potential college students. Rybinska (2021) states that a growing number of people are opting not to have children at all. Rybinska and Seltzer's positions align as they jointly identified one major factor contributing to unstable enrollment in higher education.

Another theory suggests that the economy largely influences the demand for higher education. When the economy is strong, people do not see as much need for higher education. When the economy is weak, people see a greater need for education (Acton, 2021). His position suggests that the condition of the local economy essentially controls college enrollment trends. Acton's position is equally valid but mostly applies to community colleges or technical colleges. Research conducted by Adams (2021) took a divergent position. Adams found there is limited

correlation between the economy and college enrollment at the community college level.

However, Adams believes an institution's location affects enrollment, whether it is a traditional four-year institution or a community college. Acton and Adams both have valid points in which many scholars agree, however, they are both based on speculation and not applicable to every situation.

In the last fifteen years, technology has ushered in a new era of education. The advent of online education has played a significant role in how people acquire their education. As technology improves, online education has become a more viable and economical path to higher education. Online education is growing in popularity and is likely to continue to grow (Palvia et al., 2018). In fact, the authors estimate that by 2025, there will potentially be more students enrolled in online programs than traditional residency programs. This obviously reduces the pool of students that would typically attend a traditional institution. Krishnamurthy (2020) suggests that as online education becomes more mainstream, it reduces the demand for traditional classroom space. Thus, it reduces the need for a faculty member. This generates some form of mental appraisal as faculty assess their future career opportunities. In relation to this study, online education can potentially make the traditional college professor less valuable and in less demand (Sadiku et al., 2018). The authors agree that online education's increased popularity will naturally compel change in the faculty ranks.

Unstable Enrollment Affect

Unstable student enrollment tends to have a ripple effect, and it will impact institutions in different ways. The most pronounced affect will come in the form of reduced revenue. However, the effect will be felt differently depending on the type of institution. For example, large public institutions can generate revenue through other means, such as licensing apparel (Bound et al.,

2019). In addition, they receive a portion of their funding from the state legislature. This does not make them immune from unstable enrollment trends. However, it does make them less dependent on enrollment as the sole revenue driver. Unless they are well endowed, small private institutions have less flexibility (Romero, 2017). Romero also states that smaller private institutions have limited revenue streams, and public funding is typically not one of them. Romero adds that unstable enrollment at smaller institutions can quickly be realized. It typically results in the administration having to make aggressive changes. By default, faculty will likely be affected by administrative changes: schedules and programming (M. Mitchell et al., 2017).

The effect of unstable enrollment can be analyzed through the lens of the individual academic discipline. High-demand disciplines such as science, technology, engineering, and math are less likely to feel the effect of unstable enrollment (Liu et al., 2019). The authors reason that even in the climate of fewer students attending college, these majors are not experiencing major enrollment downturns. Conversely, Liu et al. found that students majoring in business disciplines are slowly declining at many institutions. This would suggest that faculty that teach business disciplines are affected more by unstable enrollment versus faculty that teach STEM-related majors. Liu et al. position is broad as it makes a sweeping claim and does not account for individual business disciplines. Conversely, Deng and Liu (2022) reasons that finance majors are very much in demand and there has been no significant decrease in students choosing this as a major. This suggests that faculty teaching in finance programs are not affected significantly by unstable enrollment. On the other hand, faculty that teach in liberal arts programs are more likely to feel the effect of unstable enrollment (Speakman et al., 2018). For example, the authors reason that demand for majors like anthropology and archaeology is flat and unstable at many institutions. They add that many institutions are no longer offering or phasing out related majors

and just offering a few elective courses. In addition, they found that due to low demand for many liberal arts majors, faculty that teach in these areas are in a very competitive market because teaching opportunities are shrinking as enrollment in the majors shrinks. It is reasonable to conclude that unstable enrollment affects faculty subject to several different factors. Based on this position, some faculty members are more insulated from unstable enrollment. Conversely, others could be in the throes of a tenuous downward spiral due to unstable enrollment. Regardless of institutional factors, shrinking demand for discipline will likely initiate faculty to mentally appraise their situation and draw a conclusion.

Student Retention in Higher Education

Retention is classically defined as an institution's ability to keep students enrolled until the completion of a degree program (Mayeshiba & Brower, 2017). Retention is a thoroughly researched topic encompassing many facets. It is vitally important for a college or university to retain a significant number of students from term to term and year to year (Tight, 2020). Mayeshiba and Brower further states that it is of equal importance that student retention reflects the graduation rate. According to Burke (2019), a strong retention rate means more students are paying tuition and fees, stabilizing the institution. On the other hand, Burke states that poor retention leads to a myriad of consequences for an institution. As it pertains to this study, poor retention affects faculty by creating mental anxiety over their future academic career (J. Park et al., 2020).

There are several existing philosophies and theories regarding student retention in higher education. According to J.Y. Xu and Weber (2018), student retention is a concept based on multiple ideas and strategies. J.Y. Xu and Weber reason that retention is directly tied to the offering of majors. Whitten et al. (2020) states that retention is based on the value proposition of

the overall student experience. The authors share common ground as their positions are similar and conceptually based. However, I.S. Pratt et al. (2019) took a vastly different position by suggesting that positive student retention hinges on the first-year experience. While established research supports that most students that drop out do so after their freshmen year, I.S. Pratt et al. position is limited as there are many factors related to positive retention.

When an institutions enrollment declines, it is partly the byproduct of insufficient student retention. Some theorists believe that student retention is primarily affected by the interactions and relationships developed with faculty (Schreiner et al., 2020). However, D. Xu et al., (2018) states that positive retention is based on overall institutional quality. This ranges from the amenities of the dormitory to teaching quality provided by the faculty. The literature review reveals that student retention is a complex topic in which researchers have multiple positions. The literature review further suggests that there is little uniformity in how institutions address student retention and the role faculty plays. However, it is commonly agreed that deficient student retention will cause consternation among the faculty ranks (J. Park et al., 2020).

Student Enrollment Faculty Role

Unstable student enrollment has led to faculty roles evolving in an effort to improve student retention (J. Park et al., 2020). As faculty roles evolve, they most likely will mentally appraise their situation and make some form of determination (Lazarus, 1991). Faculty is one of the primary entities that interact with the student customer on a consistent basis (Wardley & Belanger, 2017). Thus, a greater and natural responsibility is placed on them as it relates to the retention of students. However, it is hard to define and measure the increased responsibilities of faculty as it relates to student retention. It is qualitative and nebulous by nature (Wangrow et al., 2022). The role of faculty is regarded as prestigious and authoritative at most institutions. This

position of prestige and authority can be very impressionable on younger students, according to Morling and Lee (2020). Their ability to connect, engage, and encourage students is invaluable to student retention (Hamman, 2018). As a result, faculty can positively influence student retention using empathy, concern, and flexibility (Meyers et al., 2019). The authors also assume the position that faculty can connect students to career paths related to their major. Getting students involved in career planning earlier in their matriculation can result in more favorable retention. Collectively, the literature review displays that the authors are in alignment as they jointly agree that faculty has a tremendous influence on whether a student remains enrolled at an institution. However, that literature does not explore the faculty role delineated by academic discipline, only a broad overview. In addition, the literature does not explore the lived experience of faculty and how they mentally process their evolving roles.

Faculty Expanded Duties

The need to retain students at a greater rate has led to a broad expansion of faculty duties. Naturally, this expansion of faculty duties has led to some form of mental evaluation (Lazarus, 1991). This expanded-duty trend represents a clear departure from their traditional roles and responsibilities (Romsa et al., 2017). Traditional faculty duties typically include research, teaching, administrative, and community service (Dickson, 2018). For example, some institutions have expanded academic advising duties for faculty (Baird, 2020). Academic advising is the practice of assisting students navigate the process of making appropriate academic and career decisions while they matriculate through an institution (G.E. Steele, 2018). This typically entails the selection of a major and appropriate course sequence. G.E. Steele further suggests that current advising trends call for a more hands-on and intrusive advising model. This will entail faculty having to meet more frequently with students throughout the

semesters. It will also include faculty serving more in a mentoring capacity (Joslin, 2018). At some institutions, it will mean that faculty will be responsible for documenting all of their academic advising and contact with students through an online learning management system (eab.com). Subsequently, the author's positions represent the evolutionary change of faculty roles by which expansion is becoming the norm.

Unstable enrollment has affected faculty teaching loads and course offerings. Over time, campus administrators have become more efficient in how and when courses are being offered (C.E. Thomas & Hentschell, 2023). The authors further state that many administrators aim to fill every class with as many students as possible while offering fewer sections. They further suggests that this represents a form of faculty-expanded duties. Furthermore, they believe that larger class sizes and fewer course offerings could affect faculty by indirectly adding additional grading and administrative duties to their workload. At some institutions, fewer course offerings have adversely affected faculty by creating a situation in which some faculty members are pressured into overloaded teaching schedules (Griffith & Altinay, 2020). The authors further suggests that teaching loads have expanded to the point that overloads have become the norm in some disciplines. Griffith and Altinay (2020) along with C.E. Thomas and Hentschell (2023) share the position that the manipulation and alteration of course offerings and class sizes will expand faculty duties in some capacity.

Unstable enrollment has made many institutions more creative in their marketing process by incorporating faculty. The admissions departments have partnered with select faculty members at some institutions to better recruit students (Furbeck, 2021). Furbeck suggests that faculty are sometimes able to better connect with students and answer more specific and granular questions about a program. The admissions department's primary focus is to sell the concept of

the school, but other instruments such as faculty, have to sell individual majors such as liberal arts (Clinedinst, 2019). According to Furbeck, this practice is not new but is becoming more popular as many colleges are experiencing a downturn in enrollment. However, Furbeck states that this practice is more prevalent among small private colleges but is growing in popularity with larger institutions. Unstable enrollment is not just an institutional challenge but a departmental challenge. This has forced many departments to develop their own recruiting strategies. For example, Baylor University School of Education has an aggressive student recruitment plan that largely incorporates faculty. In fact, at Baylor's School of Education, recruiting students is a major faculty duty in addition to teaching, research, and service (Freed & Howell, 2018). Some institutions have developed niche specialty majors like Agribusiness to better set themselves apart from competitor schools. Bowyer (2021) states that faculty must play a major role in recruiting students to specialty majors. Bowyer further suggests that it is a daunting task for the admissions department to develop the knowledge for niche programs.

As organizations change due to market conditions, it is not unusual for duties to expand and change. Koops (2021) describes duty expansion as the process by which organizational demands increase which results in the need for additional labor. Koops also describes duty expansion as function creep. It is the expansion of an original design or system beyond its intended purpose. Function creep can be categorized as a host of activities and concepts that expand for defined and undefined reasons. For example, policy spillover, job duty changes, and incrementalism are projected results of function creep. As it relates to higher education, it can be referred to as academic gerrymandering (Lund, 2018). Lund further states that the job duties of higher education faculty have been redrawn through a multitude of pressures and constraints. They have been redrawn by expanding them in the areas of marketing and student retention. In

relation to this study, many faculty members have experienced their roles expanding incrementally due to unstable enrollment. Koops's position captures the very essence of this study: how unstable enrollment affects faculty.

Student Faculty Relationship

The relationship between students and faculty has long been regarded as an essential element in creating positive student retention. Cuseo (2018) states that it is one of the seven key principles of undergraduate education. Cuseo considered the student-faculty relationship as a more formalized job requirement rather than an intangible duty along with research, teaching, and service. Cuseo is accurate in part, but well-established research has long proven that there are elements of retention that have very little to do with faculty relationships. It is vitally important that institutions have an infrastructure in place that fosters student retention (Miller, 2017). Miller further suggests that retention is not solely dependent on one factor: the student-faculty relationship. While it is clear that the student relationship with faculty is essential, Cuseo (2018) is potentially overstating the relevance of the relationship. It is a well-regarded fact that faculty impact student success which helps retention (Azevedo et al., 2022). However, it is primarily a qualitative matter and hard to measure. Azevedo et al. further state that faculty responsibilities should remain as static as possible, major changes are likely to have an adverse effect. This position contradicts what some researchers believe; faculty should have some expanded role in retention efforts.

Some institutions are calling on faculty to increase their level of student engagement in an effort to better retain students. Student engagement is a broad concept, and it encompasses multiple facets. It measures student involvement in their learning and engagement with the campus community (L. Thomas, 2020). Thomas's position is valid, but it focuses more on the

student experience. However, Barkley and Major (2020) focused on student engagement from a faculty perspective. They state that student engagement is a way by which faculty teach and deliver instruction that motivates students to learn and stay engaged. Tomlinson (2021) adds that faculty are expected to be more engaging in this climate of unstable enrollment in which institutions are endeavoring to retain students. The authors mutually infer that academia as a whole has multiple meanings for student engagement in which many cannot agree on. In fact, some researchers question whether student engagement can be measured (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). However, it is agreed upon by many higher education professionals that faculty need to increase their levels of student engagement for the purpose of better student retention. This increase and expansion of duties will lead to a mental appraisal as faculty members formulate feelings regarding their changing roles. Based on the literature review, it further denotes that faculty roles are evolving as it relates to the retention of students. The literature review unearths that the authors have different perspectives regarding the importance of the student-faculty relationship. However, they agree that relationship and engagement are vitally important to student retention

Institutional Strategic Decisions

Unstable enrollment has forced some institutions to make very difficult administrative decisions that impact faculty psychologically. Some colleges and universities have had to resort to eliminating entire programs and departments because of slumping enrollment (Donoff & Rosser, 2016). Many have made the challenging choice to consolidate or reduce the size of departments. A few have opted to merge with other schools to survive better (Poniachek, 2019). Mergers of two academic entities can be complicated (Everly et al., 2018). The mixing and blending of two cultures create anxiety and stress for all parties involved (Hartig, 2020). Hartig's

position is true in part. The research speaks to the fact that there have been several successful institutional mergers throughout history (Williams et al., 2019). However, there is consensus among researchers that significant organizational changes like department eliminations or mergers would adversely affect all constituents.

In the wake of unstable enrollment, furloughs have become a less invasive option. It provides administrators with a swift method to reduce expenses without the bloodletting of full layoffs (Huffman et al., 2021). According to B.C. Mitchell and King (2018), any initiative that a college or university undertakes that involves reducing or realigning people is likely to create feelings of instability and shock waves. Hill (2018) noted that furloughs can sometimes create an entirely new management dynamic, leading to employee confusion and instability. Hill's position is broad, but it can be applicable to higher education management structures. Furthermore, there is general agreement with previously conducted work that alternative options are useful but come with a range of complications.

Consolidation of Resources

When an organization is experiencing revenue decline, it is normal for leaders to look for ways to become more efficient through consolidation. According to Martin and Samels (2017), consolidation becomes the norm when revenue softens. It is also normal for an organization's philosophy to change in order to satisfy the mission with limited resources (Ransom, 2021). Ransom noted that the realignment of labor resources typically would be the first step. In relation to this study, this has the potential to create a unique psychological experience for faculty members (Lazarus, 1991). The researchers believe that decision-makers will look for ways to carry out organizational objectives without adding labor or even reducing labor: faculty.

