

FIVE-FIFTHS AGENDA FOR AMERICA:

EVALUATION OF THE WILLIAMS CENTER FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Prepared by the
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ronald W. Walters Leadership and Public Policy Center (Walters Center) conducted an evaluation of the Williams Center for Undergraduate Student Achievement (WCUSA) located at SUSLA. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the WCUSA, and to make recommendations concerning its continued viability and success.

In 2017, the WCUSA was launched on the campus of SUSLA - a two-year college, as a second center for undergraduate student achievement. Like the first center, the Honoré Center for Undergraduate Achievement (HCUSA) located at Southern University at New Orleans (SUNO), the WCUSA is designed to increase the presence of Black males in higher education with a special emphasis on STEM Education and Allied Health. The WCUSA also helps students prepare to matriculate into a four-year institution post-graduation.

The WCUSA has proven a success as demonstrated by its retention rate and student narratives. Of the nineteen students who have been admitted into the program, only five did not complete their degree for reasons including personal challenges, military enlistment, and failure to buy into the WCUSA's planned strategies for success. Those who actively participated in the program have been able to foster positive relationships with program staff and students, and they are fulfilling the mission of the FFAA.

Based on the findings of this evaluation, recommendations offered by the Walters Center are:

- It is strongly encouraged that the SUS identifies the WCUSA as a fundraising priority.
- The SUS assists in securing funding for additional staffing to assist with administrative duties and fundraising immediately. Full development of a staff should be made a long-term goal.
- The SUS should create a similar program at Southern University Baton Rouge (SUBR) to assist students who matriculate from the WCUSA.
- If the program is named for a benefactor, that benefactor should contribute a minimum of \$1 million as seed money for the program.
- The advisory board should consist of a variety of individuals who bring a diversity of skills and talents, including fundraising.



LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

First Generation (FG)

Five-Fifths Agenda for America (FFAA)

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

Honoré Center for Undergraduate Student Success (HCUSA)

Low-Income (LI)

Ronald W. Walters Leadership and Public Policy Center (Walters Center)

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

Southern University and A&M College System (SUS)

Southern University System Foundation (SUSF)

Southern University, Baton Rouge (SUBR)

Southern University at New Orleans (SUNO)

Southern University at Shreveport, Louisiana (SUSLA)

Williams Center for Undergraduate Student Achievement (WCUSA)

LIST OF GRAPHS

Cumulative Grade Point Average	20
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INTRODUCTION

Throughout America's history, Black people have been regarded as inferior and unworthy of the promises of liberty and opportunities that the country has afforded to others. Such is reflected in the Three-fifths Compromise, agreed upon by the nation's Constitutional Convention delegates in 1787, that enslaved persons would be recognized as part of a whole for representation and taxation purposes. This harsh reality of America's concern for Black people has since continued to be carried out in its practices and policies. However, Black people have fought to overcome the designation of an 'incomplete' human being to achieve success in all areas of society - such is the basis of the Five-fifths Agenda for America (FFAA).

In 2012, former Southern University System president Ronald Mason, Esq., introduced a vision he had to address the needs of Black men in the United States by affording them with an opportunity to obtain a college degree. The goal of the FFAA national initiative was to, "enable young Black men with life challenges to become educators and servant leaders who will seed positive change in their schools and communities. An additional goal is to establish public Historic Black Colleges and Universities as institutional bases for a long-term systemic change."¹ The FFAA was launched by the Southern University A&M System (SUS) as an effort to: (1) increase the number of Black males with bachelor's degrees; (2) increase the number of Black male teachers and graduates in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM); and (3) facilitate an ongoing conversation regarding the relationship between Black men and America through research and advocacy. Suggestive of the DuBoisian theory of the Talented Tenth, the initiative seeks to create a cadre of Black males with college degrees who are able to reinvest their gained knowledge and talents into the communities from which they come.²

The Honoré Center for Undergraduate Student Success (HCUSA) served as the pilot program for the FFAA. During the 2012-2013 academic year, HCUSA launched on the campus of Southern University New Orleans (SUNO), targeting first generation college students, those with academic deficiencies, and those who came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

¹ Source: <https://www.sus.edu/news/1433>.

