### Decision to join the Iowa State University Alumni Association: Experiences of five African American alumni of Iowa State University

Jeffery W. Johnson  
*Iowa State University*

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Decision to join the Iowa State University Alumni Association: Experiences of five African American alumni of Iowa State University

by

Jeffery Wayne Johnson

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee
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Daniel C. Robinson

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2014
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my sixth-grade sweetheart and loving wife

Peggy Johnson

who, for twenty-eight years, has unselfishly encouraged me in all of my endeavors.
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The purpose of this qualitative case study was to provide research on and voice to African American alumni who are members of the Iowa State University (ISU) Alumni Association. Two fundamental questions guided this research study:

1. Why do Iowa State University African American graduates join the ISU Alumni Association?
2. How did their experiences at Iowa State University influence their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association?

Five African American alumni of ISU, who had been ISU undergraduate students and were now current dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association, participated in this study. They were interviewed individually to learn about how they viewed their collegiate experiences at ISU, what they had learned about themselves and the institution, and how they viewed their relationship with the university. This information, along with observations I made during the interviews, was utilized to understand how these study participants constructed meaning about their alumni association membership decision and why ISU’s African American alumni join the ISU Alumni Association.

Employing a constructivist framework, the study data were first analyzed for each alumnus/alumna and presented as an individual case study. The data were next reanalyzed collectively to make interpretations about the shared reasons these five African American alumni joined the ISU Alumni Association and the shared experiences that influenced their decision to become ISU Alumni Association members.

The two themes that emerged regarding the first research question show these ISU African American alumni joined the ISU Alumni Association were: (a) receiving value from
their ISU degrees and (b) maintaining connections after receiving their degrees from ISU. In response to the second research question regarding how the study participants’ experiences at ISU influenced their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association, the findings of the study led to two additional themes, as follows: (a) feeling academically supported while enrolled at ISU and (b) finding social engagement while enrolled at ISU. In addition, the study provided some insight into the culture that existed at ISU for African American students.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background

There is enormous wealth waiting to be tapped, and none of us [in the advancement community] have figured a way to do it. I don’t think we’ve fully prepared ourselves for this shift. . . . Indeed, the change train is charging ahead. It is increasingly loaded with new faces from backgrounds with little or no history of giving to education. The trend is challenging institutions to figure out how to court this rapidly changing pool of potential donors. Long standing rules of engagement are being rewritten as the new reality undermines entrenched assumptions about the giving patterns of people of color. It’s spurring new thinking about the effectiveness of race- and ethnicity-based affinity alumni groups and the kind of team and branding message needed to make the case today for giving (Peter Hayashida, Vice Chancellor of University Advancement at the University of California, Riverside, which has a student body that is now majority minority, as cited in Stuart, 2012, p. 21)

Iowa State University (ISU) has enrolled a low percentage of its African American alumni as dues-paying members of its alumni association over the years. This reality is no different than that for many other predominantly White institutions (PWIs) of higher learning. The topic of low minority alumni membership in PWI alumni associations also continues to be widely discussed at the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, as well as at the Council of Alumni Association Executives, at professional meetings, and among alumni association executives and their staff members. Stories of the low joining rates of minority alumni at PWIs have appeared numerous times in the Council for Advancement and Support of Education’s *Currents* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*
articles, but there is a paucity of research on why African American alumni of PWIs join their alma mater’s alumni associations.

**Statement of the Problem**

Iowa State University, like many other PWIs, continues to enlist a low percentage of its African American graduates as members of its alumni association. The general percentage of African American alumni of ISU who become members of the ISU Alumni Association continues to hover around 0.9 percent (Gieseke, 2014). The ISU Alumni Association has tracked this information since 1972.

ISU Alumni Association’s African American alumni membership percentage however is relatively the same as that of its institutional peers. As an example, correspondence received from three of ISU’s peer institutions, each listed by pseudonyms, showed the following information regarding African American alumni membership in their alumni associations: The University of the Midwest had an African American membership percentage of 1.3 percent (Anonymous, personal communication, March 17, 2014), the University of the West showed 1 percent of its membership was African American (Anonymous, personal communication, March 17, 2014), and the University of the States had an African American membership percentage of 0.009 percent (Anonymous, personal communication, March 19, 2014).

A review of the literature revealed that reasons were given why minority alumni are not members of their associations. According to Osborn (1995), “Campuses around the country have had challenges getting minority alumni involved. Whether the reason is perceived problems or painfully real racial incidents, many minorities have left our campuses with degrees, bad memories, and no intention of returning” (p. 20). Minar and Henry (2012)
agreed, positing, “Sadly, many constituents in minority or marginalized groups did not have pleasant college experiences and continue to harbor negative feelings” (p. 11).

Stuart (2012) posited, “Communities of color have evolved over the years, and they demand more meaning and relevance in terms of how they are approached and what messages are targeted at them” (p. 22). This type of thinking, however, seems to be gaining little traction in the profession, as many publications and association professionals still focus only on the low joining rates and giving patterns of minority alumni. Stuart further shared, “A recent study by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation found that African-American and Asian-American households give away a larger percentage of their income each year than whites” (p. 22). Yet, Monk (2002) noted that the results from a national alumni survey show that “Blacks, multi-racial respondents, married individuals, and non-US citizens donate significantly less to their undergraduate institutions than otherwise comparable alumni/ae” (p. 6).

Hall (2010) posited that “the core programs of alumni outreach and engagement have been slow to change at many institutions” (p. 231). Due to this slowness to change many PWIs still find engaging minority alumni to be an uphill battle. Hall further stated that “for decades, our alumni were largely homogeneous, sharing common experiences while students—experiences that often exuded an aura of tradition” (p. 231). Daniels (1999) shared the following statement from Richard E. Carter, the assistant executive director of the University of Michigan Alumni Association:

We knew that, traditionally, [B]lack alumni did not participate in our programs. We also recognized that in the past this constituency had been, for the most part, disenfranchised by the university. As a result, when these students left the university,
they took with them no feeling of ownership in the institution and did not, in the aggregate, return to campus. (p. 5)

Articles in *Currents*, the national professional publication for institutional advancement, have highlighted that alumni associations of PWIs continue to experience low joining rates from their institutions’ African American graduates. For example, A. Bailey (1995) explained,

> But after I graduated and got involved in alumni events and even the alumni board, the lack of minorities staying in touch with alma mater began to bother me a good deal. . . . The reason that stands out foremost to me is that many minority students weren’t included in campus events or organizations as undergraduates. Even when they were included in activities, they were expected to adapt to the majority ([W]hite) culture and abandon any and all symbolism of their own cultures. If they felt ignored then, why should they return now? (p. 56)

Hay (1990) stated,

> If minority alumni don’t have fond feelings about their student days, they may be decidedly unenthusiastic about participating in programs after graduation. Look at [B]lack alumni who have been out for 15 to 20 years and think about what student life was like for them—it was not a pleasant time. . . . I think there’s a pain there, and we as alumni associations have a responsibility to address that. (p. 31)

Carter (1988) further noted,

> As a minority in this country during the ‘50s, ’60, and ‘70s, to attend a historically racist university was an extremely difficult decision, because the racial climate at Brown or any other predominantly [W]hite institution during that period was cold at
best. . . . Of course, race is not the only factor in low participation. Young alumni
don’t tend to get deeply involved at any institution. And many think they don’t have
the time or desire to be involved after graduation. (p. 47)

None of the research literature, however, has examined reasons why minority alumni,
especially African American alumni, of PWIs have chosen to become members of their alma
maters’ alumni associations. “Today, most African American students continue to attend
institutions of higher education where the racial/ethnic composition of the students, faculty,
and staff is predominantly White” (Douglas, 1998, p. 416). Since FY09, according to Iowa
State University’s website, approximately 130 African American students have graduated
from Iowa State University each year. Thus, this study sought to provide some insight into
why African American alumni of ISU joined the ISU Alumni Association and how their
experiences at ISU influenced their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association.

**Purpose of the Study**

As PWIs continue to enroll larger numbers of African American students, thus
producing larger numbers of African American alumni, it should be important for these
institutions to have a better understanding as to why those African American alumni who
choose to join their alma maters’ alumni associations made that decision. The purpose of this
case study was to gain understanding of how the undergraduate experiences of five bachelor-
degreed African American alumni of ISU, a large (>30,000 FTE students), Midwestern,
predominantly White, Research Intensive, NCAA Division 1, land-grant institution,
influenced their decisions to join the ISU Alumni Association. It was also important to
understand why these African American alumni chose to become dues-paying members of
the ISU Alumni Association.
Research Questions

The following two research questions guided this dissertation study:

1. Why do Iowa State University African American graduates join the ISU Alumni Association?
2. How did their experiences at Iowa State University influence their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association?

Significance of the Study

Current research literature is simply silent when it comes to examining reasons why African American alumni of PWIs have chosen to become members of their alma maters’ alumni associations. This study provides some insights into why African American alumni of ISU, a large (>30,000 FTE students), Midwestern, predominantly White, Research Intensive, NCAA Division 1, land-grant institution, did choose to become members of their alma mater’s alumni association. *Currents*, as well as many alumni magazines, report on alumni membership percentages by race, class year, age, college affiliation, gender, and ethnicity. The percentages relative to African American alumni membership, regardless of institutional type, and including historically Black colleges and universities, are low. Therefore, as PWIs graduate a greater number of African American students, there is a need to understand why these alumni choose to become alumni association members.

The case study approach used to conduct this research offers rich, thick descriptions (Merriam; 1988). This study also showcases an in-depth look into the lives and experiences of five African American alumni from their undergraduate days at ISU. This study should serve as a resource to university officials and staff members interested in improving their African American alumni membership rates. This study should add an important piece of
research to the almost nonexistent literature on African American alumni involvement in PWIs’ alumni associations.

Furthermore, this case study sought to fill some of the void in the research by providing insights into why five African American alumni of ISU chose to become dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association. It shares how their experiences at ISU influenced their decision to become dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association. The study also may serve as a resource for university alumni relations’ officers who are in search of practical methodology to prepare employees for successful interactions with African American alumni. Finally, this research may serve as a starting-point tool for alumni relations officials to increase their understanding of, awareness about, and perceptions toward minority alumni involvement in their alma maters’ alumni associations.

**Conceptual Framework**

For the purpose of this dissertation research, I utilized a case study approach. Merriam (2002) posited that “a case study is less of a methodological choice than ‘a choice of what is to be studied.’” The ‘what’ is a bounded system, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (p. 178).

As with the early work of the Chicago School in the 1920s (Esterberg; 2002), this qualitative study sought to understand a social phenomenon of alumni association membership. The phenomenon this study focused on is the alumni association membership decision of five ISU African American alumni and how their experiences at ISU influenced their decision to join the alumni association. Accepting the fact that all social reality is constructed or created by those involved and that those interactions are given meaning by
those interacting with them (Crotty; 1998; Esterberg; 2002; Merriam; 2002; Prasad, 2005), this study utilized basic interpretivism as its theoretical perspective.

Crotty (1998) defined theoretical perspective as “the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria” (p. 3), and continued, “by expounding our theoretical perspective, that is, our view of the human world and social life within that world, wherein such assumptions are grounded” (p. 7). Therefore, in basic interpretive research, “what is of paramount importance is how we order, classify, structure, and interpret our world, and then act upon these interpretations” (Prasad, 2005, p. 13). Merriam (2002) stated that in a basic interpretive and descriptive qualitative study, “the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive” (p. 6).

**Definitions of Terms**

The terms that this case study utilized and need to have defined for its readers are: *alumna*, *alumnae*, *alumnus*, and *alumni*; *alumni association member(s)*; *Carver Academy*; *institutional advancement*; *Iowa State University*; *people of color*; and *predominantly White institutions*. The definitions are as follows:

*Alumna, alumnae, alumnus, and alumni*: The American Heritage Dictionary (1991, pp. 99–100) defines *alumna* as “a female graduate or former student of a school, college, or university” and *alumnae* as the plural of alumna. *Alumnus* is defined as “a male graduate or former student of a school, college, or university.” *Alumni* is the plural of alumnus but is traditionally used to be inclusive of both genders. For the purpose of this study, the terms *alumna, alumnae, alumnus, and/or alumni*, refer only to those
who have graduated and hold, at minimum, an undergraduate degree from ISU. The term *alumni* is inclusive of male and female graduates.

*Alumni association member(s):* an alumna, an alumnus, or alumni who has (have) voluntarily self-paid the appropriate membership fees/dues to be listed as active members of the ISU Alumni Association. No distinction is made among these alumni about whether they are annual, life, or installment life members of the association. The emphasis is placed on the fact that these African American alumni are coded in the ISU records system as current dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association.

*Carver Academy:* a recruitment and academic program designed to promote the holistic development of the ISU George Washington Carver scholars in their acclimation to ISU, academic success, individual identification, community service, leadership skills, and career goals. The Carver Academy offers guidance and enrichment to its participants in an environment that fosters continuous learning, achievement, diversity, and integrity.

*Institutional advancement:* responsible for bringing together the functions of public relations, publications, alumni relations, and development to garner support for all the programs and activities of colleges and universities. The units tell the campus’s story thus engaging the time, talents, and treasures of the public, corporations, other foundations, alumni, students, parents, faculty, staff, institutional friends, and others in the life, work, and aspiration of the institution (Rowland, 1986, p. 6).

*Iowa State University (ISU):* a large (>30,000 FTE students), Midwestern, predominantly White, Research Intensive, NCAA Division 1, land-grant institution located in Ames,
Iowa. Ames is a metropolitan city of more than 65,000 residents, consisting of 33,000-plus students and some 32,000-plus residents.

*People of color:* non-White racial groups.

*Predominantly White institutions (PWIs):* colleges or universities at which most of the faculty, administrators, and staff are White, even though there may be a large concentration of minority students.

**Dissertation Overview**

This dissertation is organized in six chapters. Chapter 1 of this study provides an introduction and overview of the research study. Chapter 2 documents some of the literature surrounding African Americans’ participation in U.S. higher education. The chapter includes information about the history of alumni relations in the United States and when institutions began their efforts to engage alumni. Further, chapter 2 provides a discussion about the benefits alumni associations offer to their universities and alumni and why alumni in general join their alma maters’ alumni associations. The chapter also explores the types of alumni associations and benefits alumni associations offer to alumni. The chapter then takes a look at the campus experiences of African American alumni on predominantly White campuses. Chapter 2 concludes with information regarding what alumni associations of PWIs have done to reach out to their African American alumni and the results of those early, sustained efforts by these PWIs. What this chapter clearly demonstrates is the paucity of research on why African American alumni have joined their alumni associations.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to conduct this research. The epistemology, methodology, methods, goodness and trustworthiness, and researcher positionality are explained in depth in this chapter. Chapter 4 offers a description of the
cases studied. In this chapter, I describe the settings where the interviews took place and the characteristics of the alumni members. The decisions to join and the experiences that influenced the decisions of the African American alumni to join the Association, through themes that emerged during the data analysis process, are set forth in Chapter 5. Chapter 6, the dissertation’s final chapter, provides a discussion of the findings, recommendations for practice, recommendations for future research, and personal reflections.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study squarely focused on understanding the membership decisions of why five bachelor-degreed African American alumni of ISU chose to join the ISU Alumni Association and how their experiences at ISU influenced their decisions to become members of the ISU Alumni Association. To position this study, it is equally important for the reader to understand the history of African Americans’ participation in U.S. higher education, the history of alumni relations in the United States, when U.S. higher education alumni engagement started, benefits alumni associations offer to their institutions, benefits offered to alumni by their alumni associations, why alumni in general join their alma mater’s alumni associations, campus experiences of African American alumni on PWIs, and what alumni associations of PWIs have done to reach out to their African American alumni. The following literature review seeks to inform readers of this dissertation on these topics.

African Americans’ Participation in U.S. Higher Education

The participation rate of African Americans in higher education has been a concern for many in the United States’ academic community, particularly since many institutions in the southern and south western regions of the nation historically refused to admit persons of African descent. This practice was part of an apartheid-style mix of laws, regulations, and practices called Jim Crow that lasted from 1898 to the mid-1960s. Responding to a series of court cases and new laws, formerly all-White institutions opened their doors to all students. (Burley, Butner, Causey-Bush, & Bush, 2007, p. 1)

Hanson (1998) stated, “Higher education was once reserved for a privileged few, and universities were designed to further the learning of those who were well prepared to begin
with” (p. 1). Since 1920, this “well-prepared” group’s offspring, known as legacies, have also been receiving preferential admissions to elite colleges and universities attended by their parents or grandparents (Martindale, 2007). “The 2003 Supreme Court ruling that upheld affirmative action in college admissions has brought legacy programs under scrutiny. Critics of both programs perceive them to be unfair policies that give some applicants an underserved advantage over others” (Martindale, 2007, para. 2).

Leeff (2008) asked, “Why do colleges and universities court legacies and sometimes admit them in preference to other applicants with stronger academic profiles?” (para. 5). Leeff continued, “The answer, simply, is money. Many schools believe that they are apt to receive more in donations by admitting legacies” (para. 5). As stated above, alumni donations have been decreasing, so many schools have employed legacy admission programs as another strategy of engaging its alumni and drawing them closer to the school (Martindale, 2007). Data from the University of Virginia’s 2006 capital campaign showed that “legacy parents were more generous, giving an average of more than $34,000 each, while the take from non-legacy parents was barely above $4,000 each” (Leeff, 2008, para. 5). “Some believe that legacy programs detract from a school’s goal of increasing diversity on campus and may even be racist, since legacy programs usually benefit whites more than blacks” (Martindale, 2007 para. 4).

As it relates to diversity and to this study, Hanson (1998) wrote, “All of this changed with the GI Bill in 1944, which opened the doors to new types and much larger numbers of college students” (p. 1). Hanson further stated, “The sometimes reluctant new emphasis on teaching is due not only to increasing numbers but also to dramatic changes in student
demographics. By approximately 2030, the proportion of non-Hispanic white high school students will drop to the 50% mark” (p. 1).

“Enrollment of minorities in higher education rose from 15.7% in 1976 to 25.3% in 1995. Increases came mainly among Asian (moving from 2% to 6%) and Hispanic (4% to 8%) students” (Hanson, 1998, p. 1).

Black students who attended predominantly white colleges and universities before 1967 entered gradually enough so that they could be accommodated without strain. This situation changed dramatically after 1967 . . . by 1968 . . . black students were attending white institutions in increasing numbers (Gamson, Peterson, & Blackburn, 1980, p. 2).

However, “though both de jure and de facto segregation had ended, many African Americans experienced these formerly all-white institutions as hostile environments. . . . In fact, many institutions have developed myriad programs intended to address student access and retention” (Burley et al., 2007, pp. 1–2). Douglas (1998) pointed out, “Today, most African American students continue to attend institutions of higher education where the racial/ethnic composition of the students, faculty, and staff is predominantly White” (p. 416). With these increases, a greater number of minority graduates will make up these institutions’ alumni rosters in the future.

**History of Alumni Relations in the United States**

Today, higher education, especially public higher education, has increased its commitment to alumni involvement (volunteers), alumni engagement (members), and alumni giving (donors). The term used to cover these areas and many other external functions set aside within higher education to “secure the resources they need to achieve their academic
goals” (Rowland 1986, p. IX) is institutional advancement. Rowland (1986) posited that “the resources may be students, faculty, or dollars” (p. IX). Rowland also stated that “advancement professionals at colleges and universities are responsible for a wide variety of activities, including fundraising, alumni administration, enrollment management, media and community relations, production and distribution of publications, and more” (jacket cover).

Alumni involvement, on the other hand, covers a wide range of activities, from assisting with student recruitment, serving as mentors to current students, and representing the institution at key functions, to advocating on behalf of the university with elected officials at local, state, and federal levels. Harvard has been documented as having the earliest “alumni-like” program in the country, dating back to 1643, followed by Yale, which went on to appoint its first alumni secretary in 1792, with the concept spreading to Princeton (1826); Miami of Ohio (1832); Virginia (1837); Columbia, Oberlin and Denison (1839); Brown and Amherst (1842); and Michigan (1860) (Rowland, 1986, p. 2). ISU started its program in 1878. Rowland (1986) posited, “By the late nineteenth century, more than a hundred alumni organizations had been formed” (p. 6). Today’s alumni are not just involved with their institutions for organizing reunions and homecoming. They are literally, through partnering with their institutions, helping shape, sustain, and push their alma maters to new heights.

Finally, there is the need for and the expected outcome of alumni giving. As many institutions have suffered budget cuts, shrinking enrollments, loss of corporate and federal funding, and dwindling corporate investments, the focus on alumni giving has significantly increased. Today, many institutions would find themselves in a very different position had
they not had the support of their alumni. Many institutions have also found that, the earlier they engage students, the greater the opportunity to produce better, more engaged alumni.

**When Does Alumni Engagement Start**

Alexander Astin’s theory of student involvement explains how desirable outcomes for institutions of higher education are viewed in relation to how students change and develop in result to being involved cocurricularly (Alexander Astin’s theory, n.d.).