When a college or university is in a state of enrollment decline, realignment of course offerings can be a normal course of action. As it relates to course scheduling, offering fewer sections is one of the administrative actions sometimes taken to deal with unstable enrollment (Friga, 2020). This will obviously affect faculty as it will result in numerous scheduling alterations. Alexander (2020) adds that consolidating by offering fewer sections is one of many strategies institutions are forced to take to satisfy their student mission. However, Alexander further states that offering fewer sections is logical but does not necessarily provide a long-term remedy. Based on Friga and Alexander's position, it is a likely and prudent course of action for department heads to reduce the number of courses being offered. However, according to Martin and Samuels (2017), this creates significantly higher enrollment and overcrowding for classes offered. High student enrollment levels can sometimes have an adverse effect on faculty. Berebitsky and Ellis (2018) submit that more classes with larger enrollments naturally create another set of problems. Also, higher class enrollments can potentially jeopardize the intimate and personal connection between students and faculty (Benson et al., 2020).

Some institutions are consolidating resources by merging academic units. Some academic disciplines are similar enough and interrelated, whereas this is logical. Faculty often meet the qualifications to teach in multiple disciplines, so merging academic units is more plausible. At some institutions, too many faculty members are assigned to disciplines in which student enrollment does not support the position (Yoshinaga, 2018). Hodge et al. (2020) states that sociology and psychology are related majors. Any faculty member with a Doctorate degree in either discipline would meet the requirements to teach both disciplines. The same could apply to liberal arts and humanities. According to Friedman and Friedman (2018), merging academic units is a positive trend. The authors feel that many institutions could be more efficient due to the

level of academic overlap and administrative bloat. They also reason that departmental mergers reduce silos and provide students with a broader perspective.

Departmental mergers are likely to cause additional stress on faculty. Mergers introduce an element of insecurity into an organization, according to Ribando et al. (2020). The authors reason that one department or unit is acquiring the other one. That suggests that some faculty will have a new department head and new management style to adapt to. In addition, it suggests that faculty positions are likely to be eliminated, or some will have to take reduced roles.

Ribando et al. also reason that a departmental merger integrates two different cultures. As a result, faculty members going through a departmental merger will have to adapt and adjust to a new administrative culture. Mergers or some form of consolidation could be the greatest stress source for a faculty member (Pineiro et al., 2016).

Reduced Admission Standards

Unstable student enrollment has led many institutions to review, adjust, and sometimes lower their admissions standards. This is a widespread practice to stabilize enrollment when it is negatively trending. When an institution lowers its admissions standard, it can result in a population of students attending that might be academically deficient (Grawe, 2018). However, the fallout from liberal admission standards is not limited to academic concerns. It expands into admitting students with social and adjustment complications (Ceyhann et al., 2019). Coburn (2020) suggests lower admission standards can result in students attending from challenged socioeconomic backgrounds. This student population is sometimes the first in their family to attend college. They oftentimes have no frame of reference for the academic and social processes involved with being a college student (McCallen & Johnson, 2019). Ahmed et al. (2021) reason that first-generation college students face many challenges, such as a lack of parental support and

a sense of belongingness. As a result, some institutions have developed faculty mentoring programs to better serve students from challenging backgrounds. Previously conducted research states that faculty members serving as peer mentors for students can be very beneficial. However, it does further represent increased duties and responsibilities.

Reduced admission standards can also lead to the enrollment of students lacking in social skills, academic skills, and classroom etiquette (French & Oreopoulos, 2017). As a result, this student population will sometimes have challenges adjusting to the entire college life (Thiele et al., 2017). Thiele et al. position is valid but mostly applicable to traditional two- or four-year brick-and-mortar institutions. However, it can be applied to post-secondary education. T. Pratt (2017) reason that open-access admission standards can result in many academically unprepared college students attending college. T. Pratt further states that it becomes the professor's problem to address.

Recently, some campuses have developed specialized programs for students from challenging backgrounds (Gray & Swinton, 2017). For example, the University System of Georgia developed the African American Male Initiative. This program is designed to assist low-income first-generation African American Male College Students attending a Georgia State College or University (USG.EDU, 2018). Programs such as these typically are coordinated and managed by a faculty member as an additional duty. With an increase in students that have challenges, the unofficial job responsibility of advising and counseling will occasionally fall on a faculty member (Lawton, 2018). Holzer and Baum (2017) submit that faculty are essential to disadvantaged students succeeding in college. Holzer and Baums position represents an additional informal duty to faculty and others in similar roles. In addition, they suggest that this additionally represents a psychological stressor.

Reduced admissions standards can sometimes adversely affect the academic quality delivered by faculty (Toby, 2017). Reduced standards attract underprepared students, meaning faculty will have to make several fluid adjustments to content delivery and grading (D. Xu et al., 2018). Chowdhury (2018) found that enrollment challenges are one of the factors behind grade inflation, as faculty are under pressure to retain students. According to Weller et al (2018), underprepared students are more likely to take developmental and less challenging courses versus higher courses. Weller et al. (2018) also states that students favoring less challenging courses have a ripple effect. It can result in less demand for faculty that teach more advanced higher-level courses.

Reduced admission standards will likely decrease the number of students majoring in the more challenging math and science disciplines (Chen et al., 2018). The authors states that STEM majors are more challenging, and underprepared students are more likely to drop out of programs in their first year of school. On the other hand, academically challenged students tend to select majors that require less math and science (Gillis & Ryberg, 2021). The authors suggest that majors such as psychology, sociology, and social work are popular with first-generation students that are academically challenged. A decrease in the selection of one type of major and increased enrollment in another type of major creates a supply and demand issue for faculty. Based on the authors positions, faculty that teach majors that are generally less challenging are less likely to be affected by unstable enrollment. However, faculty that teach in technical disciplines such as engineering are more likely to see declines in students selecting this type of major.

The authors collectively reason that reduced admissions standards significantly affect faculty in a myriad of ways. At some institutions, reduced admission standards will result in

academically unprepared students. This could result in some institutions seeing an increase in socially and academically challenged students. As a result, faculty are then placed in the tenuous position of adjusting academic rigor to preserve enrollment. Based on the literature review, the systematic reduction in admission standards creates an unspecified and undefined cognitive experience for faculty members at many institutions.

Faculty Research Implications

Faculty duties usually include teaching, service, and research. Many great discoveries and advancements for society have originated in the halls of a college through research (Garcia et al., 2019). As revenue decreases, it is likely that institutional leaders will not place a significant emphasis on research. Fung (2017) states that funding or the lack of funding is the greatest promoter or inhibitor of research. Fung's position is valid, but oftentimes, research is paid for by external sources. The authors share that unstable revenue will likely have a chilling effect on faculty that support their careers through research. The current literature consensus is that there need to be more research opportunities for faculty members. In relation to the theoretical framework, unstable enrollment creates many secondary issues that serve as the stimulus. For example, a combination of unprepared students, increased class sizes, and overall expanded duties will serve as the stimulus. Therefore, all of these factors must be mentally appraised based on the Cognitive Appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991). This ties into the purpose of this study by illustrating the experience of a faculty classification based on the aforementioned unstable enrollment factors.

Self-Efficacy

When an institution is in a state of unstable enrollment, it is logical to assume that there will be elements of instability. Faculty members are in a position where they have limited control

over events that affect their academic careers. Bandura (1997) states that it is human nature for people to desire to exercise some level of control over events that affect their lives. Bandura further suggests that self-efficacy is the capability to control and execute courses of action leading to the attainment of a goal. Essentially, individuals can largely determine the results based on their actions. Bandura's findings suggest that the construct of self-efficacy is based on elements of stability and control. As a result, unstable enrollment removes a faculty members ability to control their desired outcomes.

Teaching Self Efficacy

Unstable enrollment will undoubtedly affect teaching self-efficacy. Bandura provided a foundational definition of self-efficacy. However, when applicable to teaching, self-efficacy refers to the level of confidence one has in their ability to effectively influence positive student outcomes (Suddeath et al., 2020). Hampton et.al. (2020) submit that the current climate of higher education calls for some new teaching methods. Educators need to develop different pedagogies and technology skills to better serve students. The authors further states that educators must possess self-efficacy as an essential cognitive characteristic. They believe it is the measure by which confidence and persistence are applied. Putwain and von der Embse (2019) assume that teachers' stress levels are directly linked to teaching self-efficacy. The authors states that the lower the stress level, the higher self-efficacy. On the other hand, the higher the stress levels, the lower the self-efficacy. In accordance with this study, unstable enrollment is likely to create a variety of stressors on faculty.

Research Self Efficacy

Many institutions regard research as one of the major job responsibilities of faculty. In fact, many schools allocate significant resources exclusively for the purpose of research

(Stremersch et al., 2021). Unstable enrollment naturally affects an institutions budget, suggesting that resources designated for research must be re-examined. According to Dugas et al. (2018), institutional budgets have been significantly reduced, and faculty conducting research and publishing are forced to get by with less. However, Dugas et al. assume a different position regarding research self-efficacy. They believe it is being diminished at some institutions in the name of monetization. They feel that some institutions are advertising and marketing research findings in the name of profitability tied to enrollment. Thus, other factors such as enrollment hamper a researcher's ability to control the research outcomes. Ralston (2021) implied that research self-efficacy has been diminished in the name of colleges and universities operating like corporations. Ralston further suggests that productivity and efficiency are becoming major concerns in academic research. These concepts are more prevalent in the private sector. Thus, unstable student enrollment has a far-reaching consequential affect. Faculty that conduct research are in an evolutionary cycle as unstable enrollment alters their ability to exercise total control over research.

Emotional Affect

It is logical to assume that instability caused by unstable enrollment will have some emotional effect on faculty. A stimulus causes emotions, which are mentally processed (Moors, 2017). Moors further suggests that the processing of emotions will vary based on the individual and the environment. Subject to Moors position, it is reasonable to conclude that unstable student enrollment will emotionally affect faculty in diverse ways. For example, faculty at large public institutions are in a much different environment than at a small private college. Large public institutions have a greater degree of flexibility. As a result, unstable enrollment is likely to have less of an emotional strain on faculty (Bound et al., 2019). Most small private institutions

typically do not enjoy a high degree of flexibility (Romero, 2017). Romero further suggests that unstable enrollment will emotionally affect an institutions faculty in many ways. The emotional affect may take the form of depression and anxiety, according to Romero. However, M. Mitchell et al. (2017) suggests that the most significant emotional affect felt by faculty and other stakeholders is the uncertainty of the institution remaining viable and whether it will survive.

Considering how faculty are affected by unstable enrollment is an ambiguous concept. It can be determined that faculty at an institution with unstable enrollment will be affected in their own manner. Biggs et al. (2017) states that our individual appraisal derived from the stimulus makes emotionally based topics complex. Biggs et al. position, agrees with this study's theoretical framework. In alignment with this research, literature suggests that based on the environment and other factors, faculty will be emotionally affected by unstable enrollment in an individualized manner.

Human Capital Considerations

Human capital is referred to as the skills, knowledge, and education possessed by stakeholders within an organization (Rindermann, 2023). Coppin (2017) states that people are regarded as an essential resource an institution has in its possession. In relation to this study, Coppin's position references faculty as a vital human capital resource. When an institution is in a state of unstable enrollment, volatility is created. This naturally affects faculty in a myriad of ways. According to Della Torre et al. (2018), unstable enrollment results in a mental churning effect on employees such as faculty. The churning effect is created by a natural inflow and outflow of human capital. Lehmann et al. (2020) states that faculty possess the human capital which they transfer to students.

The authors suggests that disruptions of this transfer created by unstable enrollment are detrimental to the education process. Without the appropriate levels of broad base human capital, an organization's output is constrained (Nyabvudzi & Chinyamurindi, 2020). Their findings suggest that without the appropriate human capital, the student's experience could be negatively affected. Furthermore, an institution will not be able to retain students at an appropriate level without the necessary human capital. In alignment with this study, unstable student enrollment has placed institutions in a position where they must analyze how they are utilizing their human capital: faculty.

Tenure

When an institution is in a state of unstable enrollment, it is not unusual for the administration to freeze or reduce faculty tenure awards (Ivancheva et al., 2016). Ivancha et al. further state that an overabundance of tenure awards tends to inflate the salary expenses of an institution. Cohee (2019) believes that reductions in tenure is an option that administrators always need available. Adding to the roster of tenured faculty only complicates the landscape of human resource manipulation (Colby & Colby, 2017). In fact, some institutions have reduced their workforce by offering early retirement packages instead of making tenure more available (Green & McCann, 2020). Faculty members that are seeking tenure only to realize that it is being severely delayed or not even attainable are likely to have some strong feelings (Savage, 2017). Figlio and Schapiro (2021) suggests that enrollment challenges have made institutions reconsider how they staff the classroom. They further suggest that tenure award is something that is being reimagined in this new landscape.

Tenure remains the bedrock of faculty employment at many traditional degree-granting institutions. The viability of the traditional tenure system is being called into question by higher

education administrators and a host of stakeholders. Unstable enrollment and other pressures are prompting the evolution of alternative faculty models. Unstable enrollment has placed faculty tenure awards in a precarious situation. This further supports the goal of this study as it outlines a specific experience of faculty precipitated by unstable enrollment.

Alternative Labor Source

When an organization is receiving less revenue, it is common to seek out alternative labor sources. Unstable student enrollment has forced many institutions to reduce their hiring of traditional faculty: nontenure or tenured track (Murray, 2019). According to Murray, contingent faculty are becoming the norm at many campuses. Contingent faculty are adjunct, part-time, or any source that is not full-time or tenured track and has no expectation of reappointment. The overuse of alternative faculty is potentially unsettling to faculty psychologically. Unstable student enrollment has created a trend by which over 70% of all faculty fall into the category of contingent (American Association for University Professors, 2018). According to the AAUP (2018), the majority of contingent appointments are short-term or temporary positions. In addition, the AAUP found that this trend has created an inexpensive source of academic laborers. Mapes (2019) noted that this trend is not favorable as it fosters the development of an undervalued class of academics. She also adds that it can create hierarchal uncertainty within an academic unit as contingent faculty are not always held in the same esteem as standard faculty.

Kwok (2018) took a similar position as she finds that contingent faculty are often times marginalized, powerless, and potentially exploited. Kwok also felt that the overuse of contingent faculty could be potentially harmful to collegiality and academic freedom. On the other hand, Schenkewitz (2019) took a divergent position as he feels that contingent faculty play a vital role in this climate where unstable enrollment equals unstable revenue. Schenkewitz also states that

college administrators need the option of contingent faculty for budgetary reasons. However, he does state that the usage of contingent faculty does present a range of drawbacks. Reviewed literature shares similarities in that the over usage of contingent faculty poses a potential set of challenges. For example, the overuse of adjuncts can produce a market phenomenon referred to as a monopsony. Monopsony is a market condition that exists when there is only one buyer and many sellers (Manning, 2021). It typically exists when an entity has the ability to exert power over the market in terms of labor and production (Weintraub, 1959). Monopsony as a theory was first introduced in 1932 by Joan Robinson (Thornton, 2004). Initially, Robinsons theory was narrow and not applicable to all market situations. Since then, monopsony as a theory has expanded and evolved into a more usable concept (Ashenfelter et al., 2010).