² A robust review of literature discussion justification for the FFAA is available in Appendix A.

In theory, the multi-dimensional approach of interventions and services was designed to address students' academic, social and personal needs and equalize the playing field. The program launched with sixteen young Black men in its first cohort.

HCUSA took a holistic approach to student development and achievement by providing students with support in the areas of tuition assistance, room and board, a monthly stipend, academic and personal counseling, and access to social activities. The activities and services provided by the program were intended to increase the students' cultural capital.

The Williams Center for Undergraduate Student Achievement (WCUSA) was launched on the campus of Southern University at Shreveport, Louisiana (SUSLA), a two-year college, in 2017 as the second undergraduate achievement center. Similar to the HCUSA, the WCUSA seeks to increase the presence of Black males in higher education with a special emphasis on STEM, Education and Allied Health.

Students who participate in the WCUSA are provided with academic and financial support, mentorship, professional development and community service opportunities. These services are intended to increase their chances of completing their academic program at SUSLA and thereafter successfully matriculate to the Southern University at Baton Rouge (SUBR) campus (a four-year institution). With the support of Tony and Tina Williams, Southern University alumni, for which the program was named, the Louisiana Board of Regents, the SUSF, and other donors, WCUSA has been able to successfully matriculate four students into SUBR and one to SUNO thus far.

SCOPE

Under a grant from the Southern University Foundation, the Walters Center was contracted to conduct an evaluation of the WCUSA. The purpose of this evaluation is to review and evaluate student achievement and the overall success of the WCUSA in its formative years.

This project follows earlier evaluations of the HCUSA, the pilot program of the FFAA. In August 2016, an initial evaluation was conducted of the HCUSA which provided insight into the program's structure and operations. It was followed by a secondary evaluation in September 2017, that reviewed student progress and overall success of the HCUSA pilot program. Both evaluations were conducted by the Walters Center with funding from the SUSF.

This evaluation serves as an analysis of the program structure and student success by focusing on five areas of assessment: student preparation, student achievement, resources and services, WCUSA staff, and institutional support. As with the second evaluation of the HCUSA, funding from the SUSF allowed for interviews with students, staff and stakeholders and a review of program documents and other relevant student data that was provided by WCUSA staff.

DATA

This evaluation includes an analysis of student achievement data as well as qualitative data collected through interviews with students, program staff members and stakeholders.³ Student achievement data were provided by program staff for analysis. It included student grade point averages (GPAs), retention rates, ACT/SAT scores and list of extracurricular activities.

Confidential interviews were conducted with program staff, students and stakeholders over the course of a three-month period.⁴ A total of seventeen individuals participated in the interviews; twelve students, one staff member and four program stakeholders. Data from program staff and stakeholders were combined into one category. The interviews were utilized in the assessment of the program's strengths and areas for improvement. Demographic information of the students interviewed can be found in Appendix B.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, the structure of the qualitative assessment differed from the previous evaluations of the HCUSA conducted by the Walters Center. All interviews were conducted virtually using audiovisual technology, which allowed the interviewer to concentrate on the interview rather than on writing notes, and allowed for analysis of nonverbal communication. The technology also allowed for the interviews to be recorded and transcribed for analysis.

³ The classification of 'Stakeholders' is broadly defined to encompass individuals who have worked with the program staff or participants to ensure student achievement. It includes faculty and staff of Southern University at Shreveport, program benefactors and volunteers.

⁴ Due to COVID restrictions, all interviews were conducted virtually. Interviews commenced in November 2020 and concluded in January 2021.



EVALUATION

The WCUSA has three primary goals: (1) to increase the enrollment rate of first generation Black male students at SUSLA and other post-secondary institutions; (2) to increase the academic achievement levels of first generation (FG) Black male students at SUSLA and across higher education; and (3) to enhance the understanding and focus among faculty members and staff regarding the array of challenges faced by Black males as they enter college. The following data serve as an evaluation and analysis of the WCUSA's progress towards achieving these goals. The foundation of this evaluation is based upon programmatic outcomes, and opinions held by students, staff and stakeholders.