The core concepts of the theory are composed of three elements. The first, a student’s “inputs” such as the student’s demographics, background, and any previous experiences. The second is the student's “environment,” which accounts for all of the experiences a student would have during college. Finally, there are “outcomes,” which cover a student’s characteristics, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and values that exist after a student has graduated college. (Alexander Astin’s theory, n.d., para. 4)

First and foremost, student fit, student success, persistence to graduation, and involvement in campus life are critical elements that lead to students becoming “right” candidates for long-term institutional connectedness as alumni. “Student success . . . is dependent on student involvement in the social and academic communities of the university or college, along with personal characteristics that make the student a good fit to the institution” (Burley et al., 2007, p. 2). Therefore, it is important to get students involved in the life of the institution as early in their academic career as possible.

Many universities have created student alumni and leadership programs to engage students with their institutions early on. Others have created “rites of passage” programs to further connect students with the campus’ history and traditions. Others have developed student dues programs, annual giving programs, class gift programs, and single ring
programs to further connect students to the campus and with each other. Singer and Hughey (2002) posited, “Within the scope of alumni affairs, alumni are merely students who have graduated” (p. 51).

McClintock (2009) commented,

Alumni must be cultivated while they are students. . . . Colleges and universities will always need to reach out to the broader community to attract resources. On the way, they should not forget to “reach in” to the young men and women who have the potential to be their best leaders, their most generous supporters, and their strongest advocates. (p. 47)

In a 2010 Development and Alumni Relations Report, it was noted that “it’s sometimes difficult to get senior college students to understand that once they graduate, they will be expected to give back to the institution in the same ways that so many others before them have done” (“Collaboration Helped Increase,” 2010, p. 6).

**Types of Alumni Associations**

Alumni relations seek to define the nature of the relationship of the alumni with their alma mater. Many colleges and universities gauge the strength of such relationships through a voluntary alumni dues program or an institution-based annual fund program. The overall intent is to have alumni go from being loyal and proud graduates of these institutions to being invested in the future well-being of these institutions.

**Benefits Offered by Alumni Associations**

**Benefits to the Institution**

More and more, today’s colleges and universities will need to engage greater numbers of its alumni, including minority alumni, to meet the financial, service, and ambassador
needs of their institutions. Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) noted, “After decades of
generous public and private support, American postsecondary education now clearly finds
itself facing serious questions and concerns about the efficiency and effectiveness of colleges
and universities” (p. 5). Mark Emmert, past president of the University of Washington
wrote, “Higher education is suffering while states funnel more money into prisons, health
care and social programs” (“Regents Need Control,” 2010, para. 3). In that same article, he
also commented, “The only way for four-year public universities to continue to provide a
high-quality education is to give them a firm financial foundation. They don’t have that
today with caps on tuition and shrinking allocation of state dollars” (para. 2).

Regarding private support, according to the Council for Aid to Education, which
recently released its annual Voluntary Support of Education survey, “donations to colleges
and universities in the U.S. dropped by about 12 percent in the 2009 fiscal year”
(“Institutions See Contributions,” 2010). Furthermore, “there are fewer than 20 colleges and
universities in the United States in which at least half of the alumni contribute financially to
their alma mater in any given year” (McClintock, 2009, p. 44). McClintock (2009) also
stated, “For public research universities, philanthropic support is down 9.3%” (p. 46). As it
relates to minority alumni, “fund-raising officials at predominantly White institutions suggest
that minority alumni do not contribute as much or as frequently as do white alumni” (Nicklin,
1994, p. 2). Nicklin (1994) further stated, “A number of colleges say they have to work extra
hard to attract gifts from black, Hispanic, and Asian alumni because, historically, traditional
patterns of giving among minority groups have not included colleges” (pp. 4–5), adding,
“Black families traditionally have focused their giving on churches” (p. 5).
Benefits to the Alumni

Alumni benefit from the sense of belonging that comes with being part of something larger than oneself. Alumni associations are also known to be prestigious because of the lofty stigma attached to being among the educated elite. To further understand this phenomenon, I took some time to study the theory of social identity theory. This theory speaks to the following:

It is the perception of belongingness to a group classification. The individual perceives him or herself as an actual or symbolic member of the group. Through social identification, he or she perceives him or herself as psychologically intertwined with the fate of the group, as sharing a common destiny and experiencing its successes and failures. Identification allows the individual to vicariously partake in accomplishments beyond his or her powers, and can render personally harmful activities worthwhile insofar as they aid the larger self. Under this perspective, organizational identification is a specific form of social identification where the individual defines him or herself in terms of their membership in a particular organization. (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, pp. 104–105)

Why Alumni Generally Join Their Alma Mater’s Alumni Associations

Mael and Ashforth (1992) stated, “The amount of time in which a person is actively involved with an organization is positively associated with identity, though the slope of the association should gradually decrease over time” (p. 108). They also stated that “individuals who identify with the organization are apt to support the organization in various ways” (Mael & Ashfort, 1992, p. 117). Mael and Ashforth also commented, “For the alumnus, continued
affiliation with the alma mater often provides intellectual stimulation, prestige, identity stability, and a vehicle for altruistic or tax-motivated donations” (p. 106).

Alumni generally join their alumni association because they feel a keen sense of connectedness and loyalty to members of the faculty. Mael and Ashforth (1992) stated, “It is posited that individuals who establish a close, mentor-like relationship with a faculty member will exhibit greater [organizational identity]” (p. 108). Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn (1995) commented,

The phenomenon of identification has been well studied by organizational researchers. These studies have been either of employees of an organization or the alumni of educational institutions. When a person identifies with an organization, he or she perceives a sense of connectedness to an organization and defines him- or herself in terms of the organization. (p. 46)

Furthermore, “organizational researchers have consistently shown that the identification of members, such as employees or alumni, leads to increased member loyalty to the organization” (Bhattacharya et al., 1995, p. 46).

“Researchers in organizational behavior have shown that satisfaction with the institution’s contributions to the attainment of personal goals is associated with identification” (Bhattacharya et al., 1995, p. 48). Bhattacharya et al. (1995) hypothesized that “the perceived prestige of the focal organization is positively related to identification. The notion that consumers buy products to extend their selves and enhance their self-esteem is well documented in the literature” (p. 48). Mael and Ashforth (1992) stated that “identification is the perceived prestige of the institution. The individual identifies with a group partly to enhance self-esteem” (p. 107).
Campus Experiences of African American Alumni on Predominantly White Campuses

There is an extensive amount of research on the experiences of African American students on the campuses of PWIs. To list them all would make this section of the dissertation too exhaustive. Therefore, the following passages are offered to provide a clear picture of what the literature has to say regarding the experiences of African American students on predominantly White campuses. Douglas (1998) described,

The majority of the students were highly conscious of their race/ethnicity while on Willsfield’s [a PWI] campus. As Elmalik related in a small group interview, “When I go out on campus, it seems like I wear my skin color—with a magnifying glass. It’s like, all of a sudden, Black is just in my head.” . . . Jerome, another student in the interview added, “White students and others on campus stared at Black students ‘a lot.’” Elmalik contended that it was more than the stares that disturbed him; rather, the constant awareness of his minority status at a predominantly White institution was disconcerting for him. (p. 422)

Carter (1998), another author, noted,

As a minority in this country during the ‘50s, ‘60s, and ‘70s, to attend a historically racist university was an extremely difficult decision, because the racial climate at Brown or any other predominantly white institution during that period was cold at best. (p. 46)

In addition, Allen (1992) posited, “On the average, African American students who attend predominantly White institutions do not perform as well academically as Whites” (p. 29).

Furthermore, although some institutions are strong academically, they seem to lack enough opportunities for building lasting relationships. Such was the case at University of
Missouri–St. Louis. Kathy Osborn (1995), who served as the alumni director there, stated in an article titled “Leaving the Past Behind,” “Common experiences do not always lead to common feelings” (p. 20). Osborn believed that PWIs should spend less time on mending fences. More time needed to be spent asking questions, listening, and providing African American alumni with the things they say they need. According to Hayashida, “it takes time, sensitivity, and focus on the individual and his or her interests. . . . They just don’t give the way White people do” (as cited in Stuart, 2012, p. 21).

**Ways Alumni Associations on Predominantly White Campuses Have Reached Out to Their African American Alumni**

Most colleges and universities have tried many strategies to improve the relationships their institutions have with their minority alumni. Burley et al. (2007) posited, “Building bridges to these alumni and nurturing long-term relationships is critically important” (p. 9). It is also clear that many universities have “to create a black alumni association and various boards that include African American alumni” (Burley et al., 2007, p. 9) as a way to show their institutions are serious about involving and serving this somewhat “we feel alienated” population of graduates. Mael and Ashforth (1992) further stated, “The more prestigious the organization, the greater the potential boost to self-esteem through identification” (p. 107).

Many PWIs have developed a myriad of programs intended to address and attract a greater number of African American graduates to membership in their alumni associations. Colleges and universities have also created Black alumni constituent groups, scholarship opportunities, and mentoring programs. Additionally, institutions have developed programs that range from annual or periodic Black alumni reunion weekends to Black alumni councils and advisory boards (Stuart, 2012, p. 21).
Literature further showed that some institutions have programs ranging from adding a special seat to their association’s governing board for Black alumni representation to establishing special awards and programs to honor and recognize Black alumni achievement and institutional involvement. Many of these efforts have produced modest if any substantial changes in overall membership percentages of African Americans joining alumni associations. Even with these efforts, there continues to be a paucity of research on why African American alumni of PWIs have chosen to join their alma maters’ alumni associations.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Approach

To carry out this study on why five African American bachelor-degreed alumni of ISU chose to join the ISU Alumni Association and how their experiences influenced their decision to join the association, I chose to use qualitative research. There are a number of reasons why I made this choice. First, as described by Merriam (2002),

Qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world. The world, or reality, is not the fixed, single, agreed upon, or measureable phenomenon that it is assumed to be in positivist, quantitative research. Instead, there are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding what the interpretations are in a point in time and in a particular context. (pp. 3 –4)

Second,

Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of the setting—what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting. . . . The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (Merriam, 2002, p. 5)
Therefore, researchers have to be extremely careful not to give their personal “meaning” to a phenomenon, but must work extremely hard to portray, or construct, the participants’ meanings.

Third, as defined by Shank (2002), qualitative research is “a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning” (p. 5). By systematic, Shank meant “planned, ordered and public,” following rules agreed upon by members of the qualitative research community. By empirical, Shank meant that this type of inquiry is grounded in the world of experience. Inquiry into meaning points to researchers trying to understand how others make sense of their experience.

Fourth, qualitative research is a method of inquiry employed in many different academic disciplines, traditionally in the social sciences, but also in market research and further contexts. Qualitative researchers aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior. The qualitative method investigates the why and how of decision making, not just what, where, and when. Hence, smaller but focused samples are more often needed, rather than large samples.

Fifth, K. D. Bailey (1994) stated, “Social research has traditionally been defined as gathering of data that can help us answer questions about various aspects of society and can thus enable us to understand society” (p. 4). For example, social scientists and anthropologists carry out this research to better inform society on such matters as family, women’s issues, etc. Social research may also be asked to “provide the answers to questions of theoretical interest to a social science discipline. Such questions may have no apparent application in present society” (K. D. Bailey, 1994, p. 4). Overall, the goal of social research is to further the work of social scientist (K. D. Bailey, 1994, p. 7).
Finally, Ragin (1994) posited that researchers use qualitative methods when they believe that the best way to construct a proper representation is through in-depth study of phenomena. Often they address phenomena that they believe have been seriously misrepresented, sometimes by social researchers using other approaches, or perhaps not represented at all. (p. 102)

Dr. Robyn Cooper, my Research and Evaluation 580 instructor at ISU, was instrumental in insisting how important it is to do qualitative research correctly. Dr. Cooper further solidified my understanding of qualitative research through Oldfather and West’s (1994) metaphoric jazz example. Oldfather and West described qualitative research as being like improvisational jazz. They stated that “qualitative research embodies both deep structure and collective freedom” (p. 22). What does this mean, and how does this apply to my research?

When one hears jazz, the artist, like a researcher, is truly the instrument. He or she improvises to bring deeper meaning to the music written or expressed by others. This is exactly what a researcher has to do when documenting the findings in qualitative research. Merriam (2002) stated that in a basic interpretive and descriptive qualitative study, “the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive” (p. 6).

Collaboration among participants in a jazz ensemble is also critical to the success of the piece. It is well known that jazz musicians are musically inclusive. Furthermore, the participation of the audience is important to jazz musicians and the success of the performance. Oldfather and West (1994) posited that “jazz is adaptive and is shaped by the
participants. The improvisations are collaborative and interdependent; the quality of the music depends on each musician hearing, responding to, and appreciating the performance of other players” (p. 22).

The use of qualitative research to learn more about how the experiences of five African American bachelor-degreed alumni of ISU shaped their alumni membership decision based on their experiences can be situated comfortably in the above-mentioned jazz metaphor. Each study participant, in many ways, had both similar and different experiences at ISU. In other words, each brought their own instruments (experiences) to this study. As I interviewed them, I was able to listen to their music (stories). It was critical for me to listen to and categorize these experiences to understand which ones, if any, were similar (made the music). This aided me greatly as I determined the shared findings that were critical to shaping their membership decisions.

The personal backgrounds of each study participant were important to the findings of this study. The study participants’ backgrounds coupled with their experiences at ISU shed additional light on the meaning making surrounding their individual and collective alumni association membership decisions. Through their stories, the participants in this study provided rich, thick descriptions and information about those experiences that led them to become members of the ISU Alumni Association. The presence of these African American alumni voices adds clarity and legitimacy to alumni association membership decisions.

A major difficulty in conducting social research is that one must often study social behavior in its natural setting, where there are many extraneous factors that are difficult to control (K. D. Bailey, 1994, p. 19). Another concern is not mistaking working in a setting as being observation. To achieve credibility, relative to observation, researchers need to be
deeply involved and closely connected to the scene. Furthermore, observation is critical to conducting good social research. As such, the researcher needs to achieve enough distance from the phenomenon being studied in order to record actions and interpret observations free of the researchers own stake.

Although each research project is unique in some ways, all projects involve the same basic stages. These are: choosing the problem and stating the hypothesis, designing the research (identifying the variables to test and what group of people to test the hypothesis), gathering the data, coding and analyzing the data, and interpreting the results and testing the hypothesis (K. D. Bailey, 1994, p. 18). To accomplish all of this, the qualitative approach truly worked best for this research.

Qualitative research, as compared to quantitative research, brings to life the participants who supplied the data rather than leaving them abstract and enclosed in numbers. Qualitative research also provides a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, as one gets to study a few cases in-depth. Patton (2002) confirmed this statement regarding qualitative research when he posited that researchers gain “a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases. This increases the depth of understanding of the cases and situations studied but reduces generalizability” (p. 14). A qualitative approach was perfect for this study, as I sought to understand why five bachelor-degreed African American alumni at ISU chose to become members of the ISU Alumni Association and how their experiences influenced their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association.

**Philosophical Foundation**

Epistemology, theoretical framework, methodology, methods (E-T-M-M) is essential to good qualitative research. These abbreviations and their meanings were provided to my
cohorts and me during our early classes in ISU’s higher education program by Dr. Robyn Cooper, a former education and leadership policy faculty member of ISU.

Crotty (1998) defined epistemology as “how we know what we know” (p. 8). The “nature of knowledge” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8) is fully explored when conducting qualitative research. During the interview phase, researchers are able to fully explore study participants’ journeys to see how they came to know what they know about the research topic. Crotty also defined epistemology as “the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology” (p. 3). Therefore, I chose to use a constructivist epistemology approach to understand why five bachelor-degreed African American graduates of ISU chose to become dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association and how their experiences influenced or helped them construct a membership reality in their lives.

Constructionism, as defined by Crotty (1998), is “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). Clearly, meaning is constructed, not discovered, and “people will construct meaning in different ways” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon.

According to Crotty (1998), theoretical perspective is “the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria” (p. 3). “By expounding our theoretical perspective, that is, our view of the human world and social life within that world, wherein such assumptions are grounded”
(Crotty, 1998, p. 7). I utilized a basic interpretive approach to move toward my findings. Overall, I was interested in “understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon” (Merriam, 2002, p. 7).

The methodology I applied to this study is phenomenology. Crotty (1998) defined methodology as “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes” (p. 3). Jones (2002) stated that qualitative methodologies are grounded in “a concern for developing depth of understanding of a particular phenomenon and the construction of meaning that individuals attribute to experience” (p. 461).

Phenomenology is “about saying ‘No!’ to the meaning system bequeath[ed] to us.” It is about “setting that meaning system aside” (Crotty, 1998, p. 82). When conducting qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to remember that the experiences will be those of the study participants. Qualitative researchers seek to understand the essence of the study participants’ experiences, how those experiences shaped their worlds around them, and their meanings relative to the research question the researcher is seeking to answer.

Edmund Husserl (1913/1962) is considered the father of phenomenology (p. 1). A key point that Husserl made is that “phenomenology does not deny the existence of the real world, but [seeks] instead to clarify the sense of this world (which everyone accepts) as actually existing” (p. 1). Husserl made it clear that qualitative researchers have to set aside the question of real existence as well as questions about the subject’s physical nature. Husserl was firm in his resolve that “these questions are left to the natural sciences” (p. 163).

Husserl’s (1913/1962) best example is that the experience of seeing a tree qualifies as an experience, whether the tree appears in reality, in a dream, or in a hallucination. We are
simply to suspend belief in what we ordinarily take for granted—in other words, as Husserl said, to “reduce the natural world to its pure consciousness so that what we are left with is a pure framework with which to consider the mindset and methodology of phenomenology” (p. 163). Husserl further explained,

While phenomenology is primarily concerned with the systematic reflection and analysis of the structures of consciousness, it is to take place from a highly modified “first person” viewpoint: studying phenomena not as they appear to “my” consciousness, but to any consciousness whatsoever. . . . Phenomenology could provide a firm basis for all human knowledge, including scientific knowledge, and could establish philosophy as a rigorous science. (p. 155)

Using phenomenology, researchers attempt to describe and interpret the complexities of a particular human experience. The challenge of this inquiry is to repeatedly reflect upon an event, or other lived moment, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how participants experience, interpret, and make meaning of a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 83). Researchers who engage in phenomenology usually do not prescribe any rigid rules for conducting phenomenological research (Van Manen, 1990, p. 37).

Phenomenology is sometimes considered a philosophical perspective as well as an approach to qualitative methodology. It has a long history in several social research disciplines including psychology, sociology and social work. Phenomenology is a school of thought that emphasizes a focus on people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world. That is, the phenomenologist wants to understand how the world appears to others. (Husserl, 1913/1962, p. 1)
The ways in which one’s orientation to knowledge is advanced affects the research methods used and the different criteria utilized by researchers with different orientations. In conducting this study, I sought an “understanding about the essence and the underlying structure of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 2002, p. 38)—in short, how did my study participants come to know what they know about the phenomenon (becoming dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association)?

Finally, methods used were defined by Crotty (1998) as “the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis” (p. 3). The methodology for this dissertation was qualitative case study research. The next section of this chapter provides insight into the background of case study research, defines case study methodology, examines the relevance of case study methodology, explores the characteristics and misconceptions of case study, and describes case study research design, data collection, and discusses how theories are created from case study research.

Qualitative researchers must remember that qualitative methods produce information only about the particular cases studied and that any more general conclusions are only propositions/informed assertions. It also must be clear that the choice(s) of which interpretive practice(s) to employ are not necessarily set in advance. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) stated that “the choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked, and the questions depend on the context, what is available in the context, and what the researcher can do in that setting” (p. 4). For this research, a case study methodology was used to understand why five bachelor-degreed African American alumni of ISU chose to become members of the ISU Alumni Association and how their experiences at ISU influenced their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association.
Research Design

Case study research, as noted by Tellis (1997), has a relatively short history in the United States. Its origin was in Europe, and it is grounded in the social sciences. Sociologists at the University of Chicago, with a 20th century U.S. backdrop, have been widely credited with popularizing case study research as they studied immigration-related issues (Tellis, 1997). The desire to know more about human interactions propelled the increase in case study research.

Case study researchers, such as Dilthey, Giddings, Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg, quickly gave credence to and helped enhance the interest in the credibility of and place for the qualitative form of research. Stake (1978) shared accounts of when Dilthey, a German philosopher, profusely expressed his feelings that the hard sciences did not adequately capture the entire scope of ways of knowing. Then there were the claims by Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg (1991) that show case study research increased in the 1920s and grew even more in the 1930s and on into the World War II period. For the purpose of this dissertation, I have chosen to express my findings in the definitions offered by modern case study methodologists Merriam (1988), Stake (1995), and Yin (2009).