The current market conditions of the traditional higher education industry does not constitute a true monopsony. However, there are many characteristics present in how colleges and universities staff their faculty roles. Manning (2021) suggests that external factors such as unstable student enrollment have placed colleges and universities in a situation where they exercise more control over the faculty labor market. For instance, Manning sites that the use of contingent faculty is a control mechanism. Manning then implied that the faculty role is unique and not as portable as other occupations. As a result, this potentially limits the career choices of many faculty members, especially those related to tenure. In support of Mannings position, Fernandes et al. (2023) found that the faculty labor market has remained static for nearly two decades. The authors then suggest that external factors have flattened the job market. Goolsbee and Syverson (2019) stressed that universities and colleges collectively have monopsony power over their tenure-track faculty. The authors do not see this as a phenomenon but a trend that is likely to continue into the future. Based on the author's position, there is an oversupply of faculty

seeking tenure positions which are growing in scarcity. Thus, college and university administrators have a higher level of control over the supply-side tenure market. Based on the reviewed literature, unstable student enrollment is one of the underpinnings of this market trend. Additionally, reviewed literature demonstrates how unstable student enrollment has many far reaching nebulous consequences. It aids in creating a market condition by which faculty opportunities become limited. Based on the guiding theory for this study, this condition creates a cognitive disposition (Lazarus, 1991).

Professional Development

Professional development is an essential element for the growth of faculty in higher education (Sutton, 2018). For example, while not mental health professionals, faculty are sometimes called upon to make judgments as it relates to a student's non-cognitive disposition (Farruggia et al., 2018). As mental health wellness is becoming more of a priority with the student population, it is only logical to assume that faculty will have to work with more students that may have some emotional stability issues (Kalkbrenner et al., 2019). When unstable enrollment has placed an institutions budget in a less than favorable position, professional development on mental health matters may not be a priority, and conference attendance is an unthinkable venture (MacPhail et al., 2019). There is general consensus and agreement amongst produced literature that reductions in professional development is detrimental to faculty.

Next, professional development is vital to teaching effectiveness, service, and research (Hott & Tietjen-Smith, 2018). The authors add that conference attendance is where faculty meet with peers, and vital research information is sometimes shared. They further suggest that a lack of professional development is detrimental to tenure-track faculty. Unstable institutional revenue and other factors have led to changes in how some faculty receive professional development.

Online professional development has become more popular due to a host of restrictions placed on faculty. While online professional development does provide a degree of flexibility, it is not without detractors (Wynants & Dennis, 2018). According to the authors, online professional development lacks connectedness and collegiality. However, they do acknowledge that it is necessary for this climate of shrinking budgets. They also believe that unstable enrollment is likely to lead to a reduction in professional development opportunities as well as overall quality.

Job Satisfaction

When an institutions enrollment is unstable, it is logical to assume that the job satisfaction of some faculty members is likely to decrease (Kruse et al., 2018). Biason (2019) states that slumping enrollment oftentimes leads to a reduction in resources, and that tends to make an individual's job more difficult. Biason's position aligns with the goals of this study by stating that the reduction in resources could create a negative psychological experience for some faculty members. Salam (2017) states that job satisfaction within the faculty ranks is paramount to an institution's success. While this is obviously true, Salam takes a narrow view regarding institutional success. Institutional success is not solely contingent on the happiness of faculty. On the other hand, Houdyshell and Kirk (2019) assume a position that is largely divergent from Salam. They state that institutional success is driven by the job satisfaction and efforts of all employee stakeholders, not faculty as a singular entity. Their position comes from institutional success being largely controlled by areas outside faculty. Most literature fails to adequately address the fact that faculty is not the only role contributing to institutional success. On the other hand, Houdyshell and Kirk seem to downplay the role of faculty to a level that is likely unrealistic. Although narrowly focused, existing literature would largely oppose the positions of

Houdyshell and Kirk. Nevertheless, their positions are congruent with this study as faculty will mentally appraise their situation based on the circumstances (Lazarus, 1991).

Financial Compensation

Unstable enrollment obviously results in unstable revenue which is tied to compensation. This naturally can have a chilling effect on an institution being able to appropriately compensate faculty (Lyles, 2020). This is applicable to public and private institutions. They both have been subjected to the laws of economic scarcity, which trickles down to the financial compensation of their faculty stakeholders (Baghai et al., 2020). Webber (2017) adds that public institutions are better shielded from economic downturns because they have more revenue streams. However, most states have been slowly decreasing funding for public institutions. Webbers position is true in part, but state institutions have greatly been reducing financial support. On the other hand, private institutions have limited revenue streams (Jarrell, 2020). Jarrell's findings also indicated that the financial compensation of faculty at private institutions becomes flat and even declines due to unstable enrollment. Cain (2017) further states that when enrollment declines at a private college, faculty are placed in a far more tenuous situation.

Unstable enrollment has contributed to a new era of academic capitalism (S.R. Johnson & Taylor, 2018). The authors found that at some institutions, faculty salaries are encumbered with individual performance measures and institutional enrollment statistics. Carlos Bresser-Pereira (2019) cited that one of the characteristics of capitalism is when stagnation occurs, downward pressure on wages occurs. Based on the findings of Carlos Bresser-Pereira, unstable enrollment is the stagnation factor that leads to faculty compensation becoming more static or even reduced. Unstable enrollment, coupled with other factors that reduce an institutions revenue stream, has

ushered in this new era of academic market fluctuations (Jessop, 2018). Jessop further suggests that academia as an industry is becoming more like the private sector: market factors create wage suppression. Edel (2018) implied that wage suppression by the use of alternative and more economical labor sources is foundational to capitalism. Edel's position aligns with the trend of academic capitalism. Unstable enrollment precipitates the use of alternative labor sources, which affects the compensation of full-time faculty. The authors share in agreement with the obvious position that unstable enrollment reduces the opportunity for greater levels of financial compensation. This position further undergirds the intent of this study.

Faculty Turnover

Every institution is subject to employee turnover. In fact, many of them depend on natural turnover to keep employment levels at an appropriate amount. Higher faculty turnover is one of the natural consequences of unstable enrollment (Majeed et al., 2018). Employee turnover is already a natural concern for most institutions. It is of even greater concern when an institution is in a state of unstable enrollment. According to Ngo-Henha (2018), when a faculty member vacates their position, it does not mean it will automatically be filled, especially if the enrollment does not support it. Ngo-Hemha further suggests that often times the vacated duties will be spread out amongst other faculty members. Next, faculty turnover driven by unstable enrollment can be especially detrimental to the research capacity at some institutions. According to Gandy et al. (2018), continuity in research is vital to developing worthwhile results. It is not unusual for the life of a research project to be three to five years. If participating faculty members vacate in the middle of the project, the research could be adversely affected. Faculty turnover under the auspices of unstable enrollment will logically disrupt research.

Attempting to ascertain faculty turnover related to unstable enrollment is a nebulous venture. Some researchers think that it is nearly impossible to really determine the causes of employee-faculty turnover (Wilkins et al., 2017). McPhee (2020) shares that turnover is due to a host of personal and professional reasons. Based on McPhees position, faculty turnover could be caused by the pressures of unstable enrollment, but that is not the sole cause. Wilkins et al. and McPhee jointly believe that people leave jobs for any number of personal and professional reasons. As it applies to this study, it is logical to assume unstable enrollment would lead to some faculty leaving their institution. However, that would not apply to the masses, and at best, it is difficult to determine how or if unstable enrollment is really playing a role in faculty leaving their institution. There appears to be no defining perspective as to what causes faculty to vacate their teaching positions based on the literature. Is it by choice, or is it from the associated pressures of unstable enrollment? However, there is shared agreement that high faculty turnover is not beneficial to an institution. Much of the literature produced regarding faculty turnover is assumption based and superficially delves into turnover associated with unstable enrollment.

Future Perspectives

The future of higher education enrollment trends is uncertain. Alexander (2020) painted an indecisive picture for the future of traditional higher education. While there is very little credible data that suggests unstable enrollment will subside, traditional higher education is still very much in demand. If the overall state of unstable enrollment remains consistent, faculty at many institutions will feel some type of an affect and have more of an adverse experience. While Alexanders position provides beneficial insight regarding the future of higher education, he never makes a prediction as to the future and what is to be expected. Busta (2019) took a more decisive position by stating that the future of many institutions is grim. Busta predicts that nearly

20% of all traditional private colleges will close in the next ten years. Busta's position suggests that there will be many institutions in which faculty are likely to have an adverse experience.

Busta's position further supports the need for this study.

Summary

In consideration of the research and literature that has already been conducted on unstable enrollment, a narrative is created by which the overall topic is viewed through a broad lens. Research tends to approach the subject from a macro perspective. It delves into the broad-based nationwide causes of unstable enrollment. For example, families are getting smaller because fewer people are having children, and many are delaying having children (Kotyrlo, 2021). Birthrate reduction directly affects college enrollment figures across the country. However, a micro perspective on unstable enrollment would provide a more authentic and granular basis as to how the phenomenon affects the essential capital resource: human capital. More specifically, faculty. Human capital, which is essentially workers or employees, has been studied with multiple methodologies in multiple settings (Koziol, 2018). However, there is a void in studying faculty in the setting of higher education and how they are affected by a phenomenon.

As with many organizations, much of an institutions success hinges on its faculties dedication, determination, and efforts. If that human capital is disrupted or adversely affected, it ultimately results in the institution's lack of overall success. The human capital (faculty) at a college or university should be studied in its contextual setting, and it is appropriate for it to be placed in unique identifying classifications: faculty at a public institution and faculty at a private college. They ultimately have unique experiences as they service their student customer. There are many external factors that can and do affect the faculty experience (Millea et al., 2018).

Education is an industry that is driven by people to benefit people. When an industry is placed in a precarious position because of a lack of demand for the product, it will have far-reaching implications that will lead to a multitude of experiences. (Davidson & Wilson, 2017). It is only logical to further study a population of people within the industry as they are in their natural setting.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to understand how liberal arts faculty members at a small private historically black college are affected by unstable student enrollment. In this chapter, the research design, procedures, and analysis are detailed. The research design is centered on a methodology that best provides a conduit for authentically discovering the lived experience. Components such as the research questions coincide with the overall design in order to unearth the lived experience of liberal arts faculty. Next, the research questions and how they are associated with the interview questions and other elements are further enumerated. The procedures provide details of specific processes that add to the objective of discovering the lived experience. In addition, elements such as the recruitment plan are essential factors analyzed in this chapter. Furthermore, all elements of the data collection, synthesis, and analysis plan are discussed in relationship with the goals of the study. Most importantly, characteristics of sound qualitative research are outlined in regards to the study: trustworthiness, dependability, transferability, confirmability, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

For the purpose of this research study, van Manen's (2016) approach and design is deemed foremost applicable to this work. His hermeneutic phenomenological methodology is most suitable because it captures the personal feelings and emotions of a population (van Manen, 2017). Kafle (2011) adds that van Manen's approach investigates the lived experience, reflects on essential themes, and describes the phenomenon in artful writing. Hermeneutical phenomenology can be defined as a method to interpret and comprehend the shared experience of a population within a specified context (Dangal & Joshi, 2020). The nature of this study and

design considers the institution and faculty experience. Subsequently, themes related to the broader higher education industry naturally develop. Higher education as an industry is comprised of several different types of institutions and multiple classifications. The classifications range are public universities, community colleges and private liberal arts institutions (Dei, 2019). Each type of institution has its own unique personality and environment. This study focuses on one institution that is in the perpetual throes of enrollment challenges. It is a medium to small size Historically Black College and University (HBCU). Moreover, this study is based on the complex student enrollment factors that impact liberal arts faculty at the specified institution.

The study of faculty at institutions with unstable enrollment is a broad topic by nature. The utilization of a hermeneutic phenomenological study allows for the opportunity to discover root causes and themes that are unique to the individual at this institution. In relation to this study, the design focuses on the phenomena of unstable student enrollment and the associated human experience of a specified faculty designation. While many institutions undergoing enrollment challenges will have shared experiences, faculty are likely to have a unique perspective as it pertains to individual academic disciplines. According to Carter (2022), a hermeneutic phenomenological study will shed light on the university as a separate entity and highlight the individual lived experience. It further allows for the isolation of the entity, which acknowledges the discovery of the singular faculty experience. Vasquez (2014) suggests that hermeneutical phenomenological studies allow for the true nature of the phenomenon to be discovered. Furthermore, in alignment with van Manen, information and data are gathered primarily through in-depth interviews and a focus group with liberal arts faculty members. As a

result, themes and conclusions develop as data are collected and analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of liberal arts faculty members at a small private historically black institution with unstable student enrollment?

Sub-Question One

How does a liberal arts faculty member mentally process unstable student enrollment as it relates to their ability to effectively teach?

Sub-Question Two

How does a liberal arts faculty member mentally process unstable student enrollment as it relates to student engagement?

Sub-Question Three

How does a liberal arts faculty member mentally process unstable student enrollment as it relates to their self-efficacy?

Setting and Participants

. The setting for this research study is SV University (pseudonym). It is a medium size private HBCU that has a church affiliation. SV is one of many similar institutions within the state and region. There is a relatively dense population of institutions like SV in the urban areas and the rural communities within the state. It is a traditional four-year institution that operates according to normal standards ascribed by its accrediting body (sacscoc.org).