Student Interest

The WCUSA looks to recruit students who demonstrate the following characteristics: consideration for others, discipline, ethical principles, persistence, punctuality, self-awareness, and servant leadership. These traits are seen as a necessary component of a student-scholar and of manhood. As a component of the application process, students are required to write letters of interest that describe their strengths in relation to academics and why they consider themselves to be a good candidate for the WCUSA. All students listed at least one of the aforementioned traits in their self-description to explain how their personal attributes either make them the ideal candidate or how the program could help them become a better student.

Students also discussed how certain components of the program, such as mentorship and academic counseling would help them to excel. Some students made mention of the need for a positive male figure in their life, while others discussed the need for accountability and to be part of something larger than themselves.

"I want the tools I need to be successful, not only in my career, but to be the man I can be in any and every situation...I want to be an example to the next man...I want to help as well as serve because I am my brother's keeper." - *Student*

"I feel that this program will help me make it through college while teaching me life-changing lessons. I feel that it will also help me to become a better man ...My goal is to do all that I can to succeed in life so that I can be the best father and role model for my son."
- *Student*

In their letters of interest, students also discussed how they were raised by single mothers and lacked father figures. External obstacles were made note of that either inspired them to complete their education or those which could have served as a potential barrier.

"I have strength that a lot of others don't have or haven't realized how to unlock [in themselves]. When I was born, I had a lot of issues with my health. Within the first year of my life I had to have multiple surgeries... I learned I had a strength in me that I didn't know I had. I learned how to take charge in stressful situations." - *Student*

"Growing up in a less fortunate area of Houston where young [B]lack [men] were stereotyped as uneducated and inferior, challenged me to fight to disprove the stereotypes." - *Student*

"I'm not like most kids...[school] does not come easy for me... I have to study harder than most kids to get the grades I want and I'm okay with that because nothing is going to come easy in life. Growing up in Gardere taught me that I have to work hard for what I want in life because nothing is going to be handed to me." - *Student*

Overall, student applicants demonstrated a clear understanding of WCUSA expectations, and an eagerness to be part of a program that would bring them benefits on an academic and personal level.

Another component of the WCUSA is student interest in the STEM field. While not all students major in a related subject, many do (Appendix A). In their letters of interest, students also discussed their interest in participating in WCUSA in relation to the STEM component of the program:

"My favorite subjects growing up were math and science. Math has always come easy to me. When I see numbers, my brain gets to running and figuring things out. Science wasn't always my favorite subject until the ninth grade when a teacher changed my perspective on how I viewed the subject. Once he broke down the fundamentals, I became very inquisitive and then every class involving science became easy to understand." - *Student*

"My interest in [Computer Science Technology] is a result of how the world is consistently progressing towards a more advanced digital age." - *Student*

Of the current student participants, their interest in the program appears to match the goals and expected outcomes of the program.

Recruitment and Admission Requirements

Students who have been recruited for the WCUSA have primarily been existing SUSLA students rather than students recruited by the program directly from local high schools. Program staff and stakeholders noted the importance of visibility within local high schools and current efforts for recruiting students both into the WCUSA and SUSLA.

There are six requirements for enrollment in the WCUSA. Students must:

1. Be enrolled at SUSLA;
2. Have at least a cumulative 2.0 high school GPA, GED and/or 2.0 college GPA;
3. Major in one of the following areas of study: STEM, allied health, and/or education;
4. Be enrolled as a full-time student;
5. Complete the required admissions application and student essay; and
6. Agree to abide by the SUSLA Code of Conduct and demonstrate behavior consistent with exemplary leadership.

All student participants have been enrolled as full-time students at SUSLA at the time of application. Students' majors varied as some students were enrolled in degree-granting programs outside of the STEM field.

In terms of pre-admittance requirements, student ACT scores ranged from 13-17; high school GPAs ranged from 2.11 to 3.8, with an average 2.73. Similarly, pre-admittance college GPAs of students participants ranged from 1.97 to 3.4 with an average of 2.71.