Defining Case Study

Merriam (1988) and Stake (1995) defined case study using terminology of ethnographer Louis Smith. Smith is known for introducing the phrase “bounded system” to the qualitative case study vernacular. The bounded system examines, “a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group” (Merriam, 1988, p. 9).
Yin (2009), on the other hand, provided a more technical definition of case study research:

1. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.
2. The case study inquiry copes with the technical distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interests than data points. As one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion. As another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (p. 18).

During the dissertation research process, my case study reflected a “bounded system,” as described by Merriam (1988) and Stake (1995). The case study methodology took into consideration the technical definition offered by Yin (2009). The “bounded system” in my dissertation study was the meaning making the five African American alumni of ISU attributed to their decision to become dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association and the experiences that influenced their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association.

Relevance of Case Studies

To have a clear understanding of case study methodology, it is critical to acknowledge the important role case studies play in research. First, there is the great richness that qualitative case studies produce. Second, there is a depth of information about a phenomenon that is part of a bounded system (Creswell, 2009; Feagin et al., 1991). A number of authors have described qualitative case study as being rich and thick in description.
to provide a deeper understanding of the case being investigated (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995).

Through in-depth study, the case study methodology promotes the increase of knowledge. According to Feagin et al. (1991), relevant knowledge is ascertained through the use of case studies. To make their point about the merits of case study research, the authors noted,

1. It permits the grounding of observations and concepts about social action and social structure in natural settings studied at close hand.

2. It provides information from a number of sources and over a period of time, thus permitting a more holistic study of complex social networks and of complexes of social action and social meanings.

3. It can furnish the dimensions of time and history to the study of social life, thereby enabling the investigator to examine continuity and change in lifeworld patterns (pp. 6–7).

**Characteristics of Case Studies**

Characteristics commonly found in case study research were identified by Merriam (1988). Particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive were among the descriptions the author used to describe case studies. For example, when Merriam (1988) described a case study as being descriptive, she was highlighting the rich and thick description that explains or interprets events of the particular topic being researched (p. 13).

Multiple forms of case studies exist. Stake (1995) described intrinsic and instrumental case studies in his writings. Merriam (1988) offered several types of case study
commonly found in educational research. These case study types ranged from ethnographic to historical to psychological to sociological to descriptive to interpretive to evaluative.

Stake’s (1995) description of intrinsic case study is that the study is conducted by the researcher due to the researcher’s general interest in the case. The case is completed by the researcher because it provides the researcher with an intrinsic sense of satisfaction. On the other hand, a particular phenomenon explored by an instrumental case study provides the researcher with a “general understanding” (Stake, 1995, p. 3). The latter is an instrument used to gain insight.

Merriam’s (1988) definition of an ethnographic case study includes that it “is characterized by its sociocultural interpretation” (p. 24). Case studies that are historical tend to be descriptive in nature. Historical case studies also look at progression of a phenomenon over time and rely heavily on primary source materials to inform the study.

For psychological case studies, the focus is “on the individual as a way to investigate some aspect of human behavior” (Merriam, 1988, p. 25). A psychological case study is concerned with the individual, whereas a sociological case study in education seeks to examine groups of people, their interaction, and how they influence social structures in society.

When wanting to supply a close examination of a phenomenon and shed light on a topic, often descriptive case study methodology is employed. Some critics have been skeptical of descriptive case study work because they see it as atheoretical. Merriam (1988) strongly defended descriptive case studies, describing them as “useful . . . in presenting basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted” (p. 27). Interpretive case studies focus on gathering data so that researchers are able to interpret the
findings and begin the process of creating theory from the case study. Evaluative case study, the final form mentioned by Merriam (1988), has similarities to other forms of case study. However, this latter form of case study focuses on describing, explaining, and exploring the phenomenon being studied through an evaluative process.

This dissertation research was instrumental in nature as it offers a “general understanding” of the meaning making these five, undergraduate-degreed, African American alumni of ISU attributed to their decision to become dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association and the experiences that influenced their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association. This case study followed Merriam’s (1988) descriptive case study approach to offer an in-depth, descriptive account of the phenomenon.

Components of Case Study Design

Questions of “how” and “why” are consistently associated with qualitative research. Yin (2009) named research question(s), propositions/purpose, unit of analysis, logic connecting data to propositions, and criteria for interpreting findings as the five components of case study research design. As to the number of research questions appropriate for a qualitative study, Creswell (2009) suggested researchers “ask one or two questions followed by no more than five to seven subquestions” (p. 129). This research study used a “why” and a “how” question. The “why” question was used to explain the reasons these five African American alumni of ISU chose to join the ISU Alumni Association. The “how” question was used to gain a greater understanding of the experiences that influenced the five, undergraduate-degreed, African American alumni to join the ISU Alumni Association.

The second component of case study research design is usually the study’s purpose, sometimes listed as the purpose statement. Again, Creswell (2009) offered qualitative
researchers a “script” as they develop the purpose statement of the study. The script is inclusive of what methodology will be used, what the study will examine, who the participants will be, and where the research site will be. The purpose of the present case study was to understand the meaning making five African American alumni of ISU attributed to their decision to become dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association and the experiences at ISU that influenced their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association.

Case study research design’s third component is generally the unit of analysis. This was described by Yin (2009) as simply what the case study is analyzing. Yin stated, “Selection of the appropriate unit of analysis will occur when you accurately specify your primary research questions” (p. 30). The research questions developed by the researcher are always directly tied to the unit of analysis. The units of analysis in this study were the five African American alumni who joined the ISU Alumni Association.

Case study research’s fourth and fifth components consist of connecting the data to propositions and the criteria for interpreting findings. The connecting data to proposition component is completed following the data collection phase as themes emerge. The researcher attempts to match patterns that appear in the data to the theoretical proposition of the case study as the data is being analyzed. I connected the data back to answering the research questions, provided in chapter 1, as the themes emerged in this study. Researchers commonly code the data prior to developing the themes (Yin, 2009). This latter component, the fifth component, allowed me to carefully extract meaning from the findings to determine recommendations for practice and future research.
Theory in Case Study Research

Misconceptions have surrounded case study methodology. Case study research has also been criticized as being atheoretical. Flyvbjerg (2006) identified the following five misunderstandings surrounding case study research:

Misunderstanding 1: General, theoretical (content-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge.

Misunderstanding 2: One cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case; therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development.

Misunderstanding 3: The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, that is, in the first stage of a total research process, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building.

Misunderstanding 4: The case study contains a bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions.

Misunderstanding 5: It is often difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies. (p. 221)

Counterpoints justifying and correcting case study methodology misunderstandings were provided by the work of Flyvbjerg (2006). While acknowledging the shortcomings or limitations of case study research, such as small sample size and greater researcher subjectivity, the author made two very important points regarding the merit of case study research, as follows:

- Case studies supply a much deeper understanding, and
- Case studies compliment quantitative research.
I made every effort, as the research for this study was conducted, to create knowledge in an area where very little, if any, currently exists regarding the meaning making five African American alumni of ISU, a large (>30,000 FTE students), predominantly White, Research Intensive, Midwestern, NCAA Division 1, land-grant institution, attributed to their decision to become dues-paying ISU Alumni Association members. Open-coding and theme development was central to my data analysis process.

**Research Site**

Iowa State University is a large (>30,000 FTE students), Midwestern, land grant, predominantly White, Research Intensive, NCAA Division 1, land-grant institution. It is located in Ames, Iowa, a town boasting a population of more than 65,000, which is a combination of students and permanent residents. The names of the peer schools in this study are pseudonyms. ISU employs more than 6,300 faculty and staff members.

Iowa Agricultural College and Model Farm (now Iowa State University) was officially established on March 22, 1858, by the legislature of the State of Iowa (Iowa State University, 2007). The university ranks as one of the nation’s “cutting-edge schools,” according to a guidebook that pinpoints today’s hottest majors and the innovative colleges that offer them. The colleges that make up ISU consist of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Business, Design, Engineering, Human Sciences, Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Veterinary Medicine. ISU’s Graduate College offers an impressive number of master’s and doctoral degree programs as well as graduate certificates in multiple disciplines across campus. ISU also operates a number of centers, institutes, and federal labs.

Iowa State University enrolls more than 33,000 students who come to the university from all 50 states, and the District of Columbia (D.C.) as well as from more than 130
countries. Students can choose degree programs in more than 99 bachelor degree programs, one professional degree (Doctor of Veterinary Medicine), 112 master’s programs, and 81 doctoral programs. Students have their education supported at ISU annually with close to $385 million in scholarships, grants, loans, and work–study options.

Student life is impacted by providing students at ISU with more than 800 student organizations, as well as some 50 club sports. Club sports range from badminton to wrestling. Again, ISU is a NCAA Division 1, land grant university and part of the Big XII sports conference.

**Participants**

**Purposeful Sampling**

Unlike with quantitative research, sample size is not the basis for good qualitative research. Sampling in qualitative research means less about “actual numbers of participants or cases and much more with the quality and depth of the information elicited through the research process” (Jones, 2002, p. 465). Merriam (2002) stated, “In qualitative research a sample is selected on purpose to yield the most information about the phenomenon of interest. There are usually criteria specified for selection” (p. 20).

In order to do conduct qualitative research, it is also important that the researcher spend time with the subjects. Trust has to be built. This is not accomplished through an in-and-out process of discovery. To achieve purposeful sampling for this study, participants for whom I spent time with came from the alumni body of ISU.

To identify a pool of individuals to contact for this study, I received assistance from my counterparts at the ISU Foundation who oversee the alumni/donor database. The data
request for this research was guided by the ISU Foundation/Alumni Association’s Request for Data Form. The entire process is documented in the audit trail (Appendix A).

The criteria that were used to identify the list of possible study participants for this research was as follows: current dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association, holding at minimum a bachelor’s degree from ISU, and living in Story County or one of the counties adjacent to Story County, home of ISU. These counties comprise Boone, Hamilton, Hardin, Jasper, Marshall, and Polk. Limiting the study participants to undergraduate-degreed alumni was important in order to provide a deep focus on the ISU experience during the early years of the participants’ collegiate careers.

If feasible, the study participants had to represent different class years, decades, majors, colleges, and genders. These additional pieces of criteria provided some degree of diversity in the study participants, given that they were all of African American descent and all ISU alumni. This list contained approximately 39 names. Each name was accompanied by business and home telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, and home addresses to aid me in making contact with the subjects to determine their interest in participating in this study. Approval for this study was obtained from ISU’s Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B).

For those agreeing to participate, or for any who requested additional information, a follow-up letter was sent by e-mail. A copy of the follow-up letter appears in Appendix C. Every individual to whom a letter was sent received a second call to confirm their final agreement to participate. I performed this process for every fifth name on the list until five participants had agreed to participate in the study.
Following standard research procedures, all study participants were sent an informed consent form before they actually engaged in the study. Study participants were required to review the informed consent form before I proceeded with interviewing them for this study. Upon meeting for the first interview, each study participant was given an opportunity to raise any questions about the study and/or the process. Each study participant and I signed the informed consent form in each other’s presence before the first interviews were conducted.

Data Collection Methods

Creswell (2009) posited, “The collection of procedures in qualitative research involves four basic types” (p. 179). These collection procedures are qualitative observations, qualitative interviews, qualitative documents, and qualitative audio and visual materials. The researcher attempts to select the best methods that will aid him or her in gaining the best insights into the topic being researched. For this study, the data collection methods of observations and interviews were utilized. By triangulating these inputs, deeper insights into the meaning the study participants gave to their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association and the experiences that influenced their decision to become members of the ISU Alumni Association were gained. Triangulation better informed and substantiated the findings of this study. As described below in the Goodness and Trustworthiness section, triangulation is an important feature of qualitative research.

Interviews

Semistructured interviews were used in conducting this study. Esterberg (2002) defined semistructured interviews, also referred to as in-depth interviews, as being “much less rigid than structured interviews” (p. 87). She went on to say that “in semistructured interviews, the goal is to explore a topic more openly and to allow interviewees to express
their opinions and ideas in their own words” (p. 87). This allows the researcher to gain the participants’ meaning of situations rather than that of the researcher. Although the researcher still uses a research guide, he or she is open to listening and following the study participant’s lead (Esterberg, 2002; Jones, 2002; Merriam, 2002).

Seidman (2006) emphasized, “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). By not having the interview scripted throughout the whole process, but instead allowing the study participants’ answers to guide the discovery, qualitative researchers are apt to get the participants’ meaning of a lived experience rather than researcher’s opinion. Although an interview guide was used in these interviews, it was simply that—a guide (see Appendix D).

The interview guide was used to frame the interviews. When conducting qualitative research, it is important that the researcher stick as close as possible to the same questions and methods when conducting the study. Patton (2002) referred to the interview guide as a tool “to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed” (p. 343). All interviews were tape recorded.

Seidman (2006) advocated the use of a three-part model of interviews when conducting qualitative research. The first part of the model is focused on simply learning about the study participant without focusing on the topic of the study. This data-gathering interview is important as it allows the researcher to get to know more about the background, education, professional experience, etc. of the study participant.

The second and third parts of the interviews are deeply focused on the topic of the study. The second part of the interview is utilized to “concentrate on the concrete details of
the participants’ present lived experiences in the topic area of the study” (Seidman, 2006, p. 18). The third part of the interview, in Seidman’s (2006) model, is the reflective portion of the interview. This portion of the interview allows the study participants to reflect on their experience thus giving their voice, making meaning, of the experience (Seidman, 2006). Again, this model further encourages the researcher to serve as the instrument of meaning making rather than the provider of meaning.

Because this study was charting new ground, mainly due to the paucity of literature on the topic of understanding why African American alumni of large (>30,000 students), predominantly White, NCAA Division 1 institutions choose to become members of their alma mater’s alumni associations, I was very interested in giving voice to those who historically had not been given chances to speak to this topic. I was also sensitive to the need to ensure the final study findings reflected the meanings the study participants gave to their experiences. To successfully accomplish this task, active listening was critical.

When Seidman (2006) expounded on the importance of critical listening, he offered the following statement: “Listening is the most important skill in interviewing. The hardest work for many interviewers is to keep quiet and to listen actively” (p. 78). Active listening isn’t easy, as it involves paying attention and documenting not only what is said by the study participant but also how it is said and picking up on nonverbal communication. When one actively listens, he or she is also able to develop and respond with the right follow-up questions. These follow-up questions provide deeper insights into the meaning, which ultimately provides those rich, thick descriptions needed in producing good qualitative research.
Esterberg’s (2002) advice on how to ask questions more effectively also allows the researcher to get at those rich, thick descriptions. She spoke of the timing and order of questions. Esterberg emphasized that researchers “should place easier, less threatening questions at the beginning and save more controversial or sensitive questions for the middle or end, once you have developed some rapport and established some trust” (p. 96). Furthermore, Esterberg encouraged interviewers to ask both general and specific questions (p. 99).

With general questions, the researcher allows the interviewees “to move at their own pace and indicate that you are interested in what they have to say” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 99). According to Esterberg (2002), more specific questions “allow your interviewees to draw on their own experiences” (p. 99). The use of both, especially specific questions as follow-up questions, further exposes the researcher to deeper understandings of the study participants’ experiences and thus meaning making.

As I prepared to proceed with this study, I utilized a modified version of Seidman’s (2006) three-part interview approach. Rather than conducting three separate face-to-face semistructured interviews, I accomplished parts one and two during session one and the third section in a separate interview. Following the first interview, I scheduled the follow-up interview. I followed this procedure until both interviews for each study participant had been conducted.

I e-mailed the informed consent form (Appendix E) to my study participants ahead of time so they could review it and prepare any questions about the form or my study. At our first face-to-face meeting, we discussed the informed consent form and my study. After all questions had been answered, each study participant and I signed their respective form in
each other’s presence. Getting a signed informed consent form from each study participant is standard protocol for conducting field research.

The first set of interviews focused on getting responses about the study participants’ backgrounds and responding to questions about the study. As stated earlier, although personal data gathering was important, the main intent was to begin the process of establishing trust and rapport between myself and the study participants. We then took a 15-minute break before coming back together for the second set of interviews to focus directly on the study participants’ experiences of attending ISU, a PWI, and why they chose to become members of the ISU Alumni Association when so many other African American alumni chose not to join the alumni association.

The final interview took place after I had transcribed, reviewed, corrected, and then mailed the first and second interview drafts to the study participants for their review. Ample time was provided for the study participants to read through and to reflect on the information shared at the earlier interview. This final interview was designed to close any gaps in the data as well as to correct any misinformation. Although very little new information was gleaned from this final interview, saturation was achieved as a result of their repeated responses.

After preliminary drafts of the case studies were completed, they were sent to each study participant for review and confirmation of findings. No real problems surfaced; however, small adjustments were made to their descriptions to further enhance their characteristics. These changes did not compromise the integrity of the study.
**Direct Observation**

Yin (2009) explained that direct observation can be either formal or informal observation of the case being studied. Such observation can take place in one of two ways: during the in-depth interview or at a scheduled visit to the actual case study site. This type of data collection method has the ability to inform the researcher on environmental factors influencing the case. Stake (1995) posited that, during qualitative case study, the observer “keeps a good record of events to provide a relatively incontestable description for further analysis and ultimate reporting. He or she lets the occasion tell its story, the situation, the problem, resolution or irresolution of the problem” (p. 62).

Finally, Merriam (1988) offered the following observational strategies for researchers to consider as they take on and complete observations:

1. The setting: What is the physical environment like?
2. The participants: Describe who is in the scene, how many people, and their roles.
3. Activities and interactions: What is going on? How do the people interact with the activity and with one another?
4. Frequency and duration: When did the situation begin? How long did it last?
5. Subtle factors: Informal and unplanned activities; symbolic and connotative meanings of words; nonverbal communication, such as dress and physical space; unobtrusive measures, such as physical clues; what does not happen if it ought to have happened? (Merriam, 1988, p. 91)

I utilized the direct observation method during the in-depth interviews. I took copious notes regarding the above-mentioned attributes of direct observation to help explain
the phenomenon. These extensive notes were analyzed along with the transcriptions from the in-depth interviews.

**Data Analysis**

One could call this portion of research, whether quantitative or qualitative, an opportunity to try to discover the meaning of the information obtained. Esterberg (2002) stated that one can “think of data analysis as answering the question ‘So what?’” (p. 79). The researcher is tasked with making meaning of all the information gathered during the data collection phase of the study. Esterberg stated that “this kind of analysis is called interpretation” (p. 79). Analysis entails taking the great field findings and interpreting them into what the evidence means (Creswell, 2009; Esterberg, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Esterberg (2002) emphasized the need for researchers to begin the data analysis phase while in the field or while the data are being gathered. This is important, as it allows the researcher to ask clarifying questions along the way. Furthermore, researchers need, at a minimum, to keep the following areas in mind when conducting data analysis: determine upfront the method(s) one will use to manage and organize the data; familiarize and immerse oneself in the gathered data; generate themes and categories by paying attention to the themes one finds throughout the data; and finally, decide how one will present the analysis to others. This is the true “making meaning” phase of the research process (Esterberg, 2002, pp. 151–152).

For this study, a transcriber was paid to type the notes from the tape recordings produced from my semistructured interviews. Once these documents were returned to me, reviewed and corrected by me, and confirmed by the study participants, I followed Esterberg’s (2002) suggestions of filing the data by interviews, field notes, etc. Each
document received an appropriate code number in order to keep all documents with the appropriate study participant and type. All documents were kept in either chronological order and/or by topic or document type. Furthermore, multiple copies of documents were kept (pp. 152–156).

Esterberg (2002) also emphasized getting “intimate” with the data by reading and studying it multiple times. In other words, the researcher should get to know the data backwards, frontwards, sideways, etc. (p. 157). Knowing your data inside out was the clear message stressed by multiple authors regarding undertaking qualitative research. This step, they emphasized, should be taken long before coding any of the data.

Esterberg (2002) stated that, in qualitative analysis, “the goal is not to assign numbers to cases. Rather, the goal is to begin to focus on the potential meanings of your data” (p. 158). To avoid limiting potential insights, Esterberg further encouraged qualitative researchers to use the three basic procedures for finding meaning in the collected data: “(a) noticing relevant phenomena; (b) collecting examples of those phenomena; and (c) analyzing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures” (p. 158). This initial process is great for developing “hunches and ideas about what is going on with your data” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 158).

Open coding was employed to perform the above process for this study. Esterberg (2002) described open coding as intensely working through “your data, line by line, identifying themes and categories that seem of interest” (p. 158). The emphasis should be to identify what was going on within the data on their own merit, not from the perspective of someone else or through the researcher’s own biases. This process was accomplished by me
making notes in the margins and highlighting the text that matched those notes. This process, over time, allowed themes to emerge.

After this process, I moved to focused coding. Esterberg (2002) stated that focused coding “entails going through your data line by line, but this time you focus on those key themes you identified during the open coding” (p. 161). Once the key themes were identified, I moved to writing memos. Esterberg (2002) stated that memos help researchers shape their “thoughts about the emerging analysis and provides a record” of the researcher’s progress (p. 164). This step helps researchers further develop their analysis of the findings, remember how the coding was done, and/or focus on what is important in the data so connections can be made between the cases. Overall, coding entailed managing and making sense of all the collected, analyzed, and categorized data in order to write the narrative. By following these procedures, this research study sought to provide understanding of the experiences and alumni association membership decisions of five bachelor-degreed African American alumni of ISU.