Site

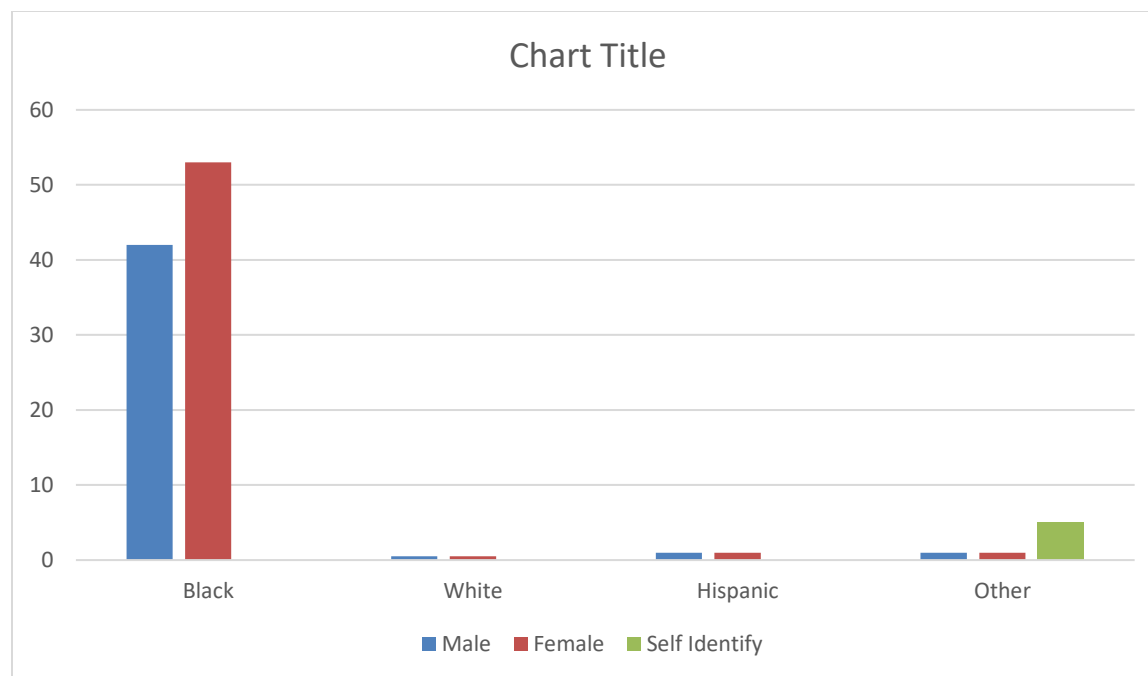
SV was selected because it represents a cross-section of many different types of HBCU institutions: size, racial makeup, location, majors, cost. Also, it has a diverse faculty population across most disciplines. Most importantly, like so many institutions, it is perpetually experiencing unstable enrollment, and there are no real plausible explanations besides external unfound market factors. (Sullivan, 2020). SV University is located in a sprawling large urban city in the southeastern region of the country. The region has a population of approximately 4,000,000 residents (census.gov). SV's student population is approximately 3,000, which entails full-time, part-time, and graduate students. Nearly 60% of all students that attend live in campus housing. SV fields the typical competitive sports found on a college campus comparable in size: football, baseball, softball, basketball, and soccer. SV is one of the many institutions within the state. The racial makeup of SV is 90% black, 5% Hispanic, 5% white, and other. The admissions standards are fairly liberal compared to comparable institutions. Essentially, most people that apply are accepted. Because SV is a private institution, a significant part of the annual budget is subsidized by donations and corporate generosity.

SV's organizational structure is typical for an institution its size. The president is the chief officer, and the provost is the second person in command. Next, the administrative cabinet, is comprised of four vice presidents and three deans. The deans are responsible for managing the individual schools within the institution: Dean of Nursing and Health Sciences, Dean of Liberal Arts and Business, and Dean of Education, Math, and Science. SV offers 29 undergraduate degree programs. SV employs approximately 50 full-time faculty and 45 adjunct faculty. SV is managed and operated by a traditional structure and model for higher education institutions. Over the last twenty years, their enrollment has been flat and slowly trending down. Since 2011

they have been losing students at an average rate of 2% annually. Over time, that has led to a major enrollment deficiency. This data represents campus-wide enrollment figures but excludes individual departments such as liberal arts.

Figure 1

University Demographics(Percentage)



Participants

It is deemed appropriate for the sample pool to consist of twelve to fifteen faculty members that teach within the College of Liberal Arts: English, literature, art, philosophy, mathematics, political science, psychology, and sociology. The number of participants in the sample pool for this study is based on the findings of Polkinghorne (1989), which suggests that phenomenological studies should have a pool of five to twenty-five participants. According to Vasileiou et al. (2018), saturation should be the goal for qualitative research, and traditionally, that is a range of 10 to 30 participants, but that varies based on the study's nature. Therefore, I

considered the number of faculty within the liberal arts department and the position of Polkinghorne and determined that an appropriate sample pool was 12 to 15, which allowed for saturation of participant responses. Next, all faculty participants are employed full-time, maintain a standard teaching load, and employed at the institution for at least three years. This time period is selected because that provides sufficient time for faculty to experience changes in enrollment. There is no distinction made between a tenured professor, full professor, associate professor, instructor, or lecturer. No distinction is made regarding gender and race. Based on the nature of the study, the purposive sampling method is utilized (Campbell et al., 2020). The goal of purposive sampling is to select respondents that have the greatest likelihood to yield beneficial and useful information according to the authors. Additionally, purposive sampling aims to produce a sample that closely represents the overall population (Ames et al., 2019). It is a form of non-probability sampling by which the researcher judges what participants are best suited for the study (Pace, 2021). In regards to sampling procedures, the snowball sampling method is most applicable.

Recruitment Plan

The primary method of participant recruitment is email contact. The list of participants develops out of relationships or referrals from the sample pool (Heckathorn & Sharpe, 2023). The sample pool consists of liberal arts faculty members at SV that teach: English, political science, mathematics, psychology, sociology, philosophy, and art. The faculty participants are all clustered together on one campus and in one department. This is referred to as convenience sampling. It is a method used by researchers in order to collect research data from a convenient and easily accessible pool (Stratton, 2021). However, the site institution is relatively small and that somewhat dictates the number of participants that consent to participate (see appendix C).

Researcher's Positionality

The motivation to conduct this study is based on my desire to develop a deeper understanding of the individual experience within an environment of uncertainty. To that end, post-positivism serves as the interpretive framework. Foundational to post-positivism is the belief that prior experience and current situational context shape human consciousness (Dedeurwaerdere, 2018). Post positivists recognize that two people can witness the same event and have divergent interpretations (Young & Ryan, 2019). The author's positions are consistent with this study as faculty members are in the same environment and have different interpretations. According to Turyahikayo (2021), post-positivism research emphasizes the development of new knowledge and expanded thinking. Furthermore, the genesis of social movements or paradigm shifts have their origins in post-positivism (Young & Ryan, 2019). Additionally, the background, values, and knowledge that I possess can positively influence observations and the outcome (Dedeurwaerdere, 2018).

Interpretive Framework

In reiteration, this study is conducted through the lens of post-positivism. It is based on the individual faculty experience and how it is mentally processed and interpreted. Based on the tenets of post-positivism, the same or identical environment is likely to produce vastly different interpretations (Ryan, 2018). Ryan adds that there is a relational aspect to post-positivism. Ryan's position aligns with this study as all participants are in some form of relationship with each other. However, in conducting research based on post-positivism, subjectivity is an element and characteristic that must be considered (Young & Ryan, 2019). One of the goals of this study is to interpret the faculty experience without subjectivity. In addition, provide an explanation as to why the phenomenon occurs and the resulting lived experience.

Philosophical Assumptions

In application to this study, the purpose of the philosophical assumption is to provide an overview of my value and belief system. This research study is conducted through a conservative Christian lens. It is approached through a traditional Biblical foundation. It is the guiding principle that creates the foundation for this study. However, I believe my religious values have a limited role. This study is based on the individual experiences of a population, so my values are somewhat irrelevant. While it is a commonly accepted principle that most research has some form of bias, from an ethical consideration, I strive to limit any and all bias (McSweeney, 2021). I hold fast to the belief that the over-insertion of one's personal values into research will ultimately lead to it being questionably reliable and potentially tainted.

Ontological Assumption

It is my belief that there is one God, one faith, and one baptism (Ephesian 4:5-6, King James Version). This belief in God is the reality and my worldview as it pertains to life and application to this study. However, the nature of this research study is likely to produce multiple realities. It is based on the individual experience of a person, not one reality. By virtue, this study produces a myriad of outcomes not necessarily related to spiritual matters. Furthermore, this study does not center on subject matter in which religious or spiritual issues should even come into focus. It does not focus on a general or imperfect truth, just the individual reality of an occupational environment.

Epistemological Assumption

As a veteran higher education employee, I have extensive general knowledge regarding enrollment management and related topics. This knowledge is broad-based and does not constitute any level of in-depth expertise. It is my current knowledge and experience which led

to the conception of this study. Furthermore, this qualitative study is based on one institution. It is an institution in which I have limited knowledge or exposure. Qualitative studies are subjective by nature and that is an inescapable reality (McSweeney, 2021). However, my predeveloped expertise is marginally irrelevant to this study.

Axiological Assumption

For the purpose of this study, my personal Christian values and belief system are fully disclosed. However, it is my desire that they play no role in this study. In addition, my experience and knowledge regarding enrollment management and being a veteran employee in higher education has been disclosed. Obviously, this creates a level of bias. However, the nature of this study limits personal bias because the focus is on external subjects, not necessarily the perspectives that I personally develop. Furthermore, this study centers on liberal arts faculty at an HBCU. It is a segment I am familiar with but have no direct exposure to.

Researcher's Role

I am currently an advisor and staff member at a similar institution to SV University. However, it does not fit the strict classification of an HBCU. As the principal instrument, I do have a set of assumptions regarding the study. I have worked in the field for over twenty years, so it would be impossible not to have preconceived assumptions. However, I have not worked in an ongoing faculty role for any extended period of time. I have merely worked and consulted with faculty on individual student matters. In addition, I have no advanced relationships with the faculty participants. Based on existing literature, there are two positions of reason regarding this matter. One position is that having experience and already formed assumptions is beneficial to the study. That experience can help guide the study in the appropriate manner. On the other hand, experience and already-formed assumptions essentially contaminate the study (Derico,

2021). I have solely worked on the academic support side with limited exposure to academic faculty. My knowledge regarding the experience of faculty is minimal at best. My role in this study is to report the findings objectively. While I do have advanced knowledge of higher education and the marketplace, it does not approach the level of tainting this study.

Procedures

The primary step at this juncture of the study is to address IRB approval and related matters (see appendix A). This entails developing recruitment, consent, and instrument material. Data for the study is gathered through individual interviews, focus groups, and document review. Individual interviews serve as the primary source, which is typical for qualitative studies (Hitchcock & Onwuegbuzie, 2022). Through interviews, I gain insight and a personal perspective as to the experience of faculty tied to unstable enrollment. I create a profile for each interviewee by which their responses are organized in a spreadsheet. Next, I ask questions and record the answers word for word in paraphrase format. Conducting interviews for a qualitative study is complex, especially for an inexperienced researcher (Malmqvist et al., 2023). Next, the focus group follows the same protocols as the individual interviews. All responses are organized through the same electronic format and procedures. Document review and analysis are conducted to provide greater context and understanding to the study. The primary documents for review are institutional enrollment data collected by the Department of Education and SV University. Due to the nature of this study, no sensitive information or documents are exchanged. However, all data gathered in electronic format stored on a secure laptop computer that is in my possession at all times.

Data Collection Plan

In reiteration, the three forms of data collection include interviews, focus group, and specified document analysis. Since the focus of the study is on the experience of faculty, I first conduct interviews with liberal arts faculty members. All interviews are conducted individually, one-on-one format. One-on-one interviews lend themselves to participants being more candid and open as opposed to focus groups (Lobe et al., 2020). However, a focus group is conducted to provide participants with an open forum to discuss the subject matter. The focus group serves dual purposes. First, I assume that all participants invited to participate in one-on-one interviews would not be available, or some will decline. The focus group allows the faculty that declined or unavailable for the one-on-one interview an opportunity to participate. Secondly, the focus group serves as an alternative method to allow for the exchange of ideas in a social setting (Scheelbeek et al., 2020). Scheelbeek et al. add that focus groups provide another layer of qualitative research findings. Wagner et al. (2020) suggests that focus groups add another dimension to qualitative research through the collective development of surprise themes. Next, this study enlists the analysis of documents as the final data collection method. Documents analyzed include institutional information from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and institutional specific enrollment reports from the university. IPEDS is a database consisting of enrollment and financial information about every postsecondary institution in the United States. It is authorized and managed by the United States Department of Education (nces.ed.gov). Institutional reports are of higher priority and serve a more significant role in data collection. They primarily consist of student enrollment numbers in various liberal arts courses over a period of time. While this is a qualitative study, document analysis provides some form of a tangible measure to bolster the research findings (Karatsareas, 2022).

Individual Interviews

Interviews with faculty members serve as the cornerstone of data collection for this study. They are the primary tool to develop themes, patterns, and unearth beneficial information. All interviews are carried out under well-established qualitative protocols (McGrath, 2021). In addition, interviews conducted with faculty participants utilize MS Teams. They were arranged at a mutually convenient time and location for the interviewer and the interviewee. I record all the interviews, so the information is retrievable. Also, I took detailed notes in a structured manner to gather all responses in a logical manner. The notes are stored in a logical spreadsheet format. Interviews began with a generic and standard greeting. This part of the interview is not scripted and is informal. It serves the purpose of building a rapport with the respondent. Furthermore, it is particularly important for the researcher to be flexible and prepared for any direction and unanticipated discoveries within the sessions (McGrath, 2021).

Table 1

Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little about yourself and your role at the institution?

The rationale for this question is to serve as an introduction or icebreaker. It will allow the interviewee to disclose personal information and their professional role at the institution.

2. What is your understanding of the current enrollment trends at your institution?
 - a. (Is it favorable or less than favorable)
 - b. (Is your institution trending up or down) RQ1

This question invites the interviewee to openly discuss the enrollment condition at the institution. This potentially could lead to other pertinent information being discovered.

3. Based on your understanding, what are the factors that have led to the current enrollment status?
 - a. Internally or externally driven? RQ2

The objective of this question is for the opinion and feelings of the interviewee to be revealed. It also will allow for the difference of opinions and perspectives to be revealed.

4. How has institutional enrollment affected you as a faculty member? RQ1

This question's purpose is to develop a deeper understanding of how the interviewee is affected as an individual. It is through this question that differences between the participants will be further identified.

5. Tell me more about retention initiatives at your institution. RQ2

The rationale for this question is to understand the institutional policies and directives in regards to how they involve their labor force.

6. Are there any specific retention initiatives in which faculty are being asked or required to carry out? RQ3

The specific goal of this question is to determine if the institutional retention policies have expanded faculty duties or have they remained static. In addition, this question will further identify the different experiences between faculty members.

7. Describe how enrollment has affected your compensation? RQ3

This question endeavors to determine if there is any relationship between compensation and unstable student enrollment. In addition, this question will unearth how faculty mentally appraise compensation tied to unstable enrollment.

8. Have your duties expanded significantly due to the enrollment? RQ1

The purpose of this question is to further establish how unstable enrollment is affecting faculty and how it relates to their duties.

9. What is your future outlook for your department? RQ2

The goal of this question is to develop themes on the interviewee's future perspective regarding enrollment at the institution. The intent is for the interviewee to give their individual opinion on how they perceive the future of this issue.

10. How do you mentally process the state of unstable enrollment? RQ3

The rationale for this question is based on the theoretical framework by Lazarus (1991). This question is essentially the cornerstone of this study. The goal is to understand how the interviewee mentally processes the environment of unstable enrollment

11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

This question serves as a summary for the interview and the final opportunity for the interviewee to disclose any additional pertinent information.

Document Analysis

The highest and most applicable documents for review are institutional records and records compiled by the Department of Education- Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. More specifically, data compiled by the campus Department of Institutional Research

and the University Registrar are reviewed in application to this study. I specifically analyze fall admission, enrollment, and retention totals by liberal arts majors. These documents are publicly accessible and available through the department of institutional research. In addition, I specifically analyze enrollment totals by individual liberal arts classes. This information is available through the university registrar and is publicly accessible. Enrollment trends based on liberal arts majors and disciplines are analyzed to detect trends and themes. For example, the student enrollment totals for specific liberal arts majors are reviewed to develop a conceptual understanding of the overall enrollment status. In addition, student enrollment in individual liberal arts classes is analyzed to provide a basis for comparison.