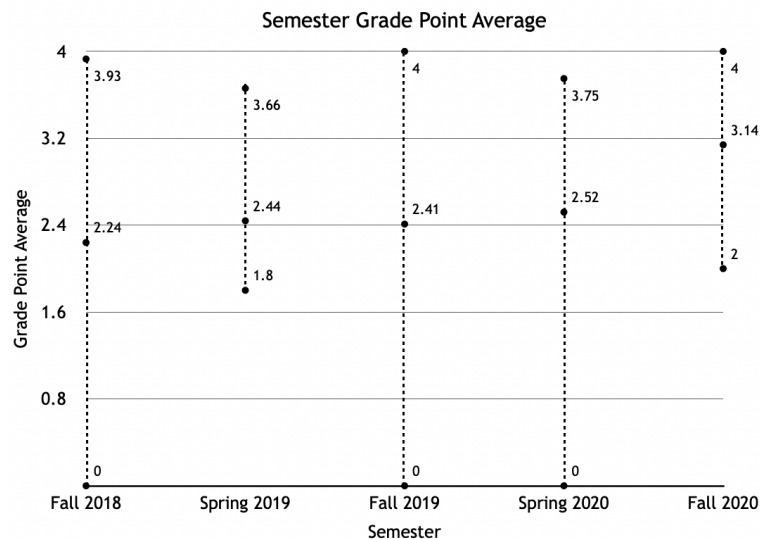
Overall, most admitted students have met or exceeded requirements for admission into the WCUSA.

⁵ Source: <https://www.susla.edu/page/the-williams-centereligibility-requirements>

⁶ Data do not reflect all students admitted into WCUSA. ACT scores were only reported for two students; high school GPAs were reported for seven students; college GPAs were reported for two students.

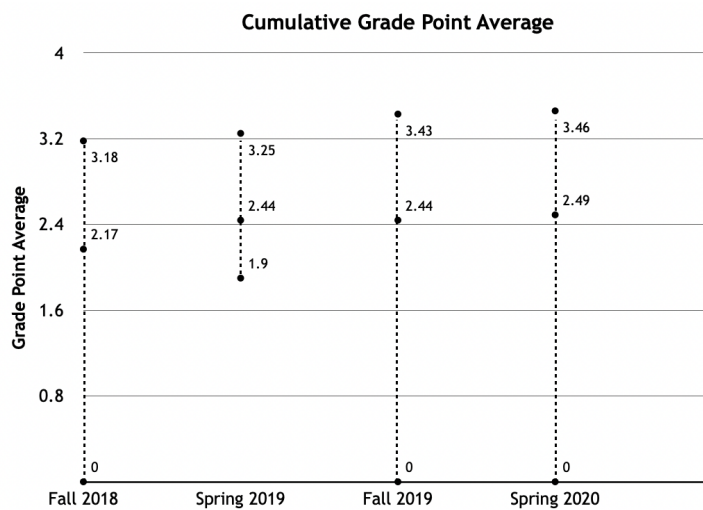
Grade Point Average

Overall, WCUSA students continue to perform well academically. Students who have remained in the program have been those who have maintained a 2.0 GPA consistently. Those who have failed to meet these minimal requirements have been suspended from the program. The mean GPA of current WCUSA students for the Fall 2020 semester was a 3.14. This is the highest recorded GPA average for the program thus far.



Note: Midpoints represent averages.

Academic achievement has been recognized as a primary factor of student success. The average cumulative GPA for students has been at a steady rise. New cohort members have helped to raise the semester GPA of the program as well as the cumulative program.



Note: Midpoints represent averages; data for the Fall 2020 semester are not included.

Student Involvement

Student leadership and extracurricular activities are common among WCUSA students. Both current and past students have been part of the Student Government Association, some of whom have held leadership positions including President, Vice President, and Sophomore Class President. Students have also served as SUSLA Coronation Escorts.

There are also students who have participated in student organizations and athletic teams on campus such as the Social Work Club, band, and football team.

All but one student interviewed identified at least one extracurricular activity they participated in. Student involvement on campus demonstrates the success of the program in developing well-rounded students who are able to succeed outside of academics.

Retention and Graduation

The overarching expected outcome of the WCUSA is to improve the perception of postsecondary education among Black males by assisting them in the completion of a college degree.

As SUSLA is a two-year degree-granting institution, the WCUSA has the added goal of ensuring students transfer to a four-year institution. While this goal is aligned with the vision of the FFAA, it is necessary to ensure students who do transfer are doing so with an Associate's degree rather than college credits.