**Goodness and Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research, when measured for quality, is often compared against quantitative research; therefore, researchers must do their best to assess quality and rigor in both quantitative and qualitative research. Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) stated that researchers also know that “good writing” can hide a poorly conducted study (p. 32). Merriam (2002) made two important points about evaluating the quality of qualitative research: “whether the problem is appropriate for qualitative inquiry” and “how significant the problem is” (p. 18). Merriam (2002) also stated that “qualitative researchers are not interested in people’s surface opinions as in survey research, or in cause and effect as in
experimental research; rather, they want to know how people do things, and what meaning they give to their lives” (p. 19). She identified the trademarks of a good qualitative study as the following:

Whether it has been systematically and ethically carried out and whether the findings are trustworthy. The question of trustworthiness has to do with issues of internal validity, reliability, and external validity. Strategies ensuring for adequate treatment of each of these issues include triangulation, member checks, peer examination, investigator position, audit trail, and rich, thick description. (Merriam, 2002, p. 31)

This study utilized these above-mentioned strategies to ensure goodness and trustworthiness of this research dissertation. Triangulation, as defined by Merriam (2002), is the use of “multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods” (p. 31). To meet the criteria for triangulation, this study utilized in-depth interviews of study participants and observations to triangulate the information.

To further ensure goodness and trustworthiness of this study, member checks were utilized. Member checks were defined by Merriam (2002) as “taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if they were plausible” (p. 31). This effort does not mean asking the study participants if they liked the wording or the interpretation; it is concerned with the validity of the information. For this study, member checks with the study participants were conducted following the transcription and draft of the findings’ processes.

The services of two recent doctoral graduates who were serving as high-level community college and private college administrators in Iowa were called upon to provide peer review/examination of this study. Merriam (2002) defined peer review/examination as
“discussions with colleagues regarding the process of the study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations” (p. 31). Having the input of these two individuals was important to further ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of this study.

This study also included an audit trail, shown in Appendix A. Merriam (2002) defined an audit trail as “a detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study” (p. 31). This audit trail was maintained and documented in a research journal.

Rich, thick descriptions are essential to the goodness and trustworthiness of qualitative research. To meet this requirement, the research document must “provide enough description to contextualize the study such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situation matches the research context, and hence, whether the findings can be transferred” (Merriam, 2002, p. 31). This dissertation showcases a number of direct quotes in order to ensure that readers are able to situate the experiences of the study participants with the findings.

Merriam (2002) stated, “Systematically evaluating or critiquing a qualitative study involves considering the overall design of the study, as well as the rigor with which the study was conducted” (p. 19). Therefore, a researcher has to be familiar with the literature that already exists around the question being investigated. What gaps are being filled by the research that one is about to undertake? Will this work add to or shed new light on the existing body of knowledge?
Finally, investigator positionality, according to Merriam (2002), is also important to the goodness and trustworthiness of qualitative research. The next section addresses researcher positionality in more detail.

**Researcher Positionality**

Merriam (2002) defined investigator/researcher positionality or reflexivity as “critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation” (p. 31). Merriam (2002) also stated, “It is impossible to imagine a person leading a life without making judgments or without making discriminations” (p. 19). Jones (2002) stated, “Researchers must be careful to check their own subjectivity and theoretical stances so that decisions are indeed rooted in the research process as it unfolds rather than in the researchers’ own points of view” (p. 464).

Prasad (2005) suggested that researchers inevitably find themselves wrestling with their own biases when conducting qualitative research. “Researchers insert themselves explicitly into the research text—acknowledging their own social location and coming to an awareness of the personal agendas guiding their research project” (Prasad, 2005, p. 173). Furthermore, the closer the researcher is to the subject, setting, and/or issue, the more important it is that one’s positionality be fully revealed.

The lessons I took from the above statements as I conducted my research were the need for me to discern my own position on who and what can be known as well as the complex dynamics attached to entering communities of both similar to and different from my own. Prasad (2005) suggested that such researchers also lay out the messier realities of the research accounts, especially in the area of fieldwork, and “give voice to subjects’
experiences by translating them into texts that can eventually be shared in a broader community” (p. 173). Clearly, positionality was important to help ensure that this research revealed the story that was told to me and not the version I wanted told or simply chose to tell.

With qualitative research, however, the researcher can, and should, work very hard to ensure the goodness and trustworthiness of the study. I approached this research with the reality that I have spent my entire professional career, approximately 31 years as of December 2013, working in higher education at four PWIs. I also hold three degrees from three PWIs, and I am pursuing a fourth and terminal degree at another PWI. Of my almost 31 years of higher education employment, 27 of those years have been spent working in the alumni relations profession.

I also have consciously never applied for or shown interest in any minority-related or minority-specific jobs. The reason for this is that I believed that society (future employers) might limit my growth opportunities if such jobs were used to define me or my professional credentials and/or abilities. I am an African American male, and I was raised in Mississippi. Therefore, I felt deeply that the combination of these factors might limit or marginalize my opportunities for future, professional, mainstream-focused advancement.

After continuing to experience a successful career in which my professional contributions were recognized as being solid, I was at a point, professionally and personally, when it was safe and necessary for me to delve into this topic. It was important that I raise awareness among and provide insights to my higher education colleagues on the topic of alumni association membership from the African American perspective. Interviewing African American alumni regarding what influenced their decisions to become dues-paying
members of the ISU Alumni Association, especially since it is an alumni association at a PWI, and how their experiences influenced their decision to join has finally satisfied a professional and personal interest of mine.

As a graduate of three PWIs, I was interested in learning about why other African American alumni of PWIs joined their alumni association and how their experiences at that institution influenced their decision to join their institution’s alumni association. As I have never asked minority alumni why they join their alumni associations, this study would also aid me professionally at ISU as my staff, the ISU Alumni Association board, and I continue to look for ways to increase the involvement of ISU’s minority alumni. The voices of these individuals are important to the future efforts of my profession and my colleagues as we work to engage a broader group of participants in helping us and others shape the future of our colleges and universities.

Finally, the turning point for me in choosing to take on this topic for my dissertation research is connected to a statement I read in Sharan B. Merriam’s (2002) book, *Qualitative Research in Practice*. Merriam (2002) stated, “In order to understand the essence or structure of an experience, the researcher temporarily has to put aside, or ‘bracket’ personal attitudes or beliefs about the phenomenon” (p. 7). Bracketing allows the researcher to seek a true understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2000, p. 94). It was very important for me to grasp this understanding as I conducted this research to complete my dissertation on this topic.

**Limitations**

There were a number of limitations for this research study. This study chronicled only five African American alumni of the same institution and, therefore, results can only be
generalized to similar institutions and demographics. In other words, none of the study participants came from any other type or a different institution of higher learning or racial or ethnic background. Participants who were also members of the ISU Alumni Association but held only master’s and/or doctoral degrees from ISU and were of African American decent were not a part of this study. Participants living outside of Story County and its adjacent counties were not a part of this study. Gender and socioeconomic criteria were also not grounds for inclusion or exclusion from this study. Furthermore, this study did not look at the intersection of race.

**Delimitations**

This research study was delimited to a case study involving five African American alumni who held, at a minimum, bachelor’s degrees from the same large (>30,000 FTE students), predominantly White, Midwestern, Research Intensive, NCAA Division 1, land grant institution—ISU.
CHAPTER 4. STUDY PARTICIPANTS’ CHARACTERISTICS AND BACKGROUND

The findings of this study are presented in this chapter and the next chapter, using the study participants’ words to substantiate the findings. In an attempt to protect the confidentiality of each study participant to the greatest extent possible, pseudonyms are used. Facts that may have further revealed the identity of each study participant were either altered or omitted. These steps made it more comfortable for study participants to participate in this study. Of note, however, to a person, study participants were not concerned about anonymity. They were even willing to have their names used. I assured them that this was not necessary; as I wanted the data—not the study participants or me as the researcher—to be the focus of the study. The study participants and I agreed that anonymity would be provided.

This chapter describes, with rich, thick descriptions, information about the five African American alumni of ISU who chose to become dues-paying members of this predominantly White university’s alumni association. Each study participant’s description was gleaned from the in-depth interviews and observations and categorized under the following two common areas: personal upbringing and choosing to attend college. For each participant, the personal upbringing section describes study participants’ rearing, family members’ expectations of them and the visions others had for their lives and the choosing to attend college section explores how they chose ISU, how they chose their majors, and how they expanded their academic journey. The experiences these five study participants shared were quite similar even though each participant was randomly selected. No study participants were aware of each other’s participation in this study.
Bob Miller

The first study participant I interviewed was Bob Miller. Bob was vice president for commercial lending for a central Iowa bank. We met in the second floor conference room of his office. Bob was wearing the slacks and vest of his three-piece blue suit along with a light blue, nicely pressed shirt and a tie that showcased two shades of blue. His shoes were shiny black, and his arm displayed a silver watch.

Bob’s appearance was that of an individual committed to health and fitness. His face was well-shaven, and he adorned a well-manicured haircut. Outside of work, Bob spoke of enjoying doing volunteer work in the community and assisting his fraternity. He also is an avid motorcycle rider.

Bob sat directly across from me at his company’s large conference table. The well-polished oak table could seat up to 10 people. Bob was very comfortable in his demeanor. He appeared excited to see me and expressed excitement about participating in the study.

Personal Upbringing

Bob grew up in central Iowa and graduated from a central Iowa high school in the late 1990s. When interviewed for this study, he was 35 years of age, single, and living on his own. His family consisted of seven individuals—himself, two sisters, two brothers, and his mom and dad. Bob was two and a half years of age when he and two of his siblings were adopted, and he is the middle child of the five children.

Bob’s parents, who are both White, grew up around central Iowa. His dad grew up on a farm, and his mom grew up in the central Iowa town’s city limits. His mom had a deep commitment for providing foster care. From all that was said during the interview, it was evident that Bob was close to his family—especially his mom. She passed away in the late
2000s. Before her death, his parents had moved to a log cabin out on a small central Iowa farm. His dad remains on that farm today.

Choosing to Attend College

In high school, Bob was a good student and athlete. He was involved in a few clubs and some activities, but he did not hold any leadership positions in those organizations. Bob’s academic prowess was a result of his commitment to studying, and he knew early on that he wanted to attend college. Bob was not sure, however, where he would go to college or what he would study.

Teachers, family members, and community individuals also saw him as college material, and they made their thoughts about his future known to him. They wanted him to attend college. His mom was a steady academic influence on him, even though neither she nor his father had gone to college. If he made the decision to go to college, he would be the first one in his family to do so.

One example of his mom’s influence that Bob shared is the following,

One thing I remember from when I was little, probably back in second or third grade, you have this thing—Parents’ Night. You have this collage. You have this Student of the Week. You are asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up? What is your favorite color, and what’s your favorite food? Or, where do you want to go to school or something like that.” I put DMACC [Des Moines Area Community College] because my sister at the time, I think, was thinking about going to DMACC. I remember when my mom read this. I had brought the assignment home to fill it out. She told me, “Don’t put DMACC on there; put something else on there. Put ISU or pick a good university.” And I was like, “OK.” That always stuck with me.
Bob decided to attend ISU in December of 1996, during his senior year of high school. His decision to do so was not an elaborate process. Bob stated,

I forget the gentleman’s name, but there was a recruiter that came from Iowa State. He was somewhat affiliated, I think, with the Carver Program at the time. I can’t remember what he looks like, but he came and offered me a scholarship. I was sent an application to apply for the Carver Academy program, and I got accepted. After that, it was a no brainer.

Bob further noted,

Had I not gotten the scholarship that was offered to me even before I applied to Iowa State, I may not have chosen Iowa State. The gentleman looked at my transcript as we were leaving, but he didn’t say anything. I said “Hey, I would be interested in a scholarship,” because he had offered one to someone else. He then said, “What kind of grades do you get? Let me see your grades.” And the guidance counselor happened to be in her office. She quickly printed off my transcript. While people were walking around, he looked at it and said, “Oh, what about a scholarship?” And that was it. My parents were like, “That really happened?” And I said, “Yeah, it really happened.” I guess that’s how it works. So I filled out an application, and I had to find $20 to submit the application. That was not a pleasant conversation to have with my parents around Christmastime, but we came up with the money. It was kind of by happenstance. It was a blessing.

As part of ISU’s Carver Academy program, participating students live on campus in one of the residence halls. Bob lived in Friley Hall. After participating in the program
during the summer of 1997, Bob had a good feeling he could excel at ISU. He also liked the
campus and had made a few friends while participating in the program.

**Helen Haynes**

Helen Haynes was the second study participant I interviewed. She was a 78-year-old,
extremely active higher education retiree. I interviewed Helen in her Ames, Iowa, home. It
was a gorgeous weekday afternoon in late August. Her neighbors were mowing their yards.
Helen’s car, a big car, was parked in her yard. Junk mail was on top of it. I picked up the
mail to give it to her thinking she had accidentally left it on her car. This was not the case.
Helen shared all of her junk mail with her next door neighbor. Helen stated, “Junk mail does
not make it into my house!”

Helen asked me to join her at her beautiful dining table for the interview. The home
had a very open floor plan. It was appointed with beautiful antiques and other accessories.
The chandelier above the table gave off great light. Helen served me a glass of cold water.

Helen had a beautiful laugh. We shared many laughs during the interview. She also
was, as I had seen her many times before around the community, beautifully dressed in a
satin top of burgundy hues and burgundy slacks. Helen’s hair, as always, was beautifully
combed. She was very grateful to be participating in the study.

**Personal Upbringing**

Helen and her brother were raised by a single mom. She grew up in and graduated
from high school in Missouri in the early 1950s. Following her graduation, her family,
consisting of Helen, her mom, and her grandmother, moved to central Iowa. Helen was in
Iowa for only one year following this move. During that year, because Helen had taken some
shorthand, she worked as a receptionist. She then entered the military. This decision took her to Maryland, the District of Columbia (D.C.), and California.

Helen was in the military for 4 years. She met her husband in the military and they were married in the mid-1950s. Following military duty, the Haynes wanted to settle in D.C. There were not any jobs, however, for Blacks in D.C. They ended up settling in Ohio where Helen’s husband’s father and brother lived.

Helen’s husband was eventually hired to work at ISU. They packed up their belongings and moved to Ames. The Haynes had two sons and a daughter. The three children attended and graduated from Ames High School.

Community involvement had been a big part of Helen’s life, and that involvement was just as strong today for her. From local and state, to national political matters, Helen remained committed to fairness, political activism, and increased voter participation.

**Choosing to Attend College**

Helen graduated from high school when she was 16 years of age. From Head Start to high school, she had been a very good student. Teachers acknowledged Helen’s potential and steadily encouraged her to go to college. The strongest influence on her choosing to go to college, however, was her high school principal in Missouri. She never let go of that influence. Helen stated, “If I make the decision to go to college, I will be the first one in my family to attempt to receive a college degree.”

Helen had taken some tuition-free, college-level courses during her time in California. She also took a few college-level courses during her time in West Virginia. Helen, however, received her undergraduate degree from ISU in the late 1970s. She was an
adult student, mother, wife, and professional. Helen’s husband, who as mentioned earlier was employed at ISU, was enrolled at the university as an adult student as well.

Helen had always wanted to get her degree. Choosing ISU was really an easy choice. She noted, “Because I lived here, it was convenient. My husband was working here, my daughter was in lab school here, and my other kids were in school here.”

**Marcus Jones**

Study participant number three, Marcus Jones, met with me in the welcoming and work area of his university office. It was a beautiful fall afternoon in August of 2013. I apologized profusely for taking Marcus away from his family. He was kind in his acknowledgement of how important it was for me to conduct such interviews and that he was glad to be of service.

Marcus sat across the table from me. He works with his university’s students of color population, which totals about 2,200 individuals. Marcus was dressed comfortably in jeans, an ISU shirt, and a light-weight fabric jacket. The office walls were filled with posters of campus life, and the shelves contained lots of books. Computers, desks, and silence filled the space.

**Personal Upbringing**

As a 32-year-old, Marcus was what the ISU Alumni Association would describe as a young alumnus/professional. He grew up in a military household with both his mom and dad enlisted in the Air Force. Following his mom and dad’s retirements from the Air Force, both enrolled in different colleges and earned associate’s and bachelor’s degrees, respectively.

Because of Marcus’s parents’ military background, he moved around quite a bit, from coast-to-coast and even living in the Midwest. He attended a number of elementary, middle,
and high schools. Although Marcus moved a lot as a child, he considered the East Coast area his home.

Marcus’s one and only younger brother was still living in this area. Marcus also graduated from high school out east, and he had made a solid network of friends in the area. His family purchased their first home there. Roots had finally been put down somewhere. With emotion in his voice, and in a somewhat somber tone, Marcus stated, “Out east is home.”

Marcus enjoys cooking, which he picked up from his maternal grandparents. When he talked about cooking, everything else became unimportant. An example of his enthusiasm for cooking is the following remarks:

- I do slow cooking.
- I do grilling.
- I am trying baking.
- I can’t make a Mrs. Smith’s apple pie yet. Yeah, I still can’t do that. But last night I made a devil’s food cake with chocolate frosting—chocolate with cream frosting. I went to hang out with some friends, and they were raving about my chocolate cake. So I’m like I can make that. I actually got [the love for cooking] from my maternal grandmother. She’s the one who taught me how to cook. And my maternal grandfather taught me how to grill—how to choose the meat, how to grill it, how to prepare it, stuff like that. I learned both.

Marcus also enjoyed reading and weight lifting. Furthermore, he was working to obtain his motorcycle license, as everyone else in Marcus’s family had one, and his doctorate degree. Education and family were very important to Marcus.
Choosing to Attend College

It was an expectation in Marcus’s family that the children would go to college. Marcus described it this way:

I think the one constant thing for my folks was college was an expectation. It was also nonnegotiable. Like you have to breathe, you have to eat, and you have to go to college. It was one of those things definitely going to happen. I just kind of rolled with it.

Marcus chose to attend ISU, because of an academic scholarship,. Marcus’s aunt had attended ISU and graduated in Engineering. There were other family members who also had attended ISU, but they did not graduate. Marcus was the only one in his immediate family to attend ISU.

Anndrea Thigpen

Anndrea Thigpen was the fourth study participant I interviewed. I met with Anndrea in her central Iowa home. As I approached the home, in a lovely, wooded neighborhood, I was taken by the pristine, well-mowed lawn. Beautiful yard flowers were in bloom. The home sat a ways back from the street. A long driveway led me to the house and eventually to the front door.

With a deep and beautiful baritone voice, Anndrea’s husband greeted me and welcomed me into the living room of their lovely home. Anndrea’s husband and I knew each other from our many ISU interactions. The home was filled with beautiful antiques and many photos of the couple, their son, and friends. Anndrea had met her husband on her first day at ISU.
Mr. Thigpen called for Anndrea. She appeared in the doorway that separated the living room from the family room. Like the living room, the family room contained additional beautiful pieces of furniture and family and friends’ photos. I could spot a patio off of the family room with many, many pots of beautiful blooming plants.

As it was in the afternoon, Anndrea was dressed very comfortably. She welcomed me and asked if we could sit outside on the patio for the interview. This setting made for a very pleasant atmosphere. It was clear that Anndrea was very comfortable in this setting.

Anndrea and her husband both were working in higher education and had done so for many years. They were working at different institutions in central Iowa. Both Anndrea and her husband were ISU alumni.

Anndrea had already set the patio table with water glasses and other beverages. As we sat across from each other, birds chirped beautifully, the wind blew slightly, and trees shaded us sparingly. After I thanked Anndrea for agreeing to participate in the study, and commented on the beautiful setting, I began the interview.

**Personal Upbringing**

Anndrea was in her sixties. She was reared in Chicago, Illinois, and graduated from the Chicago public high school system in the late 1960s. She was the baby of the 12 children in her family, which was a blended family. Her parents were originally from Mississippi. The family moved to Chicago when Anndrea was 2 years old.

Anndrea had a lot of respect for her parents, especially her mother. When she spoke of them during the interview, she would always fold her arms in somewhat of a hugging gesture. Anndrea’s whole body would almost become enveloped in her chair. It was obvious that other pleasant memories, beyond the answers to my questions, were swirling
through her head. One excerpt from her interview that illustrates her respect of and love for her parents is as follows:

Mother told me to do well. She expected I would. If there were stresses, home was always home. I felt good knowing that. Again, my parents were very proud, hard-working people. They had instilled in me the desire to do well. They had instilled in me the fact to realize that racism exists. However, education was the key. You know what your life was going to be like and to go for it. And they were very supportive. Very supportive. You know, if it’s your birthday, your parents send you birthday care packages, a cake or all these things. I never missed out on those things as [my parents] were always sending me things. I had a TV even though it didn’t work very well since reception in the residence halls was so poor. Yeah, [my parents] always made it to campus to visit me. I know it was a strain.