Historical student enrollment data over four years is reviewed to detect themes and emerging trends. Four years represents a full cycle from freshmen to senior year and many researchers in higher education suggest this is an optimal time frame to allow for trends to unfold (Guardia et al., 2021). As a result, comprehensive enrollment data from 2018 to 2022 was analyzed and reviewed extensively. Reviewing enrollment data lends itself more to quantitative analysis. However, in application to qualitative research, quantitative data is sometimes analyzed to discover meaning in the data (Morgan, 2022). Morgan adds that documents tell a story, and it is up to the researcher to discover and tell the story. For this study's purpose, the review of institutional documents serves as a supportive mechanism for me to convey the story of liberal arts enrollment at this institution.

Institutional information housed in the Department of Educations Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System is analyzed to serve as a support and corroborating mechanism to the institutional records. This system is commonly referred to as IPEDS. It is a broad database that provides institutional records on multiple characteristics and factors about

colleges and universities in North America (IPEDS, 2023). In application to this study, the focus of insitutional enrollment data centers on the academic years between 2018 and 2022.

Enrollment and retention trends during this time frame are specifically analyzed for theme detection. In addition, institutional admission data from 2018 to 2022 are analyzed to provide additional context and meaning.

Focus Groups

The incorporation of a focus group serves as a method to bolster and undergird data collected by way of individual interviews. The element of a focus group adds to the credibility of the qualitative research (Morgan, 2021). In fact, some scholars believe that focus groups are a necessity in the development of sound qualitative research (Canessa et al., 2022). Braun and Clarke (2021) believes that interviews are overutilized in qualitative research and that focus groups need to play a larger role. The intent of the focus group is to enhance and support, not necessarily to unearth new information (Jiang & Cohen, 2020). The authors add that focus groups create dialogue among participants. The focus group consists of 8 liberal arts faculty members. I made the assumption that some of the selected faculty would not participate in both one-on-one interviews and the focus group. Hence, the focus serves as an alternative option for faculty participants. Furthermore, it is administered through MS Teams and is recorded so that the content is retrievable.

Focus Group Questions

Table 2

Focus Group Questions

1. How has unstable enrollment at your institution significantly altered or changed your job as a faculty member? RQ1

The purpose of this question is for participants to share their feelings in regard to how their jobs are potentially affected by unstable enrollment. The overall intent is for the different experiences to be discussed and shared.

2. How has your workload changed significantly because of unstable enrollment? RQ1

This question is utilized to detect themes related to increased workloads pertaining to unstable enrollment. The intent is for faculty to share their different experiences regarding shifting workloads.

3. How has your compensation been affected in any way, shape, or form because of decreased revenue? RQ1

This question endeavors to gain a deeper understanding of how unstable enrollment affects compensation. The intent is for participants to share their individual experiences about a sensitive topic.

4. How has your department been affected by unstable enrollment? RQ2

This question aims to gain a deeper understanding of how unstable enrollment affects a department and not necessarily the individual. Through this question, I desire to detect themes associated with unstable enrollment.

5. How has unstable enrollment prevented you as a faculty member from being able to participate in activities such as research, conference attendance, etc.? RQ2

The intent of this question is for the individual faculty experience to be unearthed.

This question aimed to discover the tangible effect of unstable student enrollment.

6. How do you mentally process being in the environment of unstable enrollment? RQ3

The purpose of this question is to align the faculty experience with the theoretical framework (Lazarus, 1991). The intent is to uncover the differences between faculty members in regards to how they mentally process unstable enrollment.

7. How does unstable enrollment affect you emotionally and psychologically? RQ3

This question's purpose is to further align and bolster this study to the theoretical framework (Lazarus, 1991). The intent is to better understand the feelings and emotions of the individual faculty members.

Data Analysis

Data collected from interviews, focus groups, and document analysis is triangulated based on the phenomenological philosophy of van Manen (1997). Data collection encompasses taking raw data and organizing it for analysis (Arrey, 2019). Van Manen's (1997) philosophy seeks to discover central phenomena in collected data. It also seeks to develop linkages between data and identify subcategories (Alhassan et al., 2019). Next, data collected from interviews is analyzed to detect central themes or any anomalies. This type of data is considered semi-structured (Karatsareas, 2022). It is analyzed through the lens of affirming and authenticating data collected from interviews. Furthermore, data collected from the focus group is synthesized through the lens of comparison to data collected from the one-on-one interviews. This process sought to identify differences or similarities between participants based on the setting. Essentially, the focus group serves as an instrument to bolster data gathered during interviews. Next, data collected through document analysis is synthesized through van Manen's (1997) framework of theme detection woven into collected data. According to Lin et al., (2022), this consists of reviewing quantitative and qualitative data to detect central themes that are in alignment with the study. Through the collection and synthesis of data, I endeavor to produce a

high level of credible data saturation. Data saturation is when enough data has been gathered and processed to the point that it produces credible results (Mwita, 2022).

The individual interview data analysis follows the guidelines and suggestions of Creswell and Poth (2018). It consists of multiple steps to ensure that the appropriate information is captured in a logical manner. Next, this study utilizes Dedoose Qualitative software application to better process the themes and patterns within the data. However, the data is first categorized and organized before it is entered into Dedoose. As a result, a spreadsheet is developed with uniform categories from the questions to track the interview responses of each participant. Secondly, I analyze the responses to detect themes or similarities. That allows for responses to be compared and contrasted in a logical manner. Following this step, the collected data is compiled in an organized fashion and entered into Dedoose. Dedoose provides coding, thematic similarities, trends lines, and related information. Then responses are reported in a logical, coherent, and useful manner. For example, the data responses are formatted indicating that two out of the six interviewees believe that they have no control over their circumstances. Whether simple or complex, data analysis needs to be easy to understand, and that is what makes it valuable (Turner et al., 2019). As a result, this study seeks to provide comprehensive yet easily understandable results.

The overarching goal of the focus group is to unearth themes and produce data that cannot be detected through one-on-one interviews. The focus group data analysis plan follows standard guidelines and directives of Creswell and Poth (2018). It consists of multiple steps and procedures conventional to qualitative research. Dedoose qualitative software was utilized to accurately discover the themes, similarities, and patterns within the data. First, the collected data was categorized and organized before being entered and processed by Dedoose. Initially, an MS

Excel spreadsheet was developed with uniform categories from the questions to track the responses of the group participants. I then analyze the responses to detect themes, commonalities, and relevant information. The data was then entered into Dedoose. Dedoose then summarily provided coding, themes, and similarities. Then responses were reported in a logical, coherent, and useful manner. The coding and themes from the focus group were then analyzed and compared to the coding and themes of the individual interview responses. This process was necessary to further solidify the developed similarities and themes.

The document analysis plan consisted of compiling overall student enrollment and retention data based on multiple categories. First, total enrollment for students that majored in English, sociology, psychology, mathematics, political science, philosophy, and art between fall 2018 to spring 2022 was compiled. Second, the total number of students that were retained for these majors was compiled. Third, total enrollment for every individual class offered based on the aforementioned disciplines was compiled. For example, total enrollment for every individual psychology class offered between fall 2018 and spring 2022 was compiled. Next, the institutions overall enrollment between fall 2018 and spring 2022 was compiled. All of the accumulated and compiled data was initially entered into an organized MS Excel spreadsheet. This was done so that I could review, prep, and organize data logically. At this time, all of the compiled data regarding enrollment was entered into Dedoose software program. Dedoose formulated and calculated the data in order to produce themes, patterns, and similarities. I then determined which themes were most appropriate to include in the study. There was no predetermined specified number of themes that are to be included in the study. It is solely on the quality of the themes. Furthermore, theme detection and usage are subject to my judgment and discretion as it relates to this study. Subsequently, some of the detected themes are excluded from the study because they

had minimal value. This is a subjective process. Document analysis is a valuable method in qualitative research even though it is overly subjective (Morgan, 2022).

Trustworthiness

There must be an elevated level of trust in any form of research so that it can be considered as valid. People oftentimes make critical decisions based on research findings. The public must have confidence in the findings and their authenticity. Qualitative research possesses only one instrument, which is the researcher. In order for a qualitative study to be fully trusted, the researcher should display a logical and methodical pattern by which information is gathered (Jones & Donmoyer, 2021). In addition, the body of work must be grounded and easy to understand (Connelly, 2016). For the purpose of this study, the triangulation method is most applicable. Information is gathered by way of multiple sources: interviews, focus groups, and document reviews. There tends to be a connectivity between the sources which best describes the triangulation method (Farquhar et al., 2020).

Credibility

Credibility is established by the level of detail provided in the study. This study displays the authentic experiences of faculty within the realm of unstable enrollment. Credibility in research is largely based on the quality of the information and not the quantity (Amankwaa, 2016). I determine that in order to bolster credibility, quantitative elements are incorporated in this study. This entails analyzing statistical enrollment data over a period of time. This position is in alignment with the positions of other qualitative scholars (Gagani, 2019). According to Johnson et al. (2020), taking measures to remove biases of the researcher is particularly important to establish credibility. The authors believe that quantitative measures incorporated into qualitative research better remove biases.

Transferability

Transferability is centered on the basis that research work must be applicable to other situations (Daniel, 2019). The study of faculty issues in higher education has historically been studied by many qualitative and quantitative researchers (Leslie, 2020). By default, this study is therefore transferrable. The study focuses on the experience of faculty at one institution within an academic discipline. This lends to the overall trustworthiness of the study and would make it transferable to other similar studies (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In addition, it is suggested by some scholars that researchers should provide as much information as possible to better lend themselves to transferability (Stahl & King, 2020). In accordance with the authors, this study endeavors to be transparent and transferable by providing as much information as possible.

Dependability

Dependability in a research study suggests an expected level of consistency and regularity. The analysis process must be within generally accepted guidelines and principles, which would render it dependable. Singh et al. (2021) found that dependability in research comes from the usage of well-established methods and techniques. The authors add that the foundation of dependability is for the research techniques to have been utilized by many previous qualitative scholars. This study followed traditional and proven qualitative techniques suitable for a hermeneutic phenomenological study. In addition, to further add to dependability, this study incorporated an in-depth document analysis. The documents analyzed are publicly accessible so there is a natural level of transparency. Most importantly, the documents are recognized as dependable sources: s and public institutional enrollment records.

Confirmability

Confirmability is centered on the concept of whether the study can be verified or confirmed through normal means (Ellis, 2018). In this study, the procedures allow for the results to be easily confirmed. The documents analyzed regarding institutional enrollment can easily be confirmed as they are open to the public (nces.ed.gov). In addition, there is already existing literature and research that has already been conducted on the subject of institutional enrollment (Sullivan, 2020). In regards to this study, an element of confirmability is created by the use of technology to record retrievable interview sessions with the participants. Most importantly, this study provides a detailed step by step approach as to how information was gathered, processed, and disseminated. As a result, it is likely that this study can easily be tested or replicated.

Ethical Considerations

The largest ethical consideration is protecting the privacy and identity of the faculty participants at SV University. The privacy of the participants is addressed by the use of pseudonyms and assigned names. In addition, background information of the participants is constructed and worded to further provide a degree of anonymity. By the nature of the study, the information gathered is not especially of a sensitive nature. Information gathered does not include any personal characteristics or easily identifiable information. In addition, all data collected is stored on a secure laptop computer that is stored in a permanent location (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Permissions

At this juncture of the study, a suitable and appropriate institution has been located to serve as the site for this study. It fits the strict definition of the appropriate classification for this study. Furthermore, it meets all of the criteria and requirements for this study. The institution

agrees to serve as the site location for this study (see appendix B). All necessary IRB processes and procedures are satisfied with the institution.

Other Participant Protections

Participation in this study is purely voluntary. Their decision whether to participate or not has no bearing on current or future relations with the institution. If a faculty member decides to participate, they are free to decline answering any questions or withdraw at any time without any recourse. The records of this study will be kept private at all times. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Next, research records are stored securely, and only I have access to the records. Furthermore, no faculty participants chose to withdraw from the study. As a result, data collected will be maintained in the appropriate technique described.

Summary

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to understand how liberal arts faculty members at a small private historically black college are affected by unstable student enrollment. In application to this study, this chapter demonstrates the processes, measures, and steps implemented to provide credible and reliable qualitative work. Most importantly, it outlined how the theoretical framework applies to this study: cognitive appraisal theory. The collection procedures, analysis, and overall design are the foundation for this qualitative study. In regards to data collection, individual interviews are the most crucial aspect of this study. This chapter further represents how the procedures, analysis, and design produce the desired result. For example, it provides intricate details as to how data collected from the interviews is collected, analyzed, and implemented. This study is about a classification of people and their experiences. More specifically, it centers on their mental appraisal of a situation (Lazarus, 1991).

As a result, germane to this study is the selection and recruitment process for the appropriate participants. This chapter outlines philosophical considerations and direct processes by which faculty participants are selected. This chapter also provides the causal link between the research questions and the interview questions. It is through the interview questions that the highest and best capture of data for this study is derived (see appendix D). Conclusively, this chapter delineates the noble characteristics necessary to formulate principled and honorable research work that can be confirmed and replicated: credibility and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to understand how liberal arts faculty members at a small private, historically black college are affected by unstable student enrollment. This chapter first describes the participants and their background associated with the institution. Next, the three types of data collection techniques and emerging themes are thoroughly discussed. This is followed by a description of the outliers that materialized through the data collection process. The chapter concludes with a recount as to how the established themes relate and answered the research questions.

Participants

There are 12 liberal arts faculty participants for this study, all of whom are full-time faculty members ranging from lecturer to associate professor. They have been employed at the institution for at least three academic years. The average length of time employed at the institution for the entire field of participants is 12 years. As a result, the faculty participants have experienced various stages of student enrollment ranging from stable to unstable.

Table 3*Description of Participants*

<u>Participants</u>	<u>Discipline</u>	<u>Time at Institution</u>
Edward	English	4 years
Sheila	English	32 years
Sharon	Sociology	11 years
Vicki	Psychology	3 years
Robert	English	8 years
Jack	Mathematics	3 years
Karen	Psychology	29 years
Cynthia	Philosophy	25 years
Morris	Political Science	3 years
Frances	English	6 years
Ken	Sociology	13 years
Barry	Art	7 years

Edward

Edward has taught at the university for four years. He teaches a range of undergraduate lower and upper-level English courses but primarily lower-level core classes. He has a Doctorate Degree in English Studies. He has taught at two other universities, but this is his first position at an HBCU.

Sheila

Sheila has taught at the university for thirty-two years. She teaches primarily upper-level undergraduate English courses and graduate level courses. She has a Doctorate Degree in

English Literature from an HBCU. SV University is the only institution she has been employed as a faculty member.

Sharon

Sharon has taught at the university for eleven years. She teaches lower level-elective sociology courses. She has a Doctorate Degree in sociology. She has taught at one other university which is an HBCU. Her lengthy tenure at the institution has allowed her to experience stable enrollment and unstable enrollment.