The WCUSA has a reported retention rate of 76.9 percent as compared to a 41 percent retention rate for SUSLA overall. Since its inception in 2017, a reported nineteen students have entered in the WCUSA. Six either graduated from SUSLA with an associate's degree and/or transferred to another institution including SUBR (four students), SUNO (one student), and Grambling State University (one student). Five students did not complete the program. The other nine students are still enrolled at SUSLA and continue to participate in the WCUSA. The program is also prepared to recruit two additional students in the Spring 2021 semester. Students who graduate and/or transfer are expected to matriculate to SUBR post-graduation from SUSLA. Some, however, noted aspirations to attend other universities within the SUS as well as private institutions in the state of Louisiana.

The absence of a program similar to WCUSA or HCUSA at SUBR means students would be attending without the much-needed support that helped them complete their two-year degree. While the WCUSA has demonstrated success in facilitating the academic and personal growth of student members, students, staff and stakeholders commented on the need of a supportive program on the campus of SUBR.

Of those who did not complete the WCUSA program, personal troubles, military enlistment, and failure to meet academic requirements were cited as explanations. When asked what factors contribute to students not completing the program, lack of buy-in into the program and personal responsibilities to families were listed as the main two reasons.

"Out of the people that did not finish its been one consistent thing - they didn't buy into the program. They didn't use the resources that were available. They really didn't participate the way they needed to participate. And as a result, they just were not motivated. And it is challenging to try to motivate somebody that's not motivated."

- Staff/Stakeholder

"They were not use to that accountability and structure from a male figure...It has been explained to them that masculine love is different from feminine love. Masculine love may not be hugs and kisses ... masculine love is calling you out on areas in your life so you can improve and to help you to reach your goals and your dreams. It is trying to help you be a better person and a better man." - Staff/Stakeholder

"We've had people that were less academically fluent, but they maximized the program. They let [Mr. Scott] help them get organized. They went to the seminars, they utilized everything the program offered; they absorbed it. And as a result, they did well and are much better off." - Staff/Stakeholder

As of the start of Spring 2021, there were nine students enrolled in the program. Three were returning students, and six were new members of the WCUSA. As stated in program documents, the program currently has the capacity to serve a maximum of ten students. An increase in financial support from donors and/or grants would allow the program to increase the number of students served and services offered.

"I think the biggest thing stopping us is the inability to write grants and get more funding to advance the program. We could reach more young men. Right now I think we are limited to maybe seven to 10, but it would be nice to have 20 and an assistant director, maybe an admin person where you can really grow the program and have in-house tutoring just for them." - Staff/Stakeholder

"I hope the program is able to hire more staff in order to bring in more students, and hire an assistant director, counselors and somebody just focused on peer group sessions and community service. We'd be able to expand the reach of the program where we could impact more lives. Right now we're limited to really 10 students ... Imagine if we had the resources to be able to expand it to 15, even to 20." - Staff/Stakeholder

Student Preparation

Academic research shows post-secondary educational success is highly influenced by educational preparation. Students who enter into college academically prepared will not only be more likely to do well in their classes, but will also have a higher self-efficacy that can help them overcome other challenges related to college and early adulthood. Of the students interviewed, some commented on the lack of preparation for college before participating in the WCUSA.

"I got into the Williams Center. I wasn't really prepared and I really wasn't taking my work seriously...[b]ut now I am." - *Student*

Overwhelmingly, students, staff and stakeholders agreed the WCUSA helps students overcome previous challenges.

"I feared going into debt and coming to college becoming so overwhelmed that I would fail ... the Williams Center helped me stay focused so I wouldn't have to worry about my fears." - *Student*

[The Williams Center] helped me get out of my shell and it taught me how to be a leader. It gave me a general idea on how to be a leader on campus ... It's been a pretty great foundation." - *Student*

"Student needs are so varied. For example, during one of the interviews one young man wasn't able to turn his camera on because his family had been affected by Hurricane Laura and that affected his attire...he didn't want to come across as being unprofessional... [T]here are some basic needs that the Williams Center provides like professional clothes ... [But]you can't fix everything from a resourcing standpoint." - *Staff/Stakeholder*

The success of the WCUSA to train students with specific skills to succeed in their college matriculation has been attributed to the structure of the program, which focuses on the first-year experience. This first-year experience introduces students to college in terms of how to approach professors, and develop study skills.