**Choosing to Attend College**

Anndrea enrolled in ISU right out of high school. She received her degree in journalism. Anndrea was a very good student in high school, and she had her heart set on being an anchor person. She graduated in the top quarter of her high school graduating class of 800 students. When I asked Anndrea how she decided on attending ISU, she provided the following, interesting response:

In my senior year in high school, my cousin and I were leaving school and some friends of hers asked if we needed a ride home because we were either going to catch the bus or walk. It was a good two miles or so to our home. So we said sure, but first these friends had to go to this center. There was a group of people who were going into intercity communities, Chicago in particular, looking for high school students
who were interested in going on to college. Again, keep in mind that this was 1968 at the height of a lot of civil unrest. So we said to the group that “sure, we will go along with you” because I think they were going to go through some precollege testing. They were a couple of guys, a couple of friends of hers and I didn’t know them, but anyway I went along because I wanted the ride home. When we got [to the center], I said to them that “I’m not going to wait out here while you all go get tested. Why don’t we all just go take whatever exam they want us to take?” So I did, as did my cousin, and then we went on home. Well, the administrators of this center contacted us and said there was a school that they were looking at, Iowa State University. I don’t know if there were any other schools. They really wanted to see some minority students enroll at Iowa State if we were interested? I can’t remember what the test was. We tested well. We also talked to our parents.

Andrea went on to share the following:

I was college bound. I knew I was going to go to college. I was going to go to college in Illinois, and I never thought about going out of state. I figured this was good. Anyway, the people who were involved in this did speak with our parents because what they wanted to do was, if we agreed, they wanted us to live together with other students for about five weeks in the summer so we would get a taste. Well, not really college life, but living in a commune, having structure, getting up, etc. We thought, “Okay. It would be in Chicago. It was like camp. That sounds like a good thing, as it was structured.” It was very structured. We couldn’t just leave the facility when we wanted to. They were always present. There was always adult supervision. We lived like in a residence hall situation, boys and girls. And they
would give us life lessons. I wouldn’t consider it to be similar to a summer institute here at Iowa State, but it was structured. It was also curriculum based. What they were really saying was if you are going to go to Iowa State together then there needs to be a bond. And now that I am older, I realize that was a big part of it.

Those in the group who eventually joined Anndrea at ISU called themselves the Chicago 8. Anndrea talked about this experience with great fondness, for example:

There were a few of us who were in the program. [The people from the center] talked to us about college, and our parents thought this was a good opportunity. Financial aid was in the picture in terms of helping with the tuition, and, at that time of course, tuition was low. I came. I arrived on a bus. But it was interesting as I was preparing to leave one of the things my mom said to me was, “If this isn’t what you want, and, if you don’t succeed, you can come home.” She wanted to make sure I didn’t have any pressure because I was the first in my generation, well not in my mother’s family, to go to college.

**Olivia Watson**

Olivia Watson was my fifth and final study participant. I interviewed Olivia in her central Iowa office. The facility was tucked away off of a busy street. Pedestrian and vehicular traffic was fierce from all directions. After multiple attempts to locate the facility, while keeping my eyes on the road, I spotted the entrance within five minutes of my stated arrival time.

Due to the confidential nature of Olivia’s work, I had to sign in and be escorted to her office by the receptionist. Olivia was working as a social worker. She organized
conferences, trainings, and workshops to address sexual assault and violence. Folders, mounds of folders, were neatly placed about her office.

Olivia welcomed me from behind her desk as I stood in her office’s doorway. After the welcome, she grabbed her pen, a notepad, asked me if I needed something to drink, and then stood up. She was dressed extremely comfortably. Olivia wanted me to understand that her attire was a result of the fact that she had been traveling on business the last few days. This was a catch-up day in the office for her. She had also, earlier in the day, participated in an office workshop on new regulations.

Following our handshake, Olivia escorted me down the hallway to a large conference room. In the room was a large table with disheveled chairs. The room was nicely lit and extremely clean. Olivia sat at one corner of the table, and I sat near the same corner within close proximity of her. Following further introductions, I began the interview. Olivia was very easy to talk to, and she expressed appreciation for being asked to participate in my study.

**Personal Upbringing**

Olivia was 49 years of age. She and her older brother were born and reared in central Iowa. Olivia graduated in 1982 from a public high school in the area. She went straight from high school to ISU.

Olivia was the mother of three children. Two were twins, a boy and a girl, and the third child was female. Olivia also enjoyed gardening. She and her husband enjoyed ballroom dancing. They attended classes two nights a week learning new steps and perfecting existing ones.
Olivia spoke of her wonderful childhood that was orchestrated by two loving parents. Her father worked, sometimes two jobs, and they sometimes had two working cars. Olivia spoke proudly about what it meant to see her family never lose phone service or electricity. Her father was a good provider for his family. Olivia’s mother worked off and on but never had to have a steady job.

Olivia’s mom had died, and her dad still was living in the family home. He was a diabetic. Olivia’s father was still active in an African American men’s club. Knowing this provided her some piece of mind, as he had a group and activity that he looked forward to on a weekly basis.

Olivia loved sports. Her dad was a city umpire as well. She got to travel to games with him from time to time. They also had a dog—“always had a dog,” Olivia stated. She remembered her mom cooking, sewing, and crocheting.

Olivia’s mom attended AIB, and her dad spent 4 years in the Army. Her brother spent 2 years at UNI, but he did not graduate. Olivia was always known by her family, neighbors, and teachers as the overachiever.

**Choosing to Attend College**

Olivia, like all of my study participants, knew she wanted to and would go to college. She was very clear about college being in her future. As she explained it to me during the interview:

Knowing I wanted to go to college, I’ve always known that would happen. My parents always talked about it, even though they did not have the history. I liked school. I knew I wanted a career. I wasn’t quite sure in what, but I knew education was important, you know. I knew my parents didn’t have it, but I knew it was
important. How I ended up at Iowa State is kind of funny to me though because I applied not knowing where I wanted to go to school or even on what I wanted to study. I guess it came out of third grade. We had a project where we had to take an article out of the newspaper, and we had to present it to a camera as if we were a newscaster. I was a star. I was a rock star. An older White woman said, “This is the profession for you. You are so at home doing this.” I carried that with me. I think that my love of photography came out of that. So when I was looking at schools, I actually applied at Drake, UNI, Iowa State, and Iowa. I applied at Drake because I knew of their journalism school and the fact that I could live at home and walk to school every day. But the tuition was like out the back door. So it was like Drake was out. My brother was going to UNI. I knew I didn’t want to go to UNI just because my brother is my sibling and all, but we are like night and day. So then it was between Iowa and Iowa State. I will never forget being in the small gym at my high school trying on our caps and gowns for graduation. At that moment, I was accepted at both. I was accepted at all of them, but I actually had a room, a dorm room, and a schedule at the University of Iowa. But in that gymnasium, trying on that cap and gown for graduation, I said, “I am going to go to Iowa State.” Of course, since I decided so late, I ended up in a four-man dorm room in the towers, which is really kind of defunct now. But that’s how I ended up at Iowa State. It’s kind of funny because I enrolled as a Journalism major and thought that I’m not so much going into journalism as in print media and all that. Speech Communications is more what I am going into. Maybe it was vice versa. Maybe I started in Speech Communications and switched to Journalism and ended up switching back to
Communications and that’s what I graduated in. And like I told a girlfriend of mine, “I’m going to Iowa State”. It’s like in the yearbook, under my senior picture, it says University of Iowa. I had not been to Iowa State. I had been to the University of Iowa a half dozen times because they had this program; I can’t remember the name of it. There were a bunch of us who would go up there. And you got to tour the campus and all kinds of fun stuff. I remember one year, we got autographs of the entire basketball team. I thought that was the bees’ knees. I was going to Iowa. And that very last minute, “No, I’m going to Iowa State. The University of Iowa is too far away.” That’s how I ended up at Iowa State.

Summary

Bob Miller, Helen Haynes, Marcus Jones, Anndrea Thigpen, and Olivia Watson are five individuals who came from supportive families. They had performed well academically in high school. They had valued education beyond the high school diploma. They had had dreams and aspirations for improving their lives, even if they weren’t always sure of what that might look like. Their personal backstories positioned them to further their education. This chapter shared how they “ended up” attending ISU.

The meaning making associated with the decision these five African American alumni of ISU made regarding joining the ISU Alumni Association following their graduation are found in the themes that emerged during the data collection and analysis process completed for this study. The research themes, and the findings that support them, are presented in chapter 5 of this dissertation.
CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS

This chapter provides an interpretation of the common decision-making themes that emerged regarding why the study participants decided to become dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association. As presented in chapter 3, the interview data for each study participant were analyzed, and reanalyzed, until the common themes became clear. These common themes are explored in separate sections of this chapter. To make sense of the findings, I again used the study participant’s own words to express the connections. Each section closes with an interpretation of each theme, and the chapter concludes with an overall summary of the findings.

It was heartening to witness the enthusiasm the study participants exhibited as they responded to the questions. Two very common aspects were paramount. First, they were deeply proud of their academic experiences and they never forgot the real reason they were at ISU—to get an education. Second, there was not one single thing that made ISU work for them, but it was a host of things. Good classes, great faculty, access to assistance, beautiful surroundings, and access to resources came up many times as solid examples of ISU being a great place to learn. These examples were expressed repeatedly. The City of Ames was also spoken about as being a great community for students of color to live in to pursue their higher education dreams. This kind of information may come as a surprise to some of the readers. I too went into this study thinking I would hear something totally different based on what I had gleaned from my literature review about the experiences of African American alumni on predominantly White campuses.

Having been in the alumni relations profession at all predominantly White campuses, my thoughts on this topic were not completely at bay. So, listening, probing, and re-asking
questions were paramount. In the end, what I learned and experienced made me extremely proud of these alumni and ISU. As a result, in this chapter I have focused on documenting the true essence of their ISU experiences in a way that made the most sense to me.

The themes that emerged offer a framework for better understanding the meaning making these five African American alumni of ISU attributed to their decision to become dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association. The five African American Alumni of ISU shared their stories, which reflected two themes regarding why they chose to join the ISU Alumni Association:

1A. Receiving value from their ISU degrees
1B. Maintaining connections after receiving their degrees from ISU.

The five study participants also shared stories that reflected two common themes regarding how their experiences at ISU influenced their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association:

2A. Feeling academically supported while enrolled at ISU
2B. Finding social engagement while enrolled at ISU

The findings that support these themes are presented in the remainder of this chapter.

**Theme 1A. Receiving Value from Their Iowa State University Degrees**

After graduating from ISU, it was very clear to the study participants that their ISU degrees had value. This was further evidenced to them as they accepted employment and realized how much they had learned. In addition, companies were genuinely interested in hiring ISU graduates. The few excerpts below from the study participants’ interviews demonstrate the above-mentioned points. Bob Miller, study participant #1, noted,

Not so much the tangible, but more the foundation of the degrees—mainly marketing.

So when I say foundation, I’m talking about business in general. I have been a
finance person even though I didn’t major in finance. I feel like my education at Iowa State helped me be good at what I am doing right now. It is business. So it is very closely related. But learning new ways of thinking is kind of what I got out of my business degree. Yes, how to think and how to apply it in the business sense, whether to finance or knowing something in management. There are certain things you do and handle yourself, and these are the things an organization may expect of you. So with that I had a good sense of how I wanted to pursue up the corporate ladder, whether it be in sales or marketing or finance.

Olivia Watson, study participant #5, shared that her degree from ISU had served her well. She had extremely positive memories of a number of her classes and professors. As she stated,

I will never forget one of my grad school professors at the University of Iowa saying “Oh, my god, we have a social worker who can write. We’ve got a social worker that can” . . . yeah, that was me. I think that made me think more highly of Iowa State. It made me think about my love for communications in general . . . it’s everything from oral to written to everything. So I can definitely say that Iowa State has positively impacted my life.

Anndrea Thigpen, study participant #4, summed up the depth of her emotions and thoughts about getting a degree from ISU this way:

Getting a degree from Iowa State has a lot of clout. It did then, and I am sure it still does. People respect the institution and know that you put in your dues to get that degree. They know it was not handed to you. I guess that is why I respect the
university. And having a degree from it has allowed me to advance in my chosen career. Without it, I couldn’t have done it.

I asked Helen Haynes, study participant, #2, if her degree from ISU had served her well. She noted, “I believe my degree in Sociology served me well in affirmative action because group dynamics was one of the factors. You know, they taught us stratification. We really learned to write, creatively write.”

Marcus Jones, study participant #3, was proud to receive his Engineering degree from ISU. There were four other African American students in his cohort. All four of them graduated. Sitting up straight in his chair, looking me square in the eye, and with complete confidence, Marcus shared the following:

There were four of us. The four of us pretty much walked across the stage together, you know, when we graduated with our bachelor’s [degree]. Four of us managed to come out somewhat unscathed. Yes. The four African American men in a cohort of 75 were now all rocket scientists.

**Theme 1B. Maintaining Connections After Receiving Their Degrees from Iowa State University**

The study participants made significant connections during their time at ISU. They also were committed to maintaining those connections. They saw membership in the ISU Alumni Association as a direct way to ensure those connections were maintained following their graduation from ISU. Bob Miller, study participant #1, expressed his sentiment as follows:

When I moved back to Ames in 2005, I received something in the mail from the ISU Alumni Association. I can’t really tell you what sparked it, but I signed up and part of it was because I was back in Ames and it was new to me. When I graduated, I just
went away and cut everything off. Kind of what you are not supposed to do because getting those people back into your life when they are cut off and have their lives set is very hard. With the fraternity, how White fraternities are, that’s kind of how they deal with it. Whereas with Black fraternities, it’s [connection] for life . . . it’s a whole different experience. So I’m trying to relay that to these [fraternity brothers] to be successful, it’s different. As well as when you are an undergraduate, when you leave you have to keep that connection because it is very easy to lose. And I just wanted to go and do my thing and didn’t keep track of the fraternity. I kind of allowed myself to fall off the face of the earth for three to four years. Maybe about three years, two to three years, and then when I came back to Ames, it was kind of like my opportunity to get back involved. One of the ways I did that was by joining the Alumni Association.

Having had the academic and social experiences that Bob had dealt with, it was clear to him that he had made some connections. It was also clear to him that ISU had impacted his life in more than just an academic way. Bob ended by saying,

I think for me anyway, part of being an African American is identifying and maintaining relationships that are important. You’ve earned that degree. You’ve had that experience. You’ve gone through an identification process. I went through an identification process. So being part of the Alumni Association has helped me keep that connection and experience that I have had.

Overall, Bob Miller spoke of ISU as being a good choice for him. Bob also said that if he had it all to do over again, his decision-making process about a college would have been more deliberate. He stated, “You know, I looked at a few different schools. Looking back, I
should have considered tons of options, but I really just considered Iowa and ISU.”

Although he might have still chosen ISU, it would have been a choice and not just a decision.

As far as desiring to stay connected, Marcus Jones, study participant #3, shared the following story:

I think . . . actually, it was my dad’s suggestion that I join the Alumni Association.

He was like, “You should be a member of the association.” He’s a member of the Air Force Sergeant’s Association. That’s a way for him to network and stay connected.

As for me, it took a couple years. Once I graduated, I was like . . . I need to move on to something else, but it was that connection back to the university that was affordable. And, I get a calendar that hangs up on my wall and makes me remember walking around Lake Laverne or having lunch in the MU or brings up memories of good times. That was the major draw for me . . . maintaining some sort of connection to your past.

Marcus also wanted to stay connected to the people he had met because he had made real friends. He had grown as a person, and he was confident in his identity. Marcus stated, “I have peers who understand what I went through I think.”

Anndrea Thigpen, study participant #4, as she had done all evening, communicated both hurt and joy—often in the same sentence. However, it was always the attitude that she took from those experiences that amazed me. As an example of her thoughts on her ISU connection, she stated:

Yeah, it’s a journey that I would not change. It’s been good. I’ve grown. I am sure that the other students who experienced Iowa State with me would not change their experiences either. We all felt a connection, and it was interesting because we had to
learn to live to accept each other. There were so few of us and still there was some discontent. The group was small; so everyone knew everyone. [Some African American students] wrote a newsletter and stuck it under the doors. Minority folks did this to share news about who they saw dancing and doing stuff and what needed to be done. So my best friend and I, we were in the Union, and I said, “Girl, did you see the article. I’m just so glad I wasn’t mentioned.” And she said, “I don’t think I got mentioned either.” Because you weren’t mentioned, they must think that we weren’t thinking much about you right now. In that segment, they had the one statement that they stayed and played cards all day. And you know, at those tables. . . there were a lot of memories. It was good times. We had some good times. There was a killing here and the Black students were very involved. An ex-football player was killed. He was a Black student who lived in Pammel Court [a campus residence for married students] with a Caucasian lady. She shot him and there were always students in the courtroom in the young lady’s trial. It was a time.

Anndrea ended this part of the interview with the statement, “The truth is that Ames and ISU are full of good people. It had and has a good support system. I survived it . . . I think highly of the pilot program. Plus, I wanted to succeed so badly.”

When I asked Olivia Watson, study participant #5, if she had it to do all over again where she would go to school, she stated,

I would attend the University of Iowa. That is where all my high school friends went. I made road trips over to Iowa City quite a bit when I was at Iowa State. I am the kind of person who always finishes what I start, and I appreciate Iowa State.
All five study participants had deep and unique experiences during their tenure at ISU. Those experiences bonded them to the institution and, in some cases, to people. The next two sections of this chapter seek to illustrate through two common themes how the experiences of these five African American alumni of ISU influenced their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association.

**Theme 2A. Feeling Academically Supported While Enrolled at Iowa State University**

From an academic perspective, study participant #1, Bob Miller, spoke very highly of the impact his academic advisor had on his being able to achieve academic success at ISU. While talking about his academic advisor, Bob’s whole body seemed to illuminate. He noted the following about his academic advisor:

Well, I didn’t know what I was going to major in at first. Then I met with my advisor. Phenomenal! Again, this person just helped you out. It was like visiting gram—kind of always there, super nice. I had my first formal listing declaration. It was Psychology and Sociology. While I was in [the Carver Academy], I was registered, I believe. Somewhere along the way I changed it to Business—still not knowing what that would look like. Very soon thereafter, my freshmen year or somewhere at the end of [the Carver Academy], I think, I changed it to Business. I thought I would probably want to get into business, didn’t know what that meant. Whether it was management or sales, but that was what I wanted to do. I just remember my advisor believing in me as I worked through that decision.

Bob also had to deal with the fact that he was not able to afford all the things others could due to his lack of finances. Again, ISU came through for him, as he shared the following story:
My freshman year I ran out of money, I had no money for food or to live, and I had to go in and apply for an emergency loan. Thank God I got it. It was $800 a semester and that helped, but [my parents and I] didn’t know, didn’t know how to plan it. My parents didn’t know how to help me, and we didn’t have any money. So if they wanted to help me they couldn’t anyway. That was very much of a struggle at first.

Once I got my arms around it, it was easier.

Bob ended this part of the interview with this statement, “Well, because of wonderful people at ISU, I didn’t fall through the cracks. Plus, I had well above a 3.0, not a 4.0. There are so many ways I could have easily fallen through the cracks.”

Although Helen Haynes, study participant #2, was an adult learner, I found her feelings about and experiences at ISU to be very similar to those of the other study participants. The lenses through which she viewed the university were centered on her academic and social engagement. As described earlier, because Helen was employed at ISU, along with her husband, she decided to pursue a degree. She chose to study sociology because she was always interested in trying to understand people and their decisions. She was among a pretty large group of adult learners. Helen described one course and the instructor as follows:

There were several of us [adults]. And I remember one course we had where we had to write every day . . . something for English Literature. The teacher would grade it. I would write about my family and that kind of subject matter. It didn’t matter to her what we wrote, as long as we wrote something every day and turned it in to her for grading.
Helen would begin her studies at 3:00 a.m. at her kitchen table while everyone else was asleep. Her husband would awaken around 6:00 a.m. to prepare the children’s breakfast. After everyone ate, her husband would make sure the children were off to school. Helen and he would then get dressed and leave their home for their work or classes, depending on the day. On most days, Helen’s job would take her away from campus. She very seldom, however, was away from home overnight.

I further explored with Helen what it was like for her to be an adult, university-employed African American undergraduate student at ISU. Before I could even get the question out of my mouth, Helen pulled herself close to the table. Her look became very solemn. She looked me square in the eyes and shared the following:

I don’t think I had any problems. I remember taking a course on diversity, I think that was it. The only one thing I remember, my professor had us sit in sections. We had to maintain that seat every time we came to his class because that was the best way he could understand us, you know. Then when we talked about diversity, I remember one professor would walk all around the room and he would point and ask [the Black students] to answer the questions. But other than that, I didn’t have any problems. I really didn’t.