Vicki

Vicki has taught at the university for three years. She teaches lower-level undergraduate psychology courses. She has a master's degree in psychology and is currently completing a Doctorate Degree in Clinical Psychology. She is an alumnus of an HBCU and has taught at one other institution like SV University.

Robert

Robert has been employed at the university for eight years. He teaches primarily lower-level undergraduate English courses. He has a Doctorate Degree in English Literature. He has taught at three HBCU's and one large public research institution.

Jack

Jack has been employed at the university for three years. He teaches lower-level undergraduate mathematics courses. He has a Doctorate Degree in Mathematics Education. This is his first HBCU experience and his first full-time teaching opportunity. His tenure at SV University is an introduction to some of the enrollment challenges that HBCU's encounter.

Karen

Karen has been employed at the university for twenty-nine years. She teaches primarily upper level undergraduate and graduate psychology courses. However, she has taught all levels of courses from introductory to advanced. She has a Doctorate Degree in Psychological Studies.

Cynthia

Cynthia has been employed at the university for twenty-five years. She teaches all levels of undergraduate philosophy courses. She has a Doctorate Degree in philosophy. She is an HBCU alum and very supportive of their mission.

Morris

Morris has been employed at the university for three years. He teaches lower-level undergraduate political science courses. He has a master's degree in political science and is ABD in completion of a Doctorate Degree. This is his first HBCU teaching opportunity.

Frances

Frances has been employed at the university for six years. She teaches lower-level introductory English courses. She has a Doctorate Degree in English Literature. She is an HBCU alum and fiercely committed to their mission. SV University is the only institution she has been employed as a fulltime faculty member.

Ken

Ken has been employed at the institution for thirteen years. He teaches a range of sociology courses from lower-level undergraduate to advanced undergraduate. He has taught at three other institutions that are not HBCU's.

Barry

Barry has been employed at the institution for seven years. He teaches lower-level introductory art courses. He has a master's degree in art education. He has primarily taught at two-year or specialty art institutions. As a result, this is his first HBCU experience.

Results

This section's purpose is to report the data analysis review results. The collected data is triangulated through three distinct data collection techniques: individual interviews, focus group, and document analysis. The data collection methods are based on the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology of van Manen (2016). Van Manen suggests that interview forums provide the best human perspectives. The first data collection method centers on individual interviews. Individual interviews were conducted by the use of MS Teams as a technology platform. Each individual interview session lasts thirty to forty-five minutes. The individual interview questions are worded and formatted open-ended so participants can freely share their feelings. The second data collection method is a focus group. The focus group session utilizes MS Teams as a technology platform. The focus group is open, and all participants freely share ideas and perspectives. The question format is similar to the individual interviews: open ended to promote discussion among faculty participants. In addition, some of the faculty participants for the individual interviews also participated in the focus group. The final data collection method is the review of specified documents. Document analysis centers on publicly accessible department of education data known as IPEDS and data accessible on the institution's website (IPEDS, 2023). The collection of data produces results that create three broad-based themes: academic discipline, career commitment, and faculty pressure. The results also produce various subthemes: course demand, course selection, career status, and retention.

Table 4 Themes and Subthemes

Major Themes	Subthemes	% of participants where subtheme appeared
Academic Discipline	Course Demand	65%
	Course Selection	88%
Career Commitment	Early Career	86%
	Mid-Career	90%
	End of Career	100%
Faculty Pressure	Retention	75%
	Academic Standards	100%

Academic Discipline

The academic discipline and courses that faculty teach impact their feelings on institutional student enrollment is the most prominent theme. One hundred percent of the participants agree that they mentally process enrollment based on the head count numbers in their classes over a period of time. For instance, Barry, who teaches art states “I pay very close attention to my enrollment numbers - it is a sign of stability.” Additionally, 100 % of the participants regard high enrollment in their classes as a positive. Ken adds, “Robust enrollment in my classes is an indicator of demand, high demand is a good thing.” Eighty seven percent of all participants agree that their discipline and courses they teach influence their feelings about enrollment. Jack adds, “Low enrollment indicates low demand; low demand leads to uncertainty.” During interviews and the focus group, faculty participants indicate 60 times that their feelings regarding enrollment center on their discipline and courses they teach. In addition, 88% of all participants agree that persistent low enrollment numbers are mentally processed as a negative. For example, Edward states, “My upper-level English courses habitually have low

enrollment numbers, it doesn't make you feel stable." Frances, who also teaches English agrees by stating, "Persistently low enrollment liberal arts courses could be on the chopping list." There is a direct correlation between faculty feelings and enrollment numbers in their courses.

Consistent strong enrollment produces feelings of stability, while consistent low enrollment creates feelings of instability. Overall course demand and course selection are controlling factors in regards to enrollment in liberal arts courses. Subsequently, course demand and course selection are discussed in the following sections.

Course Demand

Based on a course designation as a requirement or elective, some liberal arts courses are in more demand than others. For example, there are three English courses that all undergraduate students are required to take: two English composition courses and one literature course.

Mandatory requirements naturally create ongoing demand for certain courses. As a result, faculty that primarily teach required courses naturally feel more stable. Edward, who teaches required composition courses states, "Demand for my classes is always high." He further adds, "There will always be a need for my area." On the other hand, faculty that teach higher level, advanced, or elective English courses are more likely to experience the undulations of inconsistent course demand. Based on the review of institutional records, in the last four years the school has offered 52 sections of various upper level advanced or elective English courses. During this same time period, there was an average enrollment of 13 students in these courses. An average of 13 students in these courses is 50% below full capacity. Robert, who is an English professor, states, "Demand for English courses is a good indicator of institutional enrollment stability." He further concludes that, "If the institutions enrollment drops, demand for English courses will likely drop." Thus, reducing the demand for certain English and literature courses." Sheila adds,

“English as a whole is still a fairly popular major, but I have experienced fewer students taking higher level or elective courses.” She is not sure if this is attributed to fewer people majoring in English or student avoidance of English. She further mentions “I’ve been here long enough to see the trend lines, the demand for certain English and literature courses tends to float with the overall institutional enrollment.” Robert submits, “When the overall institutional enrollment is stable, we have more students enrolled in all English courses, when it is lower, fewer enroll in the courses that are not required.” Sixty five percent of faculty participants agree that the institution's enrollment status relates to demand for their courses. However, 35% are indifferent because they teach required courses. Therefore, there will always be high demand for their courses. During the individual interviews and focus group sessions, participants indicate 27 times that course demand is directly tied to enrollment.

Course Selection

Students have the ability to select a specified number of liberal arts courses as they matriculate. Some liberal arts courses are mandatory while others are electives. Eighty eight percent of all individual interview participants feel that students try to avoid the more challenging liberal arts classes. Ninety percent of the focus group participants feel that students are not looking to challenge themselves. Based on the document analysis, in the last four years, enrollment in elective liberal arts courses hovers around 50% capacity, apart from psychology. Psychology is an elective class for most students and enrollment consistently hovers around 85% capacity. Jack states, “I teach both upper and lower-level math courses. Math as a major is not that popular.” Jack then suggests, “Students are forced to take it as a requirement but making a choice to major in it, very few make that election.” Jack further adds, “I can see the day coming when math could be eliminated as a major and just offering lower-level core curricular classes

becomes the norm.” Jack believes campus enrollment largely controls enrollment in math classes except for one or two required courses. Karen adds, “Psychology has always been a popular major and many of the psychology-based courses have always been popular.” Karen further mentions “Psychology 100 is always filled to capacity and the higher level; 300 and 400 level courses always have strong enrollment because it is such a popular major.” She later suggests, “I have been here long enough to experience downturns in enrollment, but we can never tell.” Conversely, Barry adds “Art courses are typically low in student enrollment-even the major courses and that is very concerning.” During the individual interviews and focus group session, participants indicate 36 times that students try to avoid challenging courses by selecting less demanding ones.

Career Commitment

Faculty mentally process student enrollment through the lens of their individual career commitment. The overall student enrollment condition at SV University can be described as tenuous and stable. However, faculty are more concerned with student enrollment at a departmental level and how it impacts their career. Ninety percent of faculty participants indicate they are not as concerned about the overall institutional enrollment because that is something they cannot control. They are more focused on departmental enrollment figures. There is a consensus that 87% of faculty analyze student enrollment based on demand for their discipline and individual courses. If there is consistent high demand for the courses they teach, that creates feelings of career stability and overall happiness. Jack state, “Math is always going to be in demand in some shape or form.” On the other hand, if there is persistent low demand for the classes they teach, that creates feelings of instability and potential lack of growth. Cynthia feels that “Ongoing low demand for your classes can be deflating.” She further adds, “You wonder if

you are going to get a contract for the next year when your classes are empty.” During the individual interviews and focus group session, participants mention 12 times that they are more concerned about enrollment at their level and how it impacts them career-wise. Faculty feelings regarding enrollment are directly influenced by their varying levels of career commitment to the institution. Early career, mid-career, and end of career faculty participants analyze enrollment through the different lens of their individual career positioning. Career status will be discussed in the following section.

Early Career

There are a wide range of feelings and thoughts about student enrollment and how they center on the participants' career status. For example, faculty participants early in their tenure at the institution and relatively young in age, are not overly concerned about enrollment whether stable or unstable They express indifference due to their career situation and aspirations. There are four faculty participants that have been at the institution for four years or less. They account for 30% of all participants. They are likely in a career building mindset and not necessarily committed to staying at the institution long term. Morris, who has been at the institution three years states, “Enrollment does concern me here at the institution as well as many other things.” He adds” At this stage in my career, I am not tied down to any institution, I am keeping my options open.” Jack, who has been at the institution for three years adds “Liberal arts is changing so I’m not sure how long I can stay at the school.” Morris and Jacks feelings are indicative of the early career cohort. They express moderate concern about enrollment but have limited long-term commitment to the institution.

Mid-Career

Faculty participants more committed to the institution long term express higher concern about enrollment. This group of participants has been employed at the institution for approximately five to fifteen years. They account for 45% of all faculty participants. Their higher level of commitment to the institution is based on personal reasons. For instance, some of them are connected to the region geographically and choose to stay for personal reasons. Some of the participants are alums of HBCU's and have an emotional tie to the institution and its mission. Frances, who has been at the school for six years add, "I am concerned about the institution on many levels." Frances indicates that she is deeply committed to the mission of the school, but doesn't always see a career path forward, especially in trying to get tenure which is loosely tied to enrollment. She feels that the institution wants more flexibility in reducing the head count for academics. Barry, who is an alum and seven-year veteran, is not optimistic about the overall future of liberal arts at the institution. He mentioned, "Liberal arts as a major is on the decline, the enrollment numbers support that." Ken, who is a thirteen-year veteran adds, "I pay close attention to our departmental numbers regarding major selection." Ken further suggests that sociology classes are popular as electives but not as a major. He also believes the department is top heavy with too many sociology professors. If enrollment in the program drops significantly, he envisions that they could institute reductions in force. Ken further indicates he is concerned but "This is home for me." The committed mid-career participants share in their loyalty and concern for the institution and liberal arts as a discipline.

End of Career

Faculty participants nearing retirement or already able to retire seem ambivalent and unconcerned about enrollment. Three faculty participants have been at the institution for twenty-

five years or more. They account for 25% of all participants. Sheila adds, "I've been here over thirty years and seen many changes. Enrollment goes up and then it comes back down. I really do not pay much attention to it. As I am nearing retirement it just doesn't register." Cynthia, who is twenty-five-year veteran shares similar thoughts by adding, "It's hard not to pay attention to the campus enrollment numbers when they are down- rumors and stories get started when this happens." Cynthia further mentions, "I am able to retire so I don't worry as much as I use to." Seventy five percent of all faculty participants express varying levels of concern about enrollment that range from overly concerned to moderately concerned. This cohort represents the group of faculty participants that were early in their career or at the mid-career point. Twenty five percent of the participants were ambivalent about the enrollment situation at the institution. This cohort represents the group of faculty participants at the end of their careers and able to retire. Ninety two percent of all participants agree that their individual career status influences how they feel about the institutions' enrollment situation. During the individual interviews and focus group sessions, participants indicate 29 times that the institutions' enrollment situation impacts how they mentally process their individual career objectives.

Faculty Pressure and Expectations

The administration at SV University is under tremendous pressure to manage the institution with limited resources. This pressure trickles down to faculty and how they manage their courses. Like most HBCU's, they do not receive significant revenue through charitable giving from alums or other external sources. SV University is private, so they receive no appropriations from the state. Revenue generated from tuition is by far the largest source of income. In order to function, it is imperative for the institution to maintain a specified number of full-time enrolled students: 3,300. Therefore, a conundrum is created by which there is pressure

on faculty to take extreme measures to keep students enrolled. 100% of all faculty participants are in complete agreement that there are unspoken expectations on faculty to take measures to ensure that student enrollment stays at a certain level. Jack states that they have been instructed to “Work” with students to ensure that they pass the class. Eighty percent of the participants suggest that they are being evaluated on their student enrollment efforts through some undefined ad hoc evaluation system that no one understands. During the individual interviews and focus group sessions, participants indicate 48 times that they are under pressure to be flexible with students. Pressure to generate revenue through enrollment creates an environment where student retention and academic standards are sometimes altered for the institution's benefit. Retention and academic standards were discussed in the following section.

Retention

SV University cannot afford any protracted state of enrollment decline. Two consecutive years of declining enrollment is potentially catastrophic for the institution. Based on the review of documents, the institution must maintain no less than 3,100 undergraduate students enrolled full time for fall and spring semesters. The benchmark of 3,100 is based on revenue and expense projections. In order to support this objective, the institutions' admission and retention standards have become very liberal. On an annual basis, they admit over 60% of all undergraduate applicants (IPEDS, 2023). Seventy five percent of faculty participants indicate that they must retain an undefined number of students in their programs. Frances states, "The school is starting to let in just about everyone and that leads to having a lot of unprepared students." She further adds “We have to go to great lengths to retain them.” According to Sheila, “We are evaluated on student retention.” Sheila feels it “creates” problems for some faculty because “We are on different playing fields.”

Seventy five percent of all participants agree that the retention standards led to additional work on their part. For instance, it led to remediation and watering down some of the academic content. In addition, 50% of faculty participants suggest that they must address academic and social issues. Sheila adds that they sometimes must address how students dress and appropriate behavior. 85% of the participants realize that they serve a specialized underserved population in which many of the students come from challenging backgrounds. Sheila understands, “This comes with the territory” but still is mentally frustrated with some of the things that take place at the institution.

Academic Standards

Lower admission standards and the need to retain as many students as possible have led to many academic challenges. First, 100% of the participants agree that lower standards potentially lead to more students enrolled that are not as academically prepared as they should be. Second, it makes it more challenging for liberal arts faculty that teach lower-level core courses such as English and math. One hundred percent of the participants that teach lower-level introductory English and math courses feel that they have become more remedial. In addition, 72% of faculty participants that teach courses with significant writing components believe it has become more challenging. Edward adds that, “Teaching basic English has become mentally taxing.” Finally, 96% of the participants feel that they are under unspoken pressure to pass students. As a result, liberal arts faculty are in a precarious situation in trying to maintain academic integrity while trying to retain students. Barry states, “You really must be mindful about grading. If you fail too many students that puts you as a faculty member under scrutiny by administration.” Overwhelmingly, 86% of faculty participants feel that maintaining academic integrity is a challenge as they must retain students. The consensus amongst participants is that

academic standards are compromised related to unstable student enrollment. The institution's enrollment objectives call for adjustments and flexibility with student retention and academic standards initiatives. The interviews and data collection produce various outlier findings discussed in the following sections.