"In terms of the first-year program students become familiar with college. They understand how to navigate, how to contact the professors, how to do the things they need to do to successfully navigate college, and how to rely on our support like tutor and coaches. [The Williams Center] helps with that." - *Staff/Stakeholder*

"I do believe that [The Williams Center] has lofty goals. I mean, they're pretty extensive sometimes ... [W]e sometimes have to start off thinking about that first year experience, rather than thinking about moving off to the next school." - *Staff/Stakeholder*

Parental/family involvement had a positive effect on academic outcomes, especially for students who are FG and LI. For some students, previous hardship faced serves as a motivation for them to perform well in school. For others, family troubles have served as a hindrance to their personal achievement.

“The barriers with some students is an obligation to try to take care of their parents financially. For example, one student used his financial aid (Pell grants money) to help his family. Another student [who] was working and going to school felt he had to send money home to his parents even though he wasn't even living in the same city ... he was actually working a job that required him to work all night.” - *Staff/Stakeholder*

Some students who have financial burdens outside of their academic expenses have been offered work study jobs either with the WCUSA or with a different department on campus. Others are employed outside of school.

Parental/guardian involvement in the WCUSA and in their student's education is outside of the scope of the program, as students have reached adulthood. In addition, unlike the HCUSA, many of the WCUSA students are not in the city where their parents live. They are less likely to go home on weekends or have their parents visit them on campus.

Work and time-consuming extracurricular activities also serve as potential barriers for student success.

“A lot of them are working full time, and working quite a few hours...[Some students] are in extracurricular activities...we have a couple of students playing football and we have a couple of students on the Student Government Association ... they are having to balance all of that with their academics, but that's when we try to help them with time management and organization to work through that.” - *Staff/Stakeholder*

Planned Strategies for Success

As part of the academic support services provided, students are able to enjoy academic counseling, academic career planning, academic coaching, tutoring, and transfer/graduation assistance. There are a number of programs and services provided to students of the WCUSA including:

- Scholarship/stipend to support tuition, books, meal plans, housing, and fees deemed educational needs
- Personal accountability and support via weekly check-in meetings with WCUSA Director
- Professional development through cultural activities, college tours, guest speakers, and educational activities
- Brotherhood development with fellow members through peer group meetings
- Mentorship development with community professional liaisons
- Leadership development with volunteer opportunities in the community and at SUSLA
- WCUSA student leader ambassador opportunities in the SUS and the community at-large.

Students, staff and stakeholders were asked to rank services provided in terms of those that are more useful to the students. **Guest speakers, peer group meetings and academic counseling/coaching** were identified as those which are most utilized and helpful to student success. Students also had an overwhelming positive response to community service events that they have participated in.

Academic Counseling/Coaching is provided to students by the program Director. Through daily check-ins, the program Director is able to monitor student attendance in class, upcoming assignments, grades, and additional issues concerning student achievement.

"[Mr. Scott] tries to coach us so we can be better in college." - *Student*

"The first step is to get [the students] organized. They come in and print out their [syllabi] to put down important dates on their calendars. [Organization] is part of their foundation for success." - *Staff/Stakeholder*

Students are also able to receive academic counseling from staff from the Student Support Services Program, which partners with the WCUSA to provide advising and tutoring services to students. In addition, even students who have matriculated to SUBR noted the ongoing academic coaching that takes place between them and WCUSA staff.

Guest Speakers was ranked as the most beneficial and utilized strategy for success. Throughout the course of the semester, volunteers are brought in to talk to students about professional development, academic achievement and topics related to manhood. Students found great benefit in the speakers who have presented to them thus far, and made note of the mentorship that develops between students and guest speakers.

[Mr. Scott] brings in men like us...we're seeing people [who] have been through the struggle like we are going through, and they are giving us encouragement to keep going." - *Student*

Peer Group Meetings are a way to gather students on a regular basis in order to relay important information, check-in with student progress and to build a sense of camaraderie amongst students. Students had a positive reaction to peer group meetings and found it as a conduit through which they have been able to establish a friendship with other program participants for whom they referred to as "brothers."