A number of times throughout the interview, Helen would state: “I think people knew my husband, and they knew he worked at the university.”

Marcus Jones, study participant #3, spoke with authority and conviction when he talked about his advising experience at and receiving a scholarship to attend ISU. As described earlier, Marcus came to ISU as an out-of-state student. The advising and the scholarship were central to his success. Marcus stated,
I got some wonderful guidance here at Iowa State, but the scholarship didn’t hurt either. The quality of the engineering program was pretty good. I was looking at the University of Maryland, College of Engineering at Maryland. It was right up the road, and my friends were going there. I was going to be a Terrapin. I memorized the fight song. I got the financial aid letter from the University of Maryland. They were offering $500—500 bucks! That was it. I was top 10% of my class and did okay on the SAT. I did pretty well on the ACT. All [Maryland would] give me was $500, and I was like, “No. That’s not going to work out.” Iowa State offered me full tuition and some other money. So I booked a plane to Des Moines the next day. I told my parents, “Let’s do it.”

Marcus experienced ISU through the same lenses as study participants #1 and #2 did. He was very candid about the ups and downs of his undergraduate pilgrimage. The following paragraphs provide some exposure to Marcus’s academic experiences and support system while attending ISU.

Marcus was committed to his academic pursuits. Very few things took precedence over his studies. Marcus provided the following account of a typical day:

I was in a computer lab most of the time. I was an engineering student. I really didn’t get to experience all that I wanted to because the academic curriculum was so rigid, and I struggled with it. It was fairly difficult. I was able to do some things. I also worked in the residence halls as a peer mentor. I really liked that.

Study participant #5, Anndrea Watson, always felt she could make a difference in the lives of people through communications. As she was growing up, Anndrea saw so many
people needing to have attention paid to their situations. She made the following point to illustrate why she chose to major in communications:

My parents bought a home on the west side of Chicago, which was then a predominantly African American neighborhood. Back then, I would have classified that neighborhood as middle-class because people who moved there had worked in whatever jobs they had. When I came to college hearing all this stuff in sociology classes about [Blacks], I became very angry. I remember saying to myself that I lived in a neighborhood where mothers worked, and you people [Whites] came home and there was a dad and a family. Yes, there was welfare for some family members. No one was trying to rip off the system. I simply saw hard-working people trying to make a living however they could. So, that’s how I got to Ames. I got my Bachelors of Science and Masters of Science from here in Mass Communications with a minor in English. I had wanted to get my degree in broadcasting. I was really feeling like nobody was telling it from [an African American’s] perspective. I wanted to be one of those reporter-type girls. Well, that didn’t work out. I guess God had a different plan.

Anndrea Watson had a tough go of things, academically, early on in her transition to ISU. She provided this glimpse into the beginning of her academic pilgrimage at ISU:

It was tough being a student who was used to getting pretty good grades in high school. [Iowa State] was competitive. And there were times when I felt, “Am I really ready for this?” . . . As I got older and progressed, I learned that it wasn’t so much about studying as it was about how you studied. Faculty assisted me in learning how to study smart. I had to learn the hard way before that. I studied so
hard one time for a sociology exam. I got a “D.” I didn’t know what I had done wrong. When I got better, I said, “Oh my, I could have gone off in different directions.” Then, I just wanted to graduate. I’ve had enough of this; I just wanted to graduate. But [Iowa State] was a great experience for me. For faculty, as well as students, [African American students and I] were new; we were a novelty.

Olivia Watson, study participant #5, was proud of the fact that she completed her ISU degree in exactly four years by going to two summer sessions. In doing so, she became the first person, on both her mom’s and dad’s sides of the families, to earn a college degree.

ISU, however, was not easy—academically or socially. The following excerpt from Olivia’s interview sheds some penetrating light on her academic pilgrimage at ISU:

Growing up in central Iowa, I didn’t know I was experiencing racism. I got teased because all my friends were White. Black kids would say, “You like White boys. You’re an Uncle Tom.” I got called names. Later on in high school, not at the beginning of high school, I realized what was going on. When I got to college it was in your face. It was blatantly in your face. So I sort of relished the fact that I had already experienced some of that [racism] in high school. By the time I got up [to Iowa State], I was pretty resilient. But I think when I got to Iowa State more racist remarks came from White people than from Blacks. I felt like every roommate I had was an educational opportunity for me to teach them why we do this to our hair, and why do you?

From an academic perspective, Olivia Watson believed her advisor could have done a better job helping her pick which track in journalism or communication she should have
pursued. Sitting up in her chair, a somewhat stern look on her face, it appeared Olivia and I had traveled back into time to that very meeting with her advisor. Olivia stated,

I had chosen Speech Communications, but I switched to Journalism because I thought it was the wrong major. And I think that was lack, two part, lack of research on my part and lack of support from an advisor. So I switched to Journalism. When I got into Journalism, it was like no. No. No. I think I was better where I was because it seemed like the Journalism major’s focus was more on magazines, and I knew I totally didn’t want to write for a magazine. So then I went back to Speech Communications where I could emphasize in television production and direction. I was where I was supposed to be in the first place.

Olivia continued to cite advisor-related issues. Another example of where she felt the system at ISU failed her is as follows:

I thought Iowa State would be different from high school but it wasn’t. I was one of maybe one or two of the minorities in a class, let alone in a lecture hall. I hated those. It was very impersonal, I remember. The small classrooms, I was probably one of two minorities in those classes, and it felt like there was no small classroom feel, no personal touch. Your test scores were posted on the wall by the last digits of your social security number. That’s who you were, and that’s all I was. So by that time, I was just ready to get done. I knew what I had to do, and I knew what I had to do to do it. I’d never failed a class before in my life, ever in my life. Freshman year, boom, I get an “F.” Nobody told me I could drop the class before I had trouble. Remember, I was the first one to go to college in my family. Nobody had told me
about that. So needless to say, I learned my lesson. I took it over and got rid of that “F”.

So, trying to prod deeper, I asked Olivia to respond regarding where she ended up finding academic support on campus. She believed very strongly that African American administrators at ISU had favorites among the African American students. She described where and from whom she finally found academic support:

Of [the African American students], it was totally obvious if you were a favorite or not. I was not a favorite. No, I did what I was supposed to do, and I was where I was supposed to be. I didn’t bother anybody. I didn’t make waves, so there was no way you couldn’t support me. African American administrators wouldn’t go out of their way to support me. I think the most support I got, academically and otherwise, was from fellow members of Gospel Soul Innovators because we were a tight-knit group.

**Theme 2B. Finding Social Connections While Enrolled at Iowa State University**

The social connections each study participant found during their time at ISU was very important. It was very interesting how those social connections came about and lasted. Moreover, those social connections, coupled with the earlier described academic experiences, had a profound impact on each study participant’s view of ISU. The following text serves to illustrate that reality.

At the end of the Carver Academy, Bob Miller, study participant #1, participated in Summer Greek Rush. He ended up choosing a fraternity and moving into the fraternity house for the fall. When I asked Bob what led him to be a part of the Greek scene, he noted, Well, when you apply to Iowa State, the application asks if you would like information on the Greek System. I checked the yes box. Some of the fraternities
sent me postcards. I sent a few postcards back and a gentleman spent some time calling me. We spoke for hours over the course of the summer. He was one of those recruitment people that every fraternity needs. I mean someone who really drives the recruitment. He got me inspired. He said that “we need leaders, we need this and we need that,” but he wasn’t trying to sell me something. He actually spent the time . . . hours speaking to me about it. He made sure I knew I could just get involved. I can do all those things that seemed very interesting. And if I wanted to have this new experience with college and get these leadership opportunities then I should look at the fraternity system. I decided, boy, I am going to jump in, and I am going to do that.

Bob spoke of ISU as providing positive experiences for him. For example, he stated, “I know how important the Carver Academy experience was for me. It was instrumental in helping me adjust to and get through Iowa State.” He went on to say, The [Iowa State] experience was very good. And what made it in my mind a good experience was so many resources and opportunities. In looking back, I think I kind of stumbled upon things. Maybe I didn’t realize the importance of those things then but later on realized that, wow, I was so glad that I was able to take part in that. I may not be here if I hadn’t. Carver Academy was a perfect example. It wasn’t a long program maybe six or seven weeks, but you were in class and you took those classes seriously. You had all these types of social soft-skill development, leadership development. We went camping one time. It was just so many other things like that which made the experience really good at Iowa State. I went through and thought, “This is nice, and I will try to find more areas to take part.” And Iowa State had more
organizations like that. I found myself trying to get over involved to where I wasn’t effective. I went through that period too. I’d say, long story short, what made the experience good was I was able to be involved in more things outside the classroom.

I was amazed at how involved Bob Miller was during his time at ISU. During the interview he noted, “I was a focused student. So much so that my fun part of college didn’t happen until after I graduated. I was just involved with so much on campus—10–12 hours a day and then I’d study.” Bob further noted,

My freshmen year I helped do a program with a faculty member in the Sociology Department. [The faculty member] developed this program called Cultural Kaleidoscope Peers, which was just a funky name and didn’t describe at all what it was. It was basically going into graduate level classes, and I was doing this as a freshman after being trained, to talk about multicultural communication. There are some shared characteristics, but what does that mean with shared communications. How are you going to interact and how are you going to understand were key conversations. So it was an excellent learning experience. To me, it was all about social activism and diversity.

Bob is a fair-skinned African American. He was eloquent in his explanation that many people at ISU didn’t know which group, African American or White, he belonged to or felt most comfortable embracing. Bob’s description of this reality was characterized this way:

[My identity] wasn’t a comfortable situation for many people at first. Because for me, White people wouldn’t see me as White, and some people of color didn’t see me as Black. I fell in the middle. I was practically on my own island. I felt, however,
that Iowa State was small enough that you had your communities of people that were together in groups and organizations. But I would have to say that I felt the most comfortable in the organizations that I would volunteer for like Cultural Kaleidoscope Peers. These groups were more like-minded, more diverse.

In his fraternity, Bob spoke of his not fitting in right away. He was an African American student in an all-White fraternity. Eventually things got better. Bob had this to say about that social engagement experiences:

It eventually happened, I’d say, within a year or two. Part of it for me was when I look back and talk about my experience with other people. I realized that if you are not comfortable here, or you weren’t comfortable over there . . . that at some point, I just didn’t give a crap. And when you do that all of a sudden this group is accepting of you. And the other group, whether they are accepting or not, doesn’t matter. It’s a reflection of how you see yourself. That is kind of the explanation of what I went through. Once I made the jump to be comfortable with the fact that this is just how it is, the experience became a lot more joyful. Reality is, I probably didn’t come in with the mindset that I was a student of color. I left Iowa State, however, knowing that I was a student of color.

I asked Bob if he was comfortable expounding on this last statement, to which he responded:

I wasn’t identified as such. And the town I was raised in, there wasn’t a lot of diversity. Again, my parents are both White. My mom didn’t know a whole lot to teach me about diversity, but she was a very strong-minded person. And anything that was even close to racism, she was on it to the point of okay . . . she was always all over it in a very good way. She was always kind of blindly there saying that we
are going to do this, we are going to do that, and no one is going to wrong you. You are going to fight back and whatever. That still brings me back to “this is who you are.” Every single day of life in high school is going to be 99% White, and you are going to have to deal with that. So you find yourself conforming and losing your identity to the majority so you can get through it. So that is probably where I came in with Iowa State, is where I felt comfortable and kind of prodded from both sides. When I had the opportunity, along the way, to take part in these organizations, it helped me understand that different things just make sense. This is how this works and then, OH [stated with conviction], this person over here from Washington D.C. thinks this and that’s how your school was. I started to develop kind of my ideas and thoughts and feelings about that and started to feel comfortable about who I was and had better relationships because of that.

In his fraternity, Bob also dealt with members making racial comments, not about him, but about others. This was very awkward for him.

Helen Haynes, study participant #2, being an adult student, university employee, mother, wife, and community volunteer, felt blessed to have professional interactions with colleagues on campus and in the community. She and her husband entertained in their home and were also invited to university and community functions. She bonded well with her classmates, especially the other adult learners—regardless of their race or other factors. Helen expressed over and over that she had no problems with the social environment at ISU, and this following account clearly demonstrates those sentiments:

I didn’t have any problems. I truly didn’t have any problems because of the administrators who were there and a number of other good people. These
administrators were White, and we were Black. We just supported each other. And the dean would invite us over to cookout at their home. [The dean’s family] lived in this predominantly White neighborhood in town. So we truly didn’t notice, but in classes sometimes I was the only Black student.

As Helen shared this story, the room became smaller, more intimate. Her voice lowered. The tenderness in that moment was unexplainable. It was easy to see that she was genuine, and the experience had profoundly impacted her.

Marcus Jones, study participant #3, spoke of being highly engaged with his floormates in Friley Residence Hall. He spent all five years of his undergraduate time living on campus in Friley—two years on the floor named Lorch-Russell House and three years on the floor named Meeker House. As Marcus shared this information, his entire body classified as a giant smile.

Marcus and a group of his friends, mostly engineering students, would attend basketball and football games. He had season tickets to both. He made sure the following message was conveyed to me every time he talked about social engagement matters: “[My friends and I] knew what the demands of our majors were.”

When Marcus Jones talked about social engagement, he was very deliberate. An example of such a deliberate response from him is as follows:

Well, for me, it was having grown up in the military and having been around the world; I knew how to network and make peers across cultures. So when I got here and some people were like, “You have to join BSA [Black Student Alliance], you have to do this.” My reaction was “No, I don’t.” I had had more varied experiences in life. It was hard to communicate that and I didn’t know how to. I have had a
different experience. I can walk into a group of people and I can manage. I lived in Hawaii; everybody lives there. It’s part of the east and west; everybody deals with it. You learn how to navigate that kind of stuff. I still speak a little bit of pigeon. You just pick up on that stuff. I lived in Baltimore, a more urban area. So the fact people were saying, “You have to join this community.” I was always saying, “No, I don’t. I will join the community that I want to.” Anytime I would go to a BSA or [National Society of Black Engineers] event for a little bit, it just didn’t vibe with me. I went to sporting events with friends who liked to go to football because that’s what I enjoyed doing. I would go to the Friday night movies, Friday-After-Class or After-Dark events. I would go to that because people were going there, and it was a way to relax. I had a friend, he always told me, “You need to dumb it down.” I still go with that . . . just dumb it down. Do what you want to do. It’s kind of a good thing, but with the community that was here at the time it wasn’t seen as though I didn’t want to be part of [the African American students’ groups and happenings]. My needs were different then compared to what [the African American student groups and events] could provide. I was strong in my sense of self. I am good; I don’t need that. I had some conversations with people who said, “You have to do this.” I have to study and I have to use the bathroom, and I have to take a shower, and I have to study. I have to do these things; everything else is a “want.” That’s how I navigated.

Marcus also met his wife at ISU. They dated during his undergraduate years. Their paths took them separate ways after graduation. They reconnected on Facebook. Marcus eventually made a trip to where she was living, and they eventually married.
The beginning of Anndrea Thigpen’s, study participant #4, social engagement experience started with her roommate situation. Anndrea didn’t know who her roommate would be, but she was open to making it a positive situation. Her first roommate was White. An account from Anndrea showcases how things unfolded:

The next morning, things came up about the roommates that they chose for us [African American students]. So when we finally did move into the residence halls, some of the White students were asked if they wanted a minority or African American roommate. [Iowa State doesn’t] do that now, but they certainly did it then. One White student responded that it would be like having a foreign student. It was a good experience because we got along. It was good, but we [African American students] had our little groups that we would meet up with between classes and at the Student Union.

Anndrea went on to describe herself as being an activist from the beginning of her tenure at ISU. This was due in large part to things she and her friends had heard about ISU prior to their arrival on campus. She recounted the following story to me:

[I, along with other Black students on campus] had heard that there was student unrest on campus. I think my husband was a part of that, as he was a year ahead of me. And it was mostly athletes. Athletes had a series of demands they wanted from the president of the administration. [The African American athletes] wanted an assistant coach to be African American. [The African American athletes] didn’t ask for an African American head coach. They just wanted a coach of some kind, football or whatever, that was African American. On the list also was the need to see more African American women on campus. I remember thinking that [my African
American girlfriends and I were mail-order brides for these people. We laugh about that . . . still today. So [the university administration] went out in search of Black women, but there were an equal number of men in our group as well. It was so funny. I guess [the African American athletes] demonstrated in the Student Union, and they wore black arm bands. It was that time you know. They didn’t hit anyone, but they overturned some tables gently. My husband was really good in English and still is. He was the one that wrote up the document. People were interested in who wrote that document. It was so well done, and it clearly stated what [the African American athletes] wanted. I guess we came in that time and that atmosphere and there were articles written, maybe one or two, in the student newspaper about our [Anndrea and her friends] presence on campus. I didn’t see any other African American women. I think there were two or three graduate students. Our group was it, as far as I know, except for the athletes. So you know when you walk on campus, it was like different. But if you saw somebody of color, way over there, you went over there. You went like “Hey,” because you may not see another brother or sister from like Monday to Thursday.

Anndrea also worked during her undergraduate years at ISU. She was able to get two articles published in the student newspaper, The Daily. These two opportunities ended up serving as social outlets and networking venues for Anndrea.

Study participant #5, Olivia Watson, loved to take photographs. She actually took some photography classes while at ISU. She even had an expensive camera, but, for some unknown reason, it fizzled.
Olivia also had a great junior year, as this was her first semester at ISU that she had an African American roommate. This roommate was from Chicago. Olivia remembers the entire experience with fondness. As she shared the experience with me, the heaviness of the room from earlier moments during the interview seemed to dissipate. Olivia stated,

My sophomore year I had met a girl from Chicago. She lived on a different floor than me, but we decided that the next year, our junior year, we would room together. So my junior year was my last year in the dorms and that was probably my best, my favorite year.

Olivia provided vivid accounts of what it was like for her being an African American student on ISU’s predominantly White campus. The following account painted one of the most visual pictures of how she experienced the social climate of the campus:

The White folks gave me dirty looks, all the stereotypical looks, when crossing the street. People who knew me, I was fine with. There were girls on my floor who were fine, and we would study together. I was never a partier or a drinker. I also remember walking on campus. Part of the culture was to speak to those you came into contact with. One of my White girlfriends was like, “Do you know him?” I said, “No.” She said, “Why did you say ‘hi’ to him?” I said, “Because it’s the nice thing to do.” She said, “But you don’t know him.” I said, “You think he’s going to accost me right here on the sidewalk.” She said, “Oh. I’m sorry.” I said, “It’s okay to be friendly. You can say ‘hi’ and keep walking, you know.”

Olivia loved athletics, and she found great pleasure and friendships through her participation in intramurals. She played a lot of volleyball and softball. Olivia recalled with great excitement running into the men on the ISU track team during her first year at ISU.
Hearing her talk about them made me feel as though I was attending a reunion. Olivia described this group of friends:

One of the first groups of people that I met on campus was the guys from the track team. Long story, but we are friends to this day. I never ate alone whether it was my roommate, somebody down the hall, or one of the track guys. There was never a dull moment.

Olivia found a church in Ames. Her mom would come up to campus and go to church with her. Olivia also sang in the college’s African American choir, the Gospel Soul Innovators. They met and practiced in the Memorial Union. When the choir would travel, Olivia’s parents would sometimes go along.

African American students, according to Olivia, congregated together a lot at ISU. This happened a lot in the dining halls, where Olivia worked. Her description of this level of socialization at ISU for African American students included:

We [African American students] seemed to congregate. When I think about riding the bus on the cold days, or just walking down Welch Avenue, we seemed to walk together. We seemed to kind of look out for each other. In the dining halls, we ate together.

**Summary**

The findings of this case study suggest that each of the five study participants, Bob Miller, Helen Haynes, Marcus Jones, Anndrea Thigpen, and Olivia Watson, entered ISU with a deep desire to achieve their single academic goal—a college degree. For the most part, each of the study participants was the first one in his or her family to graduate from an institution of higher education. The themes that emerged during the data analysis process
showed deep commonalities in their membership decision making and how their campus experiences influenced their decisions to join the ISU Alumni Association. Although there were some noted differences in the study participants’ experiences, the similarities clearly outweighed the differences.

Chapter 6 offers conclusions, recommendations for practice and further research, and my final reflections on this research endeavor.
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

Introduction

This chapter presents my conclusions about why five African American, bachelor-degreed alumni of ISU chose to join the ISU Alumni Association and how their experiences at ISU influenced their decision to become members of the ISU Alumni Association. Although the findings cannot be generalized, they provide some insight to the meaning-making that went into Bob Miller’s, Helen Haynes’ Marcus Jones’s, Andarea Thigpen’s, and Olivia Watson’s decisions and how the experiences of these five study participants’ influenced that decision. In addition, I offer some recommendations for practice and further research, and include my final reflections on this experience.