Outlier Data and Findings

This section includes outliers discovered during the interview, focus group, and document analysis process. The open-ended format of the interview questions allows faculty participants to openly share all perspectives related to their experiences with enrollment. As a result, three faculty participants with the longest tenures at the institution offer insight into the administration and lack of professionalism within the institution. Their positions are considered outlier findings in relationship to the study. These outliers serve as additional factors that impact faculty as it relates to enrollment. While the outliers are not directly related to enrollment or academic matters, they are obviously issues of concern for faculty. The following sections identify specific outliers and how they impact faculty directly and indirectly.

Criticism of Administration

The three veteran faculty participants who have been employed at the institution for over twenty-five years offer the sharpest criticism of the administration regarding several issues. According to Karen who is a twenty-nine-year veteran, the institution has many problems unrelated to academics. For instance, she mentions that every year there are major problems with student housing. She adds, "Every fall start there are several hundred students without housing." In fact, some years the problem was so bad that it was covered by local media outlets. In previous years, some students had to stay in hotels until on campus housing could be provided. Karen was very candid about the housing situation. She states, "The housing situation is

absolutely horrible and a blight on the institution.” Additionally, Karen suggests that the housing administration is “Incompetent.” Sheila, who is a thirty-two-year veteran, suggest “There is a lack of administrative stability due to high turnover.” She also feels that due to high turnover, the institution can never really “Progress.” Cynthia, who is a twenty-five-year veteran, adds that the school is like a “Revolving door.” The institution has had four presidents in eight years. In addition, multiple administrative and staff employees have left the institution over the years. Karen further adds that, “The lack of stability can be psychologically draining on everyone.” Collectively, Karen, Sheila, and Cynthia mention housing seventeen times during the interview and focus group.

Lack of Professionalism

Twenty five percent of faculty participants feel that there is an overall lack of professionalism within the institution. This cohort of faculty have been employed at the institution for the least amount of time out of the entire field of study participants: three years. However, the faculty participants are more critical of support staff instead of faculty. They specifically refer to the lack of professionalism within the campus housing and financial aid departments. They mutually agree that the two biggest issues that negatively impact the institution center around housing and financial aid. The faculty participants mention it is not unusual for them to get requests or calls from parents asking them to intervene in a housing or financial aid matter. On the other hand, 30% of the faculty participants suggest that some of the housing and financial aid problems stem from their student population not always having a firm grasp on processes, procedures, and deadlines. This cohort of faculty participants has been employed between four and fifteen years. Ken suggests it is not unusual for some incoming freshmen to arrive on campus and they have not properly filled out all the necessary documents

for admissions, housing, and financial aid. In trying to accommodate these incoming students, a natural burden is created for administration. Nevertheless, the faculty participants vehemently agree that campus housing and financial aid need a major transformation.

Research Question Responses

One central research question and three sub-questions guide this hermeneutic phenomenological study to better understand the lived experiences of liberal arts faculty at a historically black university with unstable enrollment. This section offers answers to the research questions introduced in Chapter 1, supporting the discussion that follows in Chapter Five. The sub-questions follow Lazarus's (1991) cognitive appraisal theory by addressing three of the following factors that impact the experience of liberal arts faculty: academic discipline, career commitment, and faculty pressure. The faculty participants describe through various experiences the factors that led to their feelings on enrollment at the institution.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of liberal arts faculty members at a small private historically black institution in relationship to their student enrollment situation? The faculty participants perspective is that unstable student enrollment creates a myriad of uncertainties and experiences. First, academic discipline and course demand significantly impact the faculty experience. Barry states, "How faculty feel about enrollment is largely controlled by discipline and enrollment in their individual courses." Second, career commitment and time served at the institution impacts experiences and feelings regarding enrollment. If a faculty member is not committed to the institution long term, that directly impacts their feelings regarding enrollment. Vicki, who teaches psychology and has been at the institution for three years feels "This is likely not a long term stop for me." As a result, she describes her feelings about enrollment as "Indifferent yet

concerned.” Conversely, if a faculty member is committed long term, that directly impacts their feelings regarding enrollment. Ken, who teaches sociology and has been at the school for thirteen years states, “Enrollment concerns me greatly since I’m probably a lifer.” Third, administrative pressure applied to faculty greatly impacts their experiences. Faculty are under pressure to be flexible with students to better support enrollment. Karen suggests that “Administrative pressure to retain students skews my feelings about enrollment.”

Sub-Question One

How does a liberal arts faculty member mentally process unstable student enrollment as it relates to their ability to effectively teach?

Liberal arts faculty members process enrollment and teaching effectiveness based on the academic standards and student retention initiatives. Essentially, reduced academic standards leads to faculty adjusting academic rigor. Sharon, who teaches sociology expresses “I am not comfortable with being forced to lower standards in the name of retention.” She adds, “Mentally I feel a sense of guilt-like I’m cheating the students.” Barry shares similar feelings as he states, “I sometimes have a sense of wrongdoing about passing people who deserve to fail.”

Sub-Question Two

How does a liberal arts faculty member mentally process unstable student enrollment as it relates to student engagement?

The faculty participants mentally process student engagement based on their career commitment. Faculty participants that are early in their career are more engaged with students and concerned about enrollment than faculty at the end of their career. Barry mentally processes unstable student enrollment by being more engaged with his students which could potentially support student retention, Sheila mentions, “I mentally process student engagement based on my

career longevity.” She adds, “I see my role as one of providing stability to instability as it relates to student needs.”

Sub-Question Three

How does a liberal arts faculty member mentally process unstable student enrollment as it relates to their self-efficacy?

Faculty feel their lack of control over the institution's enrollment status leads to decreased self-efficacy because they have limited ability to determine their own destiny. Their perspective is that unstable enrollment directly impacts their individual self-efficacy. Seventy five percent of participants feel that they have limited control over how they administer grades. Sheila states, “Administration is trying to assume more control over the classroom.” Edward adds, “Low enrollment correlates to a lack of faculty control.” As a result, faculty have limited ability to determine their own destiny as it relates to their situation at SV University.

Summary

The review and analysis of faculty responses formulates a perspective on their experience as it relates to enrollment. The academic discipline that faculty teach is a major determinant regarding their experiences tied to enrollment. The experience of a faculty member that teaches mandatory courses opposed to elective or major courses is different. Faculty that primarily teach courses that are high in demand have more feelings of stability and security. Conversely, faculty that teach courses low in demand have more feelings of instability. However, faculty feelings regarding enrollment are also influenced by their career commitment. Faculty that are not significantly committed to the institution's long term display more of an indifference to enrollment. Faculty that are more committed to the institution's long term display the most concern. Next, due to unstable enrollment, administration applies pressure on faculty regarding

academic standards and retention. Faculty are under pressure to have relaxed academic standards in order to retain a significant number of students every year. The discovered themes provide an overarching framework for how faculty are impacted by unstable enrollment. However, the individual experience of faculty in an environment of instability is the study's essence.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to understand how liberal arts faculty members at a small private, historically black college are affected by unstable student enrollment. The study seeks to develop a deeper understanding of how liberal arts faculty members are affected by the institution's pattern of unstable enrollment as an individual. The study is based on the unique experience of the faculty member as a singular entity. Subsequently, it aligns with the theoretical framework: cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991). It demonstrates how a population can undergo the same or similar experience but mentally process it differently. The overarching goal is to isolate how the individual faculty member is impacted by enrollment and their response. This further suggests that liberal arts faculty members will have an individual interpretation of the institution's enrollment status based on their circumstances. This chapter will discuss the following subsections: (a) interpretation of findings, (b) implications for policy and practice, (c) theoretical and methodological implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, and (e) recommendations for future research. It will clarify and refine the study's results while providing interpretations and implications of the findings.

Discussion

The purpose of this section is to discuss the findings for this study derived from the collection of three data sources: interviews, focus group, and document analysis. The data synthesized through Creswell's (2010) processes for data analysis, leads to thematic and sub thematic developments. For a hermeneutic phenomenological study, the research discussion will focus on the meaning of the experiences. This section of the study will interpret the findings through my interpretive lens. It will additionally provide context and meaning to the discovery of

themes. Supporting the interpretations of findings with empirical and theoretical sources along with hard evidence from the study is discussed beginning with the interpretation of findings.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Twelve liberal arts faculty members describe their experiences on how they are impacted by the institution's enrollment. Based on the findings, three distinct thematic findings are objectively interpreted through my perspectives. The interpretations provide deeper meaning and context to the findings. They also dissect the findings, so they are easily understood and usable. The interpretation of the findings will be discussed in the following sections.

Interpretation of Findings

This section of the study includes an overview and interpretation of the emerging themes and subthemes discussed in chapter four. From the collective analysis of individual interviews, focus group, and document review, I provide context to the findings as it relates to this study. The interpretations come from the developed themes and subthemes and will subsequently make reference to them. However, they clarify and provide additional meaning to the findings of the study. Essentially, they decipher the themes and subthemes by revealing my thought process and how I interpret the experience and feelings of the faculty participants.

Academic Discipline

Liberal arts faculty view their role as academic gatekeepers. Their role and experience are unique because every student that matriculates through the university must take liberal arts courses. Jack, who teaches math interprets his role as the “First line of defense.” Liberal arts courses are divided into two categories: required or elective. Typical required classes are English 101, math 101, history101, etc. Typical elective classes are theater, philosophy, art, etc. This can be translated as faculty that teach required courses have a different perspective about student

enrollment versus faculty that teach mostly elective courses. Required courses are always in high demand by default. As a result, faculty that teach required courses process enrollment through a lens of job security.

Liberal arts professors have a unique role different from professors in other disciplines. Some professors that teach in certain disciplines are exclusively exposed to students that are majoring in their discipline. For example, nursing and business professors only see students majoring in those disciplines. However, that is not the case for liberal arts professors. Liberal arts professors' role can be interpreted as the academic platform for all undergraduate students. They provide the essential foundation for undergraduate students. As a result, they have the greatest exposure to the entire student body. By default, they are naturally more susceptible to student enrollment variations, whether they are negative or positive. Susceptibility is primarily interpreted as low demand for certain liberal arts classes which could compel the institution to make reductions in liberal arts courses. Consequently, reductions in liberal arts courses could lead to reductions in liberal arts faculty.

Based on the academic discipline, liberal arts professors could have limited career opportunities at the institution. Elective liberal arts classes are typically in less demand as this is supported by enrollment data. Due to lack of demand, liberal arts professors that teach disciplines such as art and philosophy are potentially in a precarious position. The findings clearly show that art and philosophy are low in demand as an elective and a major. Career opportunities could be limited for professors in those areas. Barry, who teaches art interprets low demand to mean “Slumping career opportunities.” Barry adds, “I'm not sure if I have a future here or anywhere else.” Cynthia views low demand as “The writing on the wall” for young liberal arts faculty.

Based on multiple years experience in higher education, I believe that all liberal arts disciplines are not created equal. Mandatory courses play a more significant role as they relate to enrollment. More specifically, English and math serve as enrollment stability indicators. No other liberal arts discipline has that level of significance. The interpretation of enrollment records displays a pattern that English and math courses are closely tied to the institution's enrollment condition. When the overall student enrollment at the institution increases or decreases, enrollment in English and math increase or decrease along the same lines. For example, in fall of 2020, enrollment at the institution dropped by .68% from fall 2019. Enrollment in required English courses for fall 2020 dropped by .73%. For required math classes, fall 2020 enrollment dropped .71%. I interpret this to mean that there is a direct correlate between institutional enrollment and required English and math courses. However, enrollment in all liberal arts courses provide an indicator of enrollment stability but not as precise as English and math. According to Sheila, who was once a former chairperson, "When the institutions enrollment is soft, all but a few liberal arts courses are in less demand." Sheila further affirms that demand for courses is based on overall institutional enrollment with a few exceptions. The findings can be interpreted as faculty that teach required English and math courses will have a different experience than faculty that teach all other liberal arts courses.

Interpretation of the results exhibit that the academic discipline and the course level that the faculty member teaches controls some of their experiences related to unstable enrollment. Faculty that teaches popular or required courses are in a constant state of high demand. Whereas faculty that teach less popular courses are subject to the potential consequences of enrollment instability. In accordance with this study, the results are interpreted that the courses that faculty teach will ultimately control their experience related to enrollment. Furthermore, enrollment in

liberal arts courses can serve as a litmus test for the faculty experience. When enrollment is strong in liberal arts courses, it is interpreted that most liberal arts faculty will likely feel more stable in their position at the institution. Conversely, when enrollment is weak, most liberal arts faculty are more likely to feel uncertain about their futures.

Career Commitment

The findings indicate that faculty mentally process unstable enrollment based on their personal goals and aspirations. Essentially, they mentally process enrollment through the lens of their short term and long-term career objectives. In doing so, I identify two faculty classifications regarding career commitment: marginally committed and deeply committed. Marginally committed participants are interpreted as career builders early in their tenure-less than five years, potentially pursuing opportunities at other institutions and veteran faculty nearing retirement. Marginally committed faculty are unsure how long they will stay at the institution. Their feelings are interpreted as casual concern for the institution.

Deeply committed participants have been employed at the institution longer and are naturally more grounded and committed. The range of their tenure at the institution is between five and fifteen years. They generally are more connected to the institution and mentally process their roles through a long-term lens. This group of participants generally express more concern about enrollment and other institutional issues. They also express concern about the future of liberal arts education at the institution and in general. Their feelings are interpreted as pessimistic concern as they envision a day in which the institution could streamline liberal arts programs. Streamlining liberal arts programs could translate to reductions in the overall budget for liberal arts. The downsizing of liberal arts programs is a growing trend nationwide especially at institutions struggling with meeting enrollment numbers (Osley-Thomas, 2020).

Based on the findings, I note and interpret two divergent sets of feelings regarding enrollment instability: ambivalence and consternation. The feelings of the participants derive from their personal perspectives as well as external conditions at the institution. Ambivalence is displayed by the faculty participants not as committed. Consternation is displayed by faculty that is more committed but uncertain about their future. However, every participant has their own unique experience in how they arrive at their position. As a result, their individual level of career commitment is a major factor that promotes their overall disposition on enrollment at the institution. The findings align with the theoretical framework: cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991). Faculty members are experiencing the same condition, but they interpret it completely different.