"I love how small the group is...how powerful it is. [O]ther than Mr. Scott I have my brothers. We are really encouraged to stay close to each other and to understand our different backgrounds...[I]t's almost like a family because we're always together"
- *Student*

" I like being around other people that look like me and being able to group up and talk about each other's feelings... [I]t was really helpful to be around my brothers." - *Student*

"When we have peer group meetings, a lot of us might be feeling a certain type of way about something....us being males...we don't normally express ourselves, but when we get in the group with Brother Scott, it's comfortable. [It is] like you knew these people all your life...you can talk about anything with them." - *Student*

Community Service Events are central to the program's goals of producing servant-leaders. WCUSA has incorporated acts of service into the program's structure for which the students have appreciated and benefited greatly.

"I really am big on helping people...[T]hat's the one thing I most wanted to do."- *Student*

"[The WCUSA] has a lot of visibility...everybody's watching. [The WCUSA students] have become the model for the University. They definitely are a focal point, and everybody knows who [the students] are." - *Staff/Stakeholder*

By engaging in community service across the city of Shreveport, the WCUSA has established a positive rapport in the community.

Students, staff and stakeholders identified additional programs and services from which the program could benefit, including personalized tutoring services, counselors, and funding for more cultural activities.

"[The WCUSA] brought in a counselor two semesters during our peer group sessions. The counselors talked about anger management and mental health...[I]f money wasn't an issue I would say mental health specialists or a counselor would be on staff full-time... Studies show a lot of challenges male students have has to do with mental health and trauma... it contributes to why a lot of our [B]lack males aren't successful." - *Staff/Stakeholder*

While the lack of these services is not detrimental to the success of the program, the availability of such service could contribute to student success in the future.



Williams Center Staff

The WCUSA is currently operating with one full-time staff member who serves as the Program Director. Additional support is received from volunteers and staff members from the Student Support Services program that provides tutoring and other academic services. As noted by students and stakeholders, the WCUSA Program Director is one of the biggest assets to the program. One stakeholder remarked how the Program Director is not only hands-on with the students, but also has various community contacts that provide support to the program overall.

Students made note of the ongoing support they receive from the Director.

"[Mr. Scott] is always there when I need him. He calls and checks on me everyday about my school work and to see how I am doing."- *Student*

"Brother Scott is always staying on us about doing our work...he makes us accountable for stuff that we need to do." - *Student*

"When we have our one-on-one we go in detail about what is going on in our lives without us holding back...Mr. Scott knows exactly what we need to do to make progress and be better in [and] outside of college." - *Student*

"Mr. Scott put me in a position where I feel comfortable being a college student...I had to adjust to that...he'll say, "Hey, go talk to this teacher," and I have to do it. Over time I don't need him to coach me to do certain things because he has already taught me how."- *Student*

Some students also alluded to the Director as a positive role model who serves as a father figure to them. Some of the actions taken by the Director to do so have been intentional.

"[Mr. Scott] has been a tremendous influence on me. He's always there to talk about how things are going at school and home. And he has given me courage to do certain things...he's really a big deal." - *Student*

"[The program] makes you become a people person. I am not use to speaking and I am a shy person, but [Mr. Scott] will bring it out of you one way or another."- *Student*

"The Williams Center motivates you to want to do better...You might need that extra push to go out and do what you want to do...and it helps motivate you...it gives you courage, because you know somebody really cares about you." - *Student*

The fact that the entire success of the program rests in the hands of one individual could serve as a potential threat to the longevity of the program. Lack of administrative support and other staff to help fulfill programmatic needs is currently serving as a barrier for program growth.

“I think [the Director] wouldn't need as many volunteers to do some of the things he's doing in terms of intake if he had a staff.” - *Staff/Stakeholder*

“If [Mr. Scott is] too reliant on an individual, rather than a process, there can be losses... The individual may not necessarily lose heart, but we all have a breaking point of fatigue...then there goes the program.” - *Staff/Stakeholder*

Based on commentary provided, the program would greatly benefit from additional staff to help assist with daily programmatic needs as well as fundraising responsibilities.