Conclusions

The purpose of this case study was to understand why five African American alumni of ISU joined the ISU Alumni Association and how their experiences at ISU influenced their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association. An in-depth review of the literature revealed no previous studies related to why African American alumni of PWIs choose to become members of their alma maters’ alumni associations. However, many studies shared information about how an increasing number of PWIs of higher learning are enrolling larger numbers of minority students. These same institutions, however, are still struggling to engage minority alumni support in this era when institutions are receiving smaller appropriations from their state legislatures and other sources. Gaining understanding about African American alumni membership decision making, therefore, should be a high priority for all PWIs. As stated in chapter 1, Peter Hayashida, Vice Chancellor of University...
Advancement at the University of California, Riverside, which has a student body that is majority minority, noted,

There is enormous wealth waiting to be tapped, and none of us [in the advancement community] have figured a way to do it. I don’t think we’ve fully prepared ourselves for this shift. . . . Indeed, the change train is charging ahead. It is increasingly loaded with new faces from backgrounds with little or no history of giving to education. The trend is challenging institutions to figure out how to court this rapidly changing pool of potential donors. Long-standing rules of engagement are being rewritten as the new reality undermines entrenched assumptions about the giving patterns of people of color. It’s spurring new thinking about the effectiveness of race- and ethnicity-based affinity alumni groups and the kind of team and branding message needed to make the case today for giving,” stated Peter Hayashida, Vice Chancellor of University Advancement at the University of California, Riverside, which has a student body that is majority minority. (as cited in Stuart, 2012, p. 21)

This research study, which appears to be the first study addressing why African American alumni of PWIs choose to become members of their alma maters alumni associations, was guided by the following two fundamental questions:

1. Why do Iowa State University African American graduates join the ISU Alumni Association?

2. How did their experiences at Iowa State University influence their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association?

For close to 30 years I had wanted to conduct research on the topic of why African American alumni of PWIs join their alma maters’ alumni associations. This study ultimately
grew out of my own interest in knowing if other African American alumni of PWI institutions joined their alumni associations for the same reasons that I did. I then shared this idea for a topic with a number of my professors and cohorts, and they too thought it was a fascinating topic that warranted research. With that encouragement, and my own personal excitement, I cemented my commitment to the topic and pursued it with my major professor, Dr. Larry Ebbers, for research approval. Dr. Ebbers reviewed this with my Program of Study Committee, and this group provided final approval for me to engage five study participants in this case study research project.

What I speculated the conclusions would be and what they turned out to be are not the same. I thought the study participants would share sentiments of membership decisions based on obligation, making sure African Americans were represented. This particular response never surfaced. The sense of obligation was not a reason I had ever had or given about my reason for joining but, for some reason, I believed that the study participants would respond this way. I was really interested in the decision making these African American alumni of ISU attributed to why they chose to join the ISU Alumni Association and how their experiences at ISU influenced their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association.

After interviewing and then spending additional conversation time with my study participants, Bob Miller, Helen Haynes, Marcus Jones, Anndrea Thigpen, and Olivia Watson, I discovered that each of them had entered ISU with a deep desire to achieve their academic goals. The themes that developed during data analysis showed commonalities in why the study participants chose to join the ISU Alumni Association and how their experiences influenced their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association. The two themes shared by the five study participants that answered the first research question were,
• Receiving value from their ISU degrees and

• Maintaining connections after receiving their degrees from ISU.

The five study participants also had some deep and lasting experiences during their tenure at ISU. As they reflected on their experiences during the interview, and as they reviewed my preliminary report, they expressed how much they had grown personally during their time at ISU. The two themes shared by the five study participants that answered the second research question included,

• Feeling academically supported while enrolled at ISU and

• Finding social engagement while enrolled at ISU.

A complete review and analysis of the themes answering the two research questions follows.

**Theme 1A. Receiving Value from Their Iowa State University Degrees**

None of the five study participants in this case study entered ISU based on a long-held dream or aspiration to attend this particular institution. Their decisions to attend ISU can be categorized as being random at best. When they talked about not knowing what to expect from college, how to actually fund it, what to major in, where to live, how to navigate the place, and how different they were from the rest of the student body, it was evident to me as the researcher that these five study participants—Bob, Helen, Marcus, Anndrea, and Olivia—had a shared journey. To this day, and to my knowledge, they have never met each other, but they have so much in common. At the end of their respective journeys, it was clear to them that they had made a great college choice. Employers were quick to hire them, and the ISU degree was respected in the marketplace. A shared theme that played a major part in why these study participants chose to join the ISU Alumni Association centered on them
receiving value from their ISU degrees. Some examples of the statements supporting this shared theme are provided below.

Bob Miller, study participant #1, stated,

When it comes to education specifically, it is one of those things people can’t take from you. That you’ve earned it, and that you’ve had the experience to go along with it, makes it very special. I had truly earned a great degree from a great university.

Helen Haynes, study participant #2, shared with me that she really wanted to attend Drake because it was close to her home. She also had family members who lived in the area around Drake. Helen made it clear that attending Drake was not a possibility because of the high tuition. “But I got a great education at Iowa State, and I am happy it was here for me and my family,” she stated.

Marcus Jones, study participant #3, expressed complete satisfaction with his education from ISU; however, if he had it to do over again, he would have chosen to attend Maryland. On the other hand, he made it clear that he had received an excellent degree from a world-class university. He stated, “People see the value of the Iowa State degree. They know that the education you get here is tough, particularly engineering. So many good people have come out of the program.” He then closed this part of the interview with this very powerful story:

It was my last year out West. I was transferred to an elementary school where the principal was brand new. Our introductory meeting was like passing each other in the hallway. He was a UC-Berkeley guy; he went to San Francisco State, a smart guy. He was a Bay Area guy, and I went to Iowa State. He asked me, “Where did you go to college?” I replied, “Iowa State University.” And he kind of looks at me a minute
and then, “click,” Cyclones, George Washington Carver? You’re all right.” And he walked away. I was like, “Okay.” And during football season, he always asked about how the Cyclones are doing in football. And it was a couple years ago after we beat Oklahoma State [in football], he says, “I know you are happy.” And of course, screaming in my apartment and three months later I’m still hoarse. I was about to make a DVD over that one. There were people who knew about the university. They knew very little, but they knew something about it. Even some of the kids, these kids in Oakland, they knew a little bit about Iowa State because of what they had seen or even heard about it on the radio or something. And that was kind of a unique thing. You know I had never heard about Iowa State when I was a kid. But now with technology, people are starting to hear about it a little bit more so there is that connection piece to it and part of the culture that people know something about it. You know . . . good or bad.

Theme 1B. Maintaining Connections After Receiving Their Degrees from Iowa State University

The other shared theme that played a major part in why these study participants chose to join the ISU Alumni Association centered on their personal commitment to maintaining connections after receiving their degrees from ISU. During their time at ISU, each study participant had made some lasting connections. These relationships supported them during their time at ISU. These connections were also impactful and life changing. Some examples of the statements supporting this shared theme follow.

Bob Miller, study participant #1, stated,

I think for me, anyway, part of being an African American is identifying and maintaining relationships that are important. And while Iowa State is a big school, it
is small enough that being connected is very important. Not that if you are one of 10 million, or I know this number is out of whack, but take the largest school in the country, I can feel that I am one of millions and millions. But I think here when you are connected you still have a way of being involved, and you still have a way to talk to people. You still, I suppose it would be that way with any school, when I see an Iowa State flag in a vehicle or a shirt that they are wearing on game day, you have that camaraderie that part of being a member is that after the fact it is something that still ties you. You can say “I am still a part of . . .” and still have that connection with the place, the people, and the experiences. So I think for anyone that point of view would be beneficial, but I think also that being an African American, being a minority, it kind of draws you more. Whether you use that membership to specifically keep in touch with people, I personally don’t. I have gotten on the website and looked at the alumni directory. I think that is pretty cool. I have tried to get in touch with a handful of people that I knew for years . . . a guy I studied with in Cuernavaca, a roommate I have never talked to since. I found him on [the online directory]. There are so many good resources through the Alumni Association to help you keep your connections.

Anndrea Thigpen, study participant #4, shared deeply with me about her ISU connection. As she had done all evening, Anndrea communicated both hurt and joy regarding her time at ISU—often in the same sentence. As I mentioned earlier, however, it was always her attitude regarding those experiences that amazed me. An example of her thoughts on her ISU connections, also included earlier, is as follows:
Yeah, it’s a journey that I would not change. It’s been good. I’ve grown. I am sure that the other students who experienced [the journey] with me would not change it either. We all felt a connection and it was interesting because we had to learn to accept each other. There were so few of us [African American students] and still there was some discontent. The group was small; so everyone knew everyone. [Some African American students] wrote a newsletter and stuck it under the doors. Minority folks did this to share news about who they saw dancing and doing stuff and what needed to be done. So my best friend and I, we were in the Union, and I said “Girl, did you see the article. I’m just so glad I wasn’t mentioned.” And she said, “I don’t think I got mentioned either.” Because you weren’t mentioned, they must think that we weren’t thinking much about you right now. In that segment, they had the one statement that they stayed and played cards all day. And you know, at those tables . . . there were a lot of memories. It was good times. We had some good times. There was a killing here and the Black students were very involved. An ex-football player was killed. He was a Black student who lived in Pammel Court [residences for married students] with a Caucasian lady. She shot him and there were always students in the courtroom in the young lady’s trial. It was a time.

This following ending statement by Anndrea sums up the depth of her emotions and thoughts about ISU:

Iowa State gave me my husband . . . on the very first day I set foot on campus. Wow, I cannot let him hear me say that. [He was in the room next door to where the interview was taking place.] The truth is the fact that Ames and ISU are full of good people. It had and has a good support system. I survived it, I think, because of the
pilot program, and I wanted to succeed so badly. My husband was here, and he was great. We dated all through college, and it was good to have a strong person with values, coming from a good family, and visiting me at home in Chicago. My family loved him right away, and he would meet me at the bus station with my trunk coming up for the fall. My mother would say, “You need a husband just to go to college. Meet you at the bus station to get the trunk so your daddy didn’t have to bring it up.” They loved him and respected him, not just because he came from a good family and his father was a minister. That just happened to be a blessing. Had I gone someplace else, I don’t know what my life would be. I know me, and it has been a good life. It’s not over. It’s been a blessing.

The above-listed two themes answered the first research question in this case study regarding why the study participant chose to become dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association. The next two themes emerged for the second research question regarding how the campus experiences of the study participants influenced their decision to become dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association. A complete review and analysis of the two themes answering the second research question follows:

**Theme 2A. Feeling Academically Supported While Enrolled at Iowa State University**

The study participants in this case study expressed many examples, on many levels within ISU, how they felt supported academically. Although the system was not perfect, it was there. Study participants expressed great appreciation for the support and were candid about where it could have been better. It was clear, however, that their feeling of being academically supported while enrolled at ISU played a critical part in influencing their
decision to become dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association. The following excerpts from the study participants help tell this story.

The voice and facial expressions of Bob Miller, study participant #1, took on additional life as he talked about this one professor in the College of Business at ISU. This professor, who just happened also to be an ISU alumnus and entrepreneur, was responsible for helping Bob land his current position. Bob remembered the class being a 400-level sales class. Bob talked about the professor and the class as follows:

I took this 400-level class from this awesome professor. That class has always stuck with me. When I reflect upon this class, I remember that it was close to when I was graduating. It was my last semester, and you know you are going to go out into the real world. You know things will be different forever, and it’s not going to be like this. I kind of feel horrible. At that point you start to absorb even more.

Helen Haynes, study participant #2, also believed that there was great academic support for all students at ISU. The example regarding her statistics class really stood out to me. Helen explained,

Since I was an adult learner in the class, everyone was supportive. I never had statistics before. I remember [some of her classmates and I] went over to one of the student’s houses. Her husband was tutoring us on statistics to get us through the math part. So there was support.

Taking the advice of his parents, Marcus Jones, study participant #3, surrounded himself with friends that were just as studious as he was. He revealed,

[My friends and I] all went to the library at night, and we relaxed on the weekends. I was not the party-going person. This made me feel disconnected with the African
American community, especially those that were in fraternities, those who were involved with other stuff. They were partying and doing other stuff. I had a scholarship. I was trying to make grades. I was in engineering, and I was working. I was struggling. I was one of a very few people of color in my discipline. Once I got over that initial shock, which I kind of knew was going to happen, you know, I just needed to grind through it. But I found that many of the people I was taking classes with were really cool. They could chill. It didn’t seem to bother them that I was a person of color. I was pulling my weight. Everyone was pulling their own weight. Everyone was lost at one point or another. I think that helped balance the colorization thing. I was lucky in that respect. I was as equally lost as everyone else. We are paddling up the same creek together. I think that helped me kind of get through it.

Career-wise, Marcus had always wanted to be a pilot. He dreamed of it when he was a kid. As he spoke of that dream, and how things eventually played out, he shared the following:

I wanted to be a pilot. So I figured aerospace engineering was the best way to go about it. In my third or fourth year of study, probably my junior year, I was into the thick of it. My grades were okay. I was having a hard time finding a job. So I was working as a mentor. A couple of mentors of mine were like, “Higher Ed, you seem like you’d be good for Higher Ed.” They kind of buttered it up for me by saying, “You will be fantastic, make tons of money, and make lots of friends. It will be good for you.” So when a group tells a 21-year-old that you can make a lot of money, and it’s legal, you do it. And the higher education component was like, “I’m pretty good
at it.” I didn’t have to put a lot of effort into it. I just kind of rolled with it from there.

Marcus completed his engineering degree. He left Ames for about six years before returning to the area for employment and graduate school.

Olivia Watson, study participant #5, shared that the most support she got, academically and otherwise, was from fellow members of Gospel Soul Innovators, an African American gospel choir on the ISU campus. They were a tight-knit group.

**Theme 2B. Finding Social Engagement While Enrolled at Iowa State University**

The other shared theme that played a major part in how the campus experiences of the study participants played into their decision making regarding becoming dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association centered on them finding social engagement while enrolled at ISU. The study participants in this case study shared many examples of how they were socially engaged at ISU and the impact this engagement had on them. Although there were lonely times, emptiness, and even fear, opportunities to explore their interests and to push boundaries were made available. Like the academic environment, the social environment was not perfect. Study participants, again, expressed great appreciation for the support they received and were candid about where it could have been better. It was clear, however, that their finding social engagement while enrolled at ISU played a critical part in influencing their decision to become dues paying members of the ISU Alumni Association. The following excerpts from the study participants’ interviews help tell this story.

Bob Miller, study participant #1, spoke of social engagement from a very different perspective. Social engagement was viewed by him from a standpoint of diversity. It is a well-known fact that the state of Iowa is not very diverse. Bob remembered ISU being a bit
more diverse than his central Iowa hometown though. The level of diversity he found at ISU had a profound impact on him. He described his social engagement from a diversity standpoint at ISU this way:

Iowa State was a bit overwhelming at first. Not necessarily in a bad way. Where I came from, it wasn’t really diverse. So this was really my first experience at living in a diverse environment. When you put all that together, it was a new experience. You are not in a different country, but you really are somewhere else. First and foremost, there are people of color—different colors—and people from other countries. You walk next to them, and you talk with them. They are in your classes, and you are actually working together . . . not from far away. That was very interesting. Diversity-related social engagement in a sense, too, I realized all too fast, was a good way to get involved in what I would call, and this isn’t probably the right word, but social activism. Groups, seminars, and people the university would bring in for speakers helped to fuel this type of involvement. So I remember always taking part in those things. I was always looking for a multicultural business network and other things that just supported diversity whether it was about color, sexual orientation, you name it.

Marcus Jones, study participant #3, spoke of his friends and himself as being nerds. They played Madden and Play Station most of the time. They ate lunch and dinner together. They played intramural sports, basketball, and football. With a big smile and a huge air of confidence, Marcus sat up in his chair and offered the following declaration:

Nerds! We were nerds. We all were engineers. We all were science majors. We were all from across the country, different life perspectives, but we were all kind of
“eh” about whatever. But the key thing was that we were nerds. We were definitely nerds! We wore that with pride.

This group of friends also was very diverse, as described by Marcus:

Ethnically diverse. Mostly ethnically diverse. It was pretty diverse across the spectrum. We had some White students there; we had folks from South Korea. We had good friends from Malaysia, and a couple of brothers from Chicago and Baltimore. We all were about being together, and it was kind of across the board. It wasn’t so much about ethnic identity; it was more about our areas of interest. We can pull some people together and, in those conversations, we would share who we were and how we identified with stuff like that. It’s amazing what you will learn about someone over aerodynamics. You know, you are completely lost. Plus, our floor was coed.

Anndrea Thigpen, study participant #4, made it clear that she had a positive experience at ISU. She remembered with fondness how nice, approachable, and visible Dr. Parks (ISU’s president at the time) was among the students. Even though it was clear that African American students, as well as African American faculty and staff, were in low numbers on the campus, a number of White faculty, staff, and students treated Anndrea and her colleagues as true members of the community. Anndrea stated, “A number of administrators in key positions kept track of us and really cared. It wasn’t just a façade, or we’re doing this to get the numbers. I really, really, felt a caring attitude.” Andrea shared two stories that provide context for her feelings in this area.

The first story that Anndrea related went as follows. When she arrived at ISU her first year, it was late at night. She was picked up at the bus station by a university
administrator. The administrator shared with Anndrea that the residence halls were full. He allowed Anndrea to stay at his home with his wife and family. This gesture has always stayed with her. She stated, “I remember sleeping in one of his daughter’s little beds.”

As Anndrea told the second story, you could see her entire body take on a completely different demeanor. If thankfulness had a visual, Anndrea was a model for it. Her voice lowered. Her shoulders turned inward, as though she were giving herself a personal embrace. She clasped her hands together, looked me straight in the eye, and shared the following words:

No one at ISU was mean spirited. Nothing was ever overt. I don’t remember all of them, but there were some very caring people. My first term here, before I could get home for Thanksgiving to get my winter clothes and stuff, we had this really big snowfall. A staff member brought over a pair of boots. I said, “Oh, thank you.” I wore them and I told my mom, because she would call to see if I was okay. When I got home and got my things, [my mom] told me to take the boots back and to thank [the ISU staff member] again. So I took her boots back over and thanked her again.

Olivia Watson, study participant #5, shared this most interesting account regarding her social engagement memories:

One summer, the summer before my last year, so this would have been the summer of 1985, I got to live in a fraternity house. I’m not sure whether the sorority houses did this too, but the fraternity houses opened up for rent during the summer, and that was the bees’ knees. In the fraternity house that I stayed at, I can’t remember the name of it, but it was right across the street from the baseball field. Oh my god! You know that baseball is my favorite sport. Because I was on the second floor, I could actually
see what was going on over there and who they were playing. Well, one day they were actually playing the University of Iowa. I went over there and found out that the guy pitching that game was a guy I went to high school with. Oh, I had so much fun!

As discussed in chapter 5, the decision by each study participant to attend ISU was not based on a long-held dream or aspiration. They just ended up attending ISU, but, in the end, they found out following graduation that they were receiving value from their ISU degrees and had deep interest in maintaining connections after receiving their degrees from ISU. These two findings were instrumental to their decision making as they chose to join the ISU Alumni Association. Furthermore, they could give testimony to feeling academically supported and finding social engagement while enrolled at ISU. These two findings were instrumental in defining how their campus experiences influenced their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association.

**Recommendations for Practice**

This dissertation study, conducted at ISU regarding the decision making of five African American alumni who chose to become dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association, yielded two common themes about their decision to join and two common themes about how the experiences at ISU led to their decision to join the ISU Alumni Association. Based on the findings of this research, several recommendations can be made regarding enhancing the campus environment to engage a greater number of African American alumni as future dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association.
Recommendations to Iowa State University

Based on the findings of this study, ISU should consider these recommendations in trying to engage a greater number of African American alumni as dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association:

- **Establish and categorize a web-based “Frequently Asked Questions and Response” section.** This study heightened my awareness of the fact that a number of first-generation students just don’t know what questions to ask about navigating the college experience. In addition, it is not easy for many of these students to seek face-to-face assistance. ISU should further expand and market its web-based advising tools to assist these and all other students. This effort would also be helpful to students’ parents/guardians, peers, and advisors.

- **Ensure the residence hall leaders and academic advisors fully embrace diversity.** In general, many of the individuals working in these roles may have no personal experience supporting or interfacing with African Americans. The cultural differences can make verbal and nonverbal communications extremely taxing on both parties. As shown through some of the stories in this study, ISU needs to provide additional training in this area.

- **Ensure all university employees have some level of on-going diversity training.** Much like the residence hall leaders and advisors, not all employees have experience interacting with, being around, or supporting African Americans, whether they are students or colleagues. Without some training, the institution provides a disservice to the employees and the students. Having to blindly navigate this arena can have negative consequences on recruitment, retention, alumni
association membership, and long-term giving of time, talents, and treasures to the institution.