Faculty Pressure

There is a tremendous need to maintain a certain level of full-time students enrolled for the institution to function. Based on public information, 3,100 students is the lowest enrollment number in which the school can properly function. I conclude that student retention is arguably one of the highest priorities of administration. This translates to liberal arts faculty are under pressure to ensure that enough students pass their courses to prevent them from being academically dismissed. Additionally, retention pressure can be interpreted as coercing faculty to be flexible and lower academic standards at times. This confirms faculty are sometimes placed in the unenviable position of compromising academic integrity in the name of student retention. Frances believes “Numbers are the only thing administration is concerned about; they will compromise anything to get them.” In addition, administration has developed lower admissions criteria for the intent of stabilizing enrollment. Lower admission standards can create a myriad of complexities. Faculty have to make ongoing judgments as to quality and quantity of content that

is covered in class. then they are likely to have use a liberal grading system. Lower standards result in students that are not as serious about education. Sharon adds “Lower admission standards has resulted in a lot of uncaring students.” Based on the findings, liberal admission standards coupled with the need to maintain a certain number of full-time students enrolled, are the major forces behind faculty pressure.

Implications for Policy or Practice

The findings of this study highlight the experiences of liberal arts faculty as it relates to unstable student enrollment at an HBCU. The results confirm the topic is worthy of exploration to assist higher education decision makers. While the impact of enrollment on faculty is difficult to encapsulate, it is a topic that impacts various stakeholders. The findings reveal major theoretical and practical implications for policy and practice.

Implications for Policy

The results of this study support recommendations that the university consider developing policies that address liberal arts faculty. More specifically, it is recommended that a subcommittee within the faculty senate be created to specifically address the unique concerns of liberal arts faculty. Sheila states, “We are unique as it relates to faculty on this and every campus.” Barry adds “We need special support mechanisms from administration.” The findings of this study support this position by displaying the nexus of liberal arts faculty and the university.

Next, it is recommended that the university consider developing policies that create separation between administration and faculty as it relates to grading and retention. The findings of this study indicate that on occasion, the administration will apply pressure on liberal arts faculty to take measures to ensure a certain number of students pass their classes. This is not just

unethical; it is a potential violation of their regional accrediting body (Sacsoc.org). According to Ken who has served on several accreditation committees, “The administration walks right up to the line” in regards to ethical violations. It is recommended that a no academic tampering policy should be enacted. This policy would create a formalized barrier between administration and the academic departments. Furthermore, this policy would bolster current academic integrity policies that are already in place. The beneficial implications for faculty would be that they will have less pressure from external sources in regards to how they manage their classes. The implications for administration would be that they will be held to a higher standard regarding academic integrity. This potentially will hold administration more accountable regarding their enrollment management operations.

The administration at SV University made a strategic decision to lower admission standards. Eighty percent of faculty believe this was a mistake. Faculty perspectives demonstrate that it results in several unintended consequences. Karen states, “I understand the need to bolster enrollment, but admissions standards are too low.” Barry adds “I understand the need for lower standards to get students in the door, but there needs to be balance.” Based on faculty responses, lower admission standards result in many under-prepared students enrolled at the institution. Additionally, this creates a tremendous amount of additional work for liberal arts faculty, especially those that teach English and math. In many cases, they must incorporate remedial concepts into a standard course. The same is true for other liberal arts disciplines, especially courses that have writing components. The administration of SV University should consider reinstating more stringent admission standards. There are likely to be positive implications in considering this new policy. It will result in better prepared students for their future courses.

Implications for Practice

Instituting a new policy aimed at preventing the administration from over-stepping their authority would not be a complex undertaking. This would not require any capital expenditures or major infrastructure changes. It is simply creating a new regulation and incorporating it into the already existing operational bylaws. There are no implications by which the adaptation of this new policy would create an undue burden or is unattainable. However, this policy would need an enforcing mechanism.

Instituting higher but realistic admission standards would not be a complex venture. It is reasonable and attainable because admission standards operate on a floating concept. They are adjusted based on the institution's enrollment. Higher admission standards would likely improve the quality of academics and the campus community. The implications for this new policy are reasonable and justified.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

The study confirms that Lazarus (1991) cognitive appraisal theory was an appropriate theory to guide this study. The theory is based on the individual appraisal of an event or a condition. Essentially, a group of people can undergo the same condition but appraise it differently. However, I discover that there is a contrast within the condition that the participants are experiencing. All of the faculty participants are experiencing the undulations of unstable enrollment. However, there is a major contrast based on the discipline in which they teach. The unstable enrollment experience of a professor that teaches required English and math courses is different than the unstable enrollment experience of a professor that teaches elective art or philosophy. They are both undergoing an unstable enrollment experience but there is a stark

contrast based on the academic discipline they teach. Nevertheless, Lazarus (1991) cognitive appraisal theory is still applicable.

Each of the participants share their experiences regarding unstable enrollment. Based on the guiding theoretical framework, they appraise unstable enrollment through their own lens. That led to the establishment of different themes related to faculty and enrollment issues at SV University. The study participants have a deep commitment to liberal arts as a whole and many of them are deeply committed to the mission of HBCU's. HBCU's often times face an ongoing list of challenges and liberal arts as a discipline is shrinking (Busta, 2019).

This study fills an existing gap in current literature and will contribute new research to higher education issues. Higher education enrollment management challenges have been extensively researched over a long period of time. Most of the existing research is based on institutional enrollment issues and not individual colleges. In addition, existing research does not explore the implications of enrollment and how it impacts specified academic disciplines and related faculty. This study supports and enhances previously conducted research by exploring unstable enrollment matters through the lens of liberal arts faculty. This study is an extension of previous research by exploring factors that are typically not considered. For example, this study specifically analyzes student enrollment issues tied to academic disciplines. Additionally, the study analyzes enrollment challenges at an HBCU and how it impacts faculty. Most applicably, it analyzes the divergent set of interpretations and feelings as it relates to faculty in the same environment.

Empirical Implications

This study provides the experience of a population based on solid evidence. The evidence is reliably empirical because it is based on the personal accounts of several individuals. Furthermore, this study provides the granular experience of math and English faculty that teach lower-level courses and how their experience is different from those that teach other disciplines. The study also provides insight as to how campus administration makes decisions about enrollment and how they impact faculty. This study makes a contribution to the field by exploring enrollment through the lens of faculty at an HBCU. Previously conducted research typically explores the enrollment challenges of HBCU's from a broad perspective, not the experience of individual faculty.

This study aligns with previously conducted research in multiple ways. First, the study clearly outlines how unstable enrollment impacts faculty job duties. The findings clearly demonstrate how faculty job duties naturally expand due to declining enrollment. Koops (2021) indicates that this becomes normal when a customer base declines or grows stagnant. The remaining employees are subsequently forced to do more. Lund (2018) states that job expansion in higher education is a form of gerrymandering. Secondly, the study implicates how enrollment is the overall determinant in regards to institutional stability. It is the revenue driver of the overwhelming majority of higher education institutions in this country. This position is supported by many scholars, researchers, and reviewed literature for this study. Most importantly, this study aligns with current literature as it relates to the uncertain future of liberal arts institutions and programs. Essentially, many researchers are unsure regarding the future of liberal arts and the impact of declining student enrollment. This was a reoccurring theme in the reviewed literature for this study.

Theoretical Implications

This study sheds light on the mindset of faculty in their perceptions of enrollment at the institution. It aligns with the cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991) by displaying that individuals mentally process an environment or circumstance completely different from each other. In addition, the study demonstrates how external pressure from administration impacts their feelings towards enrollment. Additionally, it includes their interpretation regarding their personal career situation and how that shapes their feelings. Furthermore, the study demonstrates how external pressure from administration impacts their feelings towards enrollment. Nevertheless, it is interpreted that there is a wide cross section as to how engaged faculty are regarding the institution's enrollment status. Some faculty are engaged and concerned about enrollment matters while others show a marginal lack of interest.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study contains limitations and weaknesses as do most qualitative research studies. Lazarus (1991) suggests that sss should not be overly concerned with weaknesses or limitations, it's an unavoidable element of qualitative research. In consideration of the subject matter, a larger field of participants is desirable to better reach saturation. Mwita (2022) states that saturation of participants, which in some cases is twenty-five or above is the goal. However, Mwita understands that is not always possible. In addition, the scope of the study is limited to a few select traditional liberal arts disciplines. For example, it did not include disciplines such as anthropology, astronomy, classical arts, etc. Faculty insight from these liberal arts disciplines could potentially provide different perspectives. However, I deem it necessary to limit the study to the more traditional liberal arts courses such as English, math, and psychology. The majority of students will and must take these courses. The more traditional liberal arts classes are more

likely to have enrollment fluctuations in association with the university enrollment picture.

Furthermore, it developed into a necessity as the availability of participants became challenging.

Limitations

Like most previously conducted research, this study contains a set of limitations and weaknesses. First, it is limited to one type of institution that represents a wide cross section of similar institutions: private HBCU. While there are similarities between private and public HBCU's, there is a fundamental difference in how they receive their revenue and are managed. Another limitation is that the study is restricted to certain faculty that teach specified disciplines within liberal arts. It does not include all liberal arts faculty or any other discipline. It would be informative as well as interesting to study the experiences of faculty within majors such as business, engineering, and nursing, etc. It could produce beneficial comparison and contrasting results.

Delimitations

Based on previously conducted work, I deem it appropriate to limit the study to a small grouping. The grouping is based on the desire to research faculty that have the broadest exposure to all students at the institution. I chose hermeneutic phenomenology because the objective was to capture the lived experience. Furthermore, I have been actively employed in higher education for twenty-five years. Some of that experience was spent at an HBCU similar to SV University. As a result, there are preconceived notions and feelings regarding the subject matter. My The opinions and perspectives could play a role in interpreting the findings. However, the included opinions and perspectives would not prevent the study from being credible. Moreover, the study is based on the experience and feelings of individuals, not my feelings or specified experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study is based on the experience of liberal arts faculty related to enrollment at a historically black college. In regards to potential future research, expanding this study to include the experience of faculty for additional academic disciplines is recommended. For example, the experience of science, engineering, and information technology is potentially different from other disciplines. This study is based on one type of institution located in an urban area. It is recommended that additional research be conducted on multiple HBCU's and their faculty enrollment plight. While HBCU's face a distinct set of circumstances, it is likely that faculty at a non HBCU face some of the same challenges as an HBCU faculty member. Therefore, it is recommended that future research be conducted on the experience of faculty at non HBCU's.

This study finds that there is pressure applied on liberal arts faculty to be flexible with academic standards in order to stabilize enrollment. This naturally results in a host of unintended consequences. As a result, it is recommended that additional research be conducted on administrative pressure placed on faculty and how it potentially leads to grade inflation. Grade inflation has been a pertinent topic in higher education for well over twenty years. It is conceivable that the origins of grade inflation stem from enrollment issues (Klafter, 2019). SV University made the choice to eliminate remedial math and English courses. Faculty that teach English and math did not agree with this choice. In their experience, you have more unprepared students enrolled in classes; they should already have the background to be academically successful in. Therefore, it is recommended that future research be conducted on the impact of remedial courses on enrollment and the faculty experience.

This study was conducted under standard qualitative guidelines. By nature, qualitative research does not capture tangible numerical data. As a result, it is recommended that

quantitative research be conducted on the faculty experience to develop greater context as to how faculty are impacted by enrollment matters. For example, qualitative research is limited because it does not provide numerical percentages as to how faculty are impacted. In conducting this study, the findings are largely intangible and lacking in hard data. Additional quantitative research would benefit the academic community by supporting previously conducted qualitative research.

Conclusion

This study endeavors to understand the lived experience of liberal arts faculty at an institution that has a specific mission. It provides an in-depth analysis of the granular aspects of how student enrollment impacts the individual faculty member based on specified academic disciplines. The twelve faculty participants represent a wide range of academic disciplines within the liberal arts family. Their experiences are similar but simultaneously divergent. They are all being impacted by unstable enrollment in some manner. However, their mental processing is uniquely different.

An essential finding of this study is that the academic discipline in which faculty teach controls their perspectives. Faculty that teach essential core areas such as English and math are in a more stable position. There is likely to always be demand for their services. However, faculty that teach liberal arts disciplines that are not essential core areas, they have less job security and stability. This position aligns with national trends associated with liberal arts (Becker, 2022). This study discovers that there is an undefined continuum in which faculty are controlled by the institution's enrollment. When enrollment is unstable, there is more pressure applied to faculty to retain students by any measure. This naturally creates some form of an adverse condition for faculty. This study captures the specific individual experience in the midst of adverse conditions:

unstable enrollment. Conclusively, this study adds to the body of knowledge by exploring a topic that is potentially beneficial to the higher education community. It is my true desire that this work will benefit faculty and administrators in balancing academic and administrative decisions.

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Appendix A
IRB Approval Letter

May 31, 2023
Sanford Dennis
Shariva White

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1399 Student Enrollment and the Experiences of Liberal Arts Faculty at a Historically Black College and University

Dear Sanford Dennis, Shariva White,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2. (iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification

submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the sender.

Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Site Approval

Date: 15 March 2023

Dear Mr. Dennis

The purpose of this letter is to confirm that [REDACTED] University has agreed to serve as a site study location for Doctoral Student Sanford Dennis. The Point of Contact/interviewee is Dr. [REDACTED]

Stipulations:

- The study must use pseudonyms when referencing [REDACTED] University.
- No information will be included in the study that is obviously referencing [REDACTED] University.
- [REDACTED] reserves the right to see the study before publication.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or need additional information. I can be reached at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Appendix C

Consent

Title of the Project: Student Enrollment and the Experiences of liberal arts faculty at a Historically Black College and University

Principal Investigator: Sanford Dennis, Doctoral Student, School of Education, Liberty

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a full-time faculty member teaching in a liberal arts discipline (English, math, art, philosophy, sociology, political science, psychology) and employed at the institution for at least three years. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to better understand the plight and experience of liberal arts faculty in the midst of declining student enrollment in liberal arts majors.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in an in-person, video-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour. This interview will be virtual utilizing Zoom or MS Teams.
2. Participate in a virtual focus group that will take approximately one hour. The focus group will be conducted via Zoom or MS Teams.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include exploring a topic that has not been researched and adding to the body of academic work.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. [Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses from the individual interviews will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Individual interviews will be conducted virtually so privacy will be maintained.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with people outside of the group.
- Data will be stored on a password-protected laptop computer/in a protected area in which the researcher is the only one that has access. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Video recordings will be stored on a password-protected laptop computer/in a protected area in which the researcher is the only one that has access. After three years, all records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting any relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Sanford Dennis. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Shariva White at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

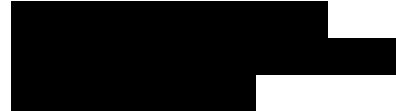
The researcher has my permission to video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix D**Copyright**


June 2, 2023



To Whom it May Concern:

The purpose of this letter is to provide principal researcher and doctoral student Sanford Dennis, permission to publish institutional copyrighted material for the purpose of a dissertation. The grant of permission is subject to the following terms.

- Pseudonyms will be utilized so that the identity of the university will be protected.
- Copyright material to be published is limited to general demographic information about the institution.
- The publishing of copyrightss material will be for educational purposes only.

Please contact me at  if you have any questions or need additional information.

Best Regards,



Director, Institutional Research