- **Have deliberate discussions with faculty about the negative impacts they have on African American students when these students are singled out in classes to respond as perceived experts on race-related topics.** As illustrated in this study, a number of the study participants internalized a degree of shame caused by faculty members who made them feel uncomfortable baring their souls on race-related topics, which faculty members felt African American students were somehow qualified to address. Although faculty may view such opportunities as empowering, a number of African American alumni remembered it as a form of humiliation. Prewarning students or getting students’ permission to speak about such topics in advance would go a long way in building trust with these students and enriching the class experience for all participants.

- **Don’t assume all African American students speak for all other African American students or African Americans in general.** Students, not just African American students, are individuals first and desire to be treated as such. They also know they are a part of a larger, and sometimes a specific, demographic. The alumni in this study, during many of their student experiences at ISU, felt they were representing the whole of Ames’s, ISU’s, the state of Iowa’s, or even the nation’s African American community. ISU should put in place surveys to capture such information and then build programs and services to address these concerns.

- **Identify why African American students have come to the university.** In the cases highlighted in this study, it was evident that these alumni were serious about their
education, and, ultimately, the degree they would receive from ISU. ISU, through surveys and one-on-one conversations, should seek to learn this information up front. In doing so, ISU personnel will be better positioned to serve this population of students and help them achieve their dreams.

- Don’t operate from a “one-size-fits-all” mentality when it comes to engaging African American students. It is not easy to operationalize customer-centered service on campuses with large student enrollments. This is, however, something ISU should strive to implement. The African American participants in this study, at times, described their experiences as being “canned.” Students want to be acknowledged, heard, and treated with respect and as individuals.

**Recommendations to the ISU Alumni Association**

- Share more stories about its African American alumni members in order to attract additional African American dues-paying members. Using the insights gained from this study, African American alumni of ISU did not mention traditions, Central Campus, or rah-rah related topics. The Alumni Association’s current marketing messages are centered on these topics. The African American participants in this study spoke about academic achievement, important connections, becoming employed, and feeling supported as key drivers of their dues-paying decision making.

- Survey and then invite those African American alumni of ISU who respond in the affirmative to the themes that emerged from this study to join the Alumni Association. Rather than doing traditional solicitations to this demographic, I highly recommend the ISU Alumni Association use the findings from this study to
scrutinize its database to discover member prospects most likely interested in becoming members of the Alumni Association.

- Enlist current African American dues-paying alumni as membership ambassadors for the Alumni Association. There are no better salespeople than current patrons. The ISU Alumni Association should pursue opportunities to involve these members more intimately in their outreach and engagement efforts.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This research study fills a gap in the existing literature about the decision making of African American alumni to become dues-paying members of their alma maters’ alumni associations. This qualitative research study utilized a case study methodology to focus on one institution and five of its African American alumni living in central Iowa. It is clear that additional and more extensive research in this area needs to be done, especially if the academy wishes to position itself to generalize and employ the findings of this study. The recommendations for future research related to the decision making of African American alumni at PWIs to become dues-paying members of their alma maters’ alumni associations include:

1. A research study from a quantitative perspective should be conducted to increase the breadth of knowledge related to the decision making of ISU’s African American alumni to become dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association.

2. A similar qualitative case study research study of another Midwestern, land grant university should be conducted to increase the breadth of knowledge related to the decision making of African American alumni on predominantly White campuses...
on their choice to become dues-paying members of their alma maters’ alumni associations.

3. A research study from a quantitative perspective should be conducted to increase the breadth of knowledge related to any differences in the decision making of ISU’s African American male and female alumni on predominantly White campuses regarding their choice to become dues-paying members of the ISU Alumni Association.

4. A study featuring alumni from other underrepresented groups of dues-paying alumni association members should be conducted.

5. A study looking at the intersection of race should be conducted.

Reflections

This study developed out of a long-standing (dating back to 1986 to be exact) interest I have had following my own attendance at and graduation from my alma mater as well as membership in my undergraduate alma mater’s alumni association. I, too, attended a PWI. In addition, as an employee in higher education advancement, alumni relations, I have pondered the question of why those of us of African American descent, even with our low numbers and varied experiences, chose to become members of our alumni associations. Many of my African American peers did not join the alumni association, but a number of us did. Although this study will not allow me to make generalizations, I was very interested in making sense of my own decision to be an active, dues-paying member of my alumni association. Furthermore, after prompting discussions on this topic in a number of my graduate classes, my cohorts and faculty members encouraged me to pursue this study and supported me in pursuing this topic for my dissertation.
In 2009, during one of our monthly meetings, Dr. Greg Geoffroy, then president of ISU, encouraged me to consider pursuing my doctorate. His confidence in me awakened a dream my wife and I had talked about for some time. Due to professional moves, children, and work, I never thought I could fit going back to school into my schedule.

I received my master’s degree from the University of Kansas while employed full time. My wife and I had to really decide if we wanted to put ourselves through this level of sacrifice again. After we got through the discussions, we both decided we needed to move forward with me pursuing this doctorate.

Dr. Geoffroy also made me aware of the university’s financial support for employees pursuing degrees at ISU. Having that variable solved in the equation aided my wife and me in making the decision that I would begin the Higher Education Leadership program at ISU in 2010.

As I would leave class and complete assignments, I found myself going online and to ISU’s Parks Library’s Help Desk researching the topic of African American alumni membership at PWIs. There was an abundance of research on African American students’ experiences at PWIs and why these African American graduates don’t join their alumni associations. The paucity of information about why African American alumni of PWIs do join their alma maters’ alumni associations gave me confidence that my research topic was worth pursuing.

The Council for Advancement and Support of Education’s *Currents* magazine, over the years, has included articles about what different institutions have done to reach out to and attempt to engage its underrepresented alumni groups. A number of these articles have centered on African American alumni. Similar to the research reflected in my literature
review, articles in *Currents* consistently have focused on the non-joining behavior, not the joining behavior, of African American alumni of PWIs. This finding, coupled with my personal interest in the topic and a desire to do qualitative research, further solidified my resolve to pursue this research topic.

Focused research for this case study began in the fall of 2012. With the help and encouragement of my major professor, Dr. Larry Ebbers, and my Program of Study Committee, I was encouraged and supported to focus my study on African American alumni of ISU. With my work schedule, family and community obligations, and a national and international travel schedule, my Program of Study Committee and I concluded that limiting the study to five undergraduate ISU African American alumni living in central Iowa would be reasonable for beginning research in this topic area.

Following the in-depth interviews with the five study participants, as well as the data analysis of the typed transcripts and the observations from the interviews, I am convinced that doing qualitative research to understand the decision making of African American alumni of PWIs who chose to become dues-paying members of their alma maters’ alumni association is both important and timely. It is especially important as one looks at the increasing blackening and browning of America and the number of first-generation students, as well as legacies from these demographics, who are attending and graduating from PWIs. The study participants in this dissertation study offered great insights, helping ISU administrators and its institutional advancement personnel understand the importance and impact this demographic can have on the long-term advancement of the institution if they are receiving value from the degrees following their graduation from ISU, maintaining connections after receiving their degrees from ISU, feeling academically supported while
enrolled at ISU, and finding social engagement while enrolled at ISU. Having at least one person on the campus take a deep and abiding interest in the well-being and future success of students in this demographic is key. Each of my study participants had multiple such individuals. The good experiences of these individuals seemed to outweigh the bad or not-so-pleasant experiences many of these African American alumni recounted.

Now that this research has been conducted, I am convinced that additional research is required in this area. I view the engagement of this demographic into the life, work, and aspiration of the institution as being central to the university’s future health. Having a diverse student body that just walks away, disengaged with the institution, could severely damage the long-term viability of the institution in the areas of recruitment, retention, alumni engagement, and philanthropy. I highly recommend that presidents of PWIs make the engagement of African American alumni, as well as other key groups of underrepresented individuals, a priority of the institution, especially among its institutional advancement personnel. The engagement of African American alumni as dues-paying members of the institution’s alumni association will undoubtedly lead to an increased body of loyal alumni; generous donors; engaged volunteers; ready-to-act advocates; and needed mentors, recruiters, and employers. The five participants in this study are proof of these aspirations.
APPENDIX A. AUDIT TRAIL

- November 19, 2012 – Received approval to conduct the study on African American alumni members from the Iowa State University Institutional Review Board.

- May 1, 2013 – Contacted the Iowa State University Foundation to request a detail listing of African American Alumni Association members living within a 90-mile radius of Ames, Iowa.

- May 13, 2013 – Received the list from the Iowa State University Foundation. The list contained 39 names, showing phone numbers, email addresses, degree dates, and majors.

- May 20, 2013 – Chose each fifth person on the list to make contact regarding participation in the study.

- July 14, 2013 – Made phone calls to first five on the list requesting their participation in the study. Received three yeses during the first round of calls.

- July 15, 2013 – Made second set of calls to next seven on my list and received two more yeses. At the end of this process, I had finally found five willing to participate in the study.

- August 16, 2013 – Emailed five thank-you notes and first-round of interviews confirmation notices, along with copies of the Informed Consent Form, to the five participants for the study.

- August 18, 2013 – Made confirmation calls two days before two of the interviews occurring on the same day. During this call, I discussed the parameters of the study and what was required for participation, that there would be two face-to-face interviews, and a need for participants to review my draft of notes and dissertation text for accuracy and truthfulness.

- August 19, 2013 – Made confirmation calls two days before the second two sets of interviews occurring on the same day. During this call, I discussed the parameters of the study and what was required for participation, that there would be two face-to-face interviews, and a need for participants to review my draft of notes and dissertation text for accuracy and truthfulness.

- August 20, 2013 – Made a confirmation call to the final participant two days before the final interview. During this call, I discussed the parameters of the study and what was required for participation, that there would be two face-to-face interviews, and a need for participants to review my draft of notes and dissertation text for accuracy and truthfulness.

- August 20, 2013 – Held first and second round individual interviews with Participant #1 and Participant #2. A one-hour break was taken in between each interview to allow
time for participants to reflect on early questions and add any additional information, as well as ask questions, during the second round interviews.

- August 21, 2013 – Held first and second round individual interviews with Participant #3 and Participant #4. A one-hour break was taken in between each interview to allow time for participants to reflect on early questions and add any additional information, as well as ask questions, during the second round interviews.

- August 22, 2013 – Held first and second round individual interviews with Participant #5. A one-hour break was taken in between each interview to allow time for the participant to reflect on early questions and add any additional information, as well as ask questions, during the second round interview.

- October 11, 2013 – Sent interview transcript to all participants for their review.

- October 21, 2013 – Received all interview transcripts back from participants with their comments.

- October 26, 2013 – Did follow-up interviews with Participants #1 and #4 to clarify information and fill necessary gaps.

- October 27, 2013 – Did follow-up interviews with Participants #2, and #3 to clarify information and fill necessary gaps.

- October 28, 2013 – Did follow-up interview with Participant #5 to clarify information and fill any necessary gaps.

- February 5, 2014 – Sent Findings and Conclusions’ drafts to all participants for their review and input.

- February 13, 2014 – Received all Findings and Conclusions’ drafts back from participants with their comments.

- February 23, 2014 – Did follow-up calls with Participants #3 and #5 to clarify minor edits.

- February 25, 2014 – Did follow-up calls with Participants #1, #2, and #4 to clarify minor edits.
APPENDIX B. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-3107
515-294-4566
FAX 515-294-4267

Date: 11/19/2012
To: Jeffrey W Johnson
3037 Evergreen Circle
Ames, IA 50014

CC: Dr. Larry Ebbers
N256 Lagomarcino Hall

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Decision to Join the Alumni Association: Experiences of African American Alumni at a Predominantly White Midwestern Research 1 University

IRB ID: 12-425

Approval Date: 11/19/2012
Date for Continuing Review: 11/18/2014

Submission Type: New
Review Type: Expedited

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.

- Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.

- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.

- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.

- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. Approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

Please don’t hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.
APPENDIX C. PARTICIPANT FOLLOW-UP LETTER

Dear XXXXX:

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me on XXXXX, XX, 2013 at X:XX p.m. at your XXXXX. Again, I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Iowa State University and am president and CEO of the Iowa State University Alumni Association. I write today to confirm your participation in a research study involving your membership decision to join the Iowa State University Alumni Association. This case study will assist me in completing my dissertation from Iowa State University.

I have communicated with the staff of the Iowa State University Foundation to obtain your name and membership status with the Association. My interest is using this study to better understand the membership decision of African American alumni of Iowa State University. My intention has been to begin this research study in late April 2013 and complete data collection in late August 2013. I would like to thank you again for making time for our interview to further discuss this study and to get to know you better.

Your involvement would require participation in a three-part, audio-taped, in-depth interview. This interview will last approximately one and a half hours. Please read through the attached Informed Consent Form and let me know if you have any questions. I will bring a copy of this form with me for you to complete before we start the interview. There will be no travel required on your part.

Again, I am available to answer any of your questions.

Sincerely,

Jeff Johnson
jjohnsn@iastate.edu
515.231.9206

Jeffery W. Johnson  •  President and CEO
Life Membership and Sustaining Life Donor
Iowa State University Alumni Association  •  ISU Alumni Center
420 Beach Avenue, Ames, Iowa 50011-1430
(515) 294-4762  •  www.isualum.org  •  jjohnsn@iastate.edu
APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview I: Background

What is your age and educational background?

Where did you grow up?

Tell me a little about your immediate family?

What are your hobbies outside of work?

What is your current occupation?

When did you know you had found the right career for yourself?

What does your typical work day consist of you doing?

What questions do you have of me?

Interview II

What led to you choosing Iowa State University for your bachelor’s degree?

Did other members of your family go to college? If yes, where did they go, and what degrees did they receive? Did any members or ancestors of yours attend Iowa State University?

Did you know coming out of high school that you were going to go to college, or were you encouraged by someone or a set of factors to attend college? Who encouraged you, or what were those factors?

How did you choose your major, and why? Did you stay with that major your entire stay at Iowa State or did you change? If you did, what to, and why did you change? How many times did you change majors before settling on the major you graduated with?

What was the general environment like for you as an African American student at Iowa State during your undergraduate tenure?

How would you describe your experience and educational pilgrimage at Iowa State University as an African American undergraduate?

What are your top three favorite memories of your time at Iowa State? What are your top three worst memories?

Has your degree from Iowa State supported you well in your profession?

If you had it to do all over again, where would you go to college? Why? What led you to become a member of the ISU Alumni Association? (Possible follow-up question: Of your family members who attended college, do you know if any of them are also members of their alma maters’ alumni associations?)
How long following graduation did it take you to become a member of the ISU Alumni Association?

Why have you continued to be a member?

Would you encourage other African American alumni of Iowa State University to become members? If your answer is yes, why would encourage them to join? If your answer is no, why would you not encourage them to join?

How would you describe the alumni association to others?

What questions do you have of me?

Interview III

Is there anything you would like to discuss that we have not already talked about regarding your Iowa State experiences or your decision to join the Iowa State University Alumni Association?

Would you like to add any comments about the pros and/or cons about your alumni association membership?

In your opinion, what makes your alumni association membership worth the money you paid for it?
APPENDIX E. INFORMED CONSENT

CONSENT FORM FOR:

Decision to join the alumni association: Experiences of four African American alumni at Iowa State University

This form describes a research project. It has information in it to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate in this study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part; therefore, your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

Who is conducting this study?
This study is being conducted by Jeffery W. Johnson, a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies doctoral program at Iowa State University.

Why am I invited to participate in this study?
You are being asked to take part in this study because you are an African American undergraduate-bachelors degreed alumnus/a of Iowa State University or you were referred to me by an Iowa State University alumnus/a who knew you and interacted with you during his/her time at Iowa State University. (Special Note: In the actual study, Iowa State University will be referred to as Iowa State University.) You should not participate in this study if are not willing to meet with the researcher on three occasions for one-on-one in-depth interviews.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to make sense of the alumni association membership decision of four Iowa State University alumni through an understanding of their undergraduate experience at Iowa State University.

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a three-part, one-on-one, in-depth interview. The three-part interview will last about one and a half hours. The three-part interview will be tape recorded and transcribed. You will be given the opportunity to review the interview transcript to verify the accuracy of your statements. You also will be given an opportunity to remove any statements that you are not comfortable including in the transcript from your interview.

After participants review and complete the informed consent form, the researcher will meet with each participant for the three-part, semi-structured, in-depth interview. The interview will take place in one setting, with follow-ups as needed. The three-part interview will last about one-and-a-half hours.

As to the alumni participants, the first part of the interview will be completed using questions to gain insight into the alumni participant’s professional background and interests. This part of the interview will help the researcher become familiar with the participant’s background and establish rapport with the participant. The second part of the interview will include questions directly related to the participant’s campus and undergraduate student experience at Iowa State University. The final part of the interview will allow the participant to provide any additional insights they feel was not discussed in the previous parts of the interview.

Alumni participants will also be asked to share with the researcher any documents (letters, postcards, journals, scrapbooks, photos, etc.) that document or shed any additional light or insights into the alumni participants’ collegiate experiences. The actual documents, nor reproductions of the documents, will appear in the final dissertation. The use and review of these documents will be for the
researcher to gain deeper insights into the lived experience of the participants. The alumni participant can use these documents to further explain and solidify the information being shared.

Alumni participants will be asked to provide the name of at least one individual who can speak to the experiences of the alumni participants while they were undergraduate student at Iowa State University. These individuals will also participate in a three-part individual interview. The interviews will these participants will last about one and a half hours as well. The interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. The first part of the interview will be completed using questions to gain insight into the participant’s professional background and interests. This part of the interview will help the researcher become familiar with the participant’s background and establish rapport with the participant. The second part of the interview will include questions directly related to the participant’s knowledge of and interactions with the alumni participant. The final part of the interview will allow the participant to provide any additional insights they feel was not discussed in previous parts of the interview.

Each of these participants will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview to verify the accuracy of their statements. Each will be given an opportunity to remove any statements that he/she may not be comfortable including in the transcript from the interview. They will not be asked to provide any documents for the study. These additional individuals will have the full process explained to them, no different than that of the alumni participants. These individuals will also sign an informed consent form and will not be identifiable in the final study. They too will be assigned pseudonyms.

What are the possible risks and benefits of my participation?

Risks – None other than the possibility of having to relive any unpleasant memories. Aside from this, there are no other foreseeable risks. The researcher will protect the confidentiality of all research participants to the greatest extent possible, however, it cannot be guaranteed.

Benefits – If you decide to participate in this study there will be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will provide institutions of higher learning an understanding of one campus’ African American alumni’s views on alumni association membership decision making.

Privacy and Confidentiality Provisions
The researcher will protect the confidentiality of all the research participants to the greatest extent possible, however, it cannot be guaranteed. Participants must be fully aware that there is the potential of reviving some memories that may not be pleasant.

In an effort to protect the confidentiality of all research participants to the greatest extent possible, all interviews will be conducted in locations that provide participants with privacy and confidentiality. A private location to complete the interview process will be established following the informed consent process.

All participants in this study will be given a pseudonym that will be used during the audio recorded interview process. All transcribed material will include the pseudonym given to the research participant to further protect the confidentiality of the participant. Following the transcription process, the audio recording will be deleted. All transcripts from interviews will be destroyed following the completion of the research study.

In addition to these protections, once all data are collected and transcribed, participants will be given an opportunity to review a transcript of their comments and remove any statements they do not wish
to have shared. These statements will be removed from the transcripts and not considered to be part of the data for this study.

**How will the information I provide be used?**
The information you provide will be used for the following purposes: The information participants share will be analyzed and reported in the researcher’s doctoral dissertation. Each participant will be given a pseudonym. This material could be published if the researcher chooses to pursue that opportunity. The anonymity of the participant will be protected at the greatest extent possible.

**What measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the data or to protect my privacy?**
Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable laws and regulations. Records will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the ISU Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies with human subjects) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent allowed by law, the following measures will be taken: participants will be assigned a pseudonym that will be used on forms instead of their name. And while I am doing document review and analysis, photos, quotes, etc. from these documents will not appear in my dissertation. This study will be kept confidential on a password protected computer file. Any material that is printed will be stored in a locked file cabinet. The data will be destroyed following the completion of the doctoral dissertation.

**Will I incur any costs from participating or will I be compensated?**
You will not have any costs from participating in this study, and you will not be compensated.

**What are my rights as a human research participant?**
Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences.

You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer in the three-part, semi-structured, in-depth interview that will be asked as part of this study.

Your choice of whether or not to participate will have no impact on your membership in the Iowa State University Alumni Association or your relationship with Iowa State University.

**Whom can I call if I have questions or problems?**
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact Jeff Johnson, lead investigator, (515) 231-9206 or jjohnsn@iastate.edu or Dr. Larry Ebbers, Iowa State University Major Professor, (515) 294-8067 or lebbers@iastate.edu.
- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

**Consent and Authorization Provisions**
Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to
your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed) ________________________________

(Participant’s Signature) ___________________________ (Date)

**Investigator Statement**

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining Consent) ___________________________ (Date)
REFERENCES