“We established an advisory board made up of five to six volunteers to help raise money...That is going to at least give [the director] some help and assistance with fundraising.” - *Staff/Stakeholder*

Institutional Support

In general, individuals interviewed agreed the WCUSA aligns with the overall mission of SUSLA and the SUS. Individuals also agreed the program received support from the institution, but would benefit from increased financial support in order to grow the program to serve more students.



CONCLUSION

As a second effort to fulfill the vision of the FFAA, the WCUSA has made commendable results in graduating students from SUSLA and helping them continue with their education at a four-year institution. As the WCUSA retention rate is well above the institutional threshold, the implemented strategies for success have proven to work among the given student-body population. However, it should be noted that the strategies alone are not to be held responsible for the program's success, but rather the dedication and investment into student success shown by the program's current director, Ted Scott.

The WCUSA has not only met its goals, but it also fulfills the mission of the FFAA. Since its inception, the program has nurtured over nineteen Black males in their journey to obtain a college degree. Although not every student has yet reached that goal, the program has been able to instill critical values within the students that will help them on their life's journeys. This is a critical component of the FFAA - to develop young Black men into leaders. The majority of students interviewed provided positive remarks about the program, the Director, their fellow participants, and program activities. It is clear that the WCUSA has had a positive impact on the students' individual lives, their families, the SUS and the community at-large.

Limited financial resources and a dependency on the current Director serve as potential threats to the longevity of the program. It is undeniable that the SUS is deeply committed to the success of the program, but additional financial resources and staffing would help to alleviate current pressures.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Interviewees identified three areas of improvement for the program: **additional funding, additional staffing, and the development of a similar program at SUBR.** These areas of improvement coincide with the researcher's observations.

To ensure the success and longevity of the WCUSA, the SUS should prioritize obtaining additional funding for the program. As the program currently operates, it is being led and implemented by one individual. This person not only serves as the program director in the programmatic sense of the position, but he is also tasked with fundraising responsibilities and community outreach. Given the extensive amount of attention needed by student participants, it is unrealistic for the person who serves in this role to accomplish all tasks without assistance in the administrative sense, or from staff who could help to administer program services.

It is undeniable that the current director has been able to assist students academically and personally. As noted in the interviews, students receive daily calls to ensure their success. This level of attention can be unsustainable for one person to manage, especially with additional duties required to ensure the continuation of the program. Therefore, it is recommended that additional staff be hired to assist with program implementation. Immediate needs require a staff member who can help to fulfill administrative duties. There is also a need for a staff person who can help with fundraising. In the long term, program staff members should be considered to fulfill the program's counseling and programmatic needs, including an assistant director, program coordinator, mental health counselor, and academic tutors.

Additional funding is needed to expand the Center's reach and serve more students than its current capacity. The additional funds could be used to guarantee financial assistance to each student to cover tuition, fees and books, housing, and money for incidentals such as emergencies. The financial support would help reduce the necessity for students to seek off-campus employment.

A third recommendation is for the creation of a Center for Undergraduate Student Achievement at SUBR to assist students who matriculate from SUSLA. Students who are currently enrolled at SUBR noted their reliance on the WCUSA director for continued support during their undergraduate baccalaureate studies, and a lack of support at their current institutions. The support provided by the WCUSA during their two years at SUSLA will, in theory, provide them with a foundation to be successful in college. However, students, especially with unique identified needs, will require continued support throughout their college career in order to maintain good grades and reach graduation.

If a Center is established at SUBR, it should not be named for any benefactor who is not in a position to donate at least \$1 million to the Center. It is commendable that Mr. and Mrs. Williams donated seed money to start the WCUSA and that they continue to support the program, but the Center is an expensive undertaking that needs continuous fundraising to maintain existing programs and meet the expanding needs of the Center. Private and corporate foundations should be contacted as potential donors for the SUBR and WCUSA programs.

Lastly, it is recommended that the advisory board which is being established should consist of a variety of individuals including SUSLA faculty and administrators, parents, community members, and previous students as well as other SUSLA alumni who are interested in maintaining and expanding the WCUSA. The advisory board should not be expected to serve as staff members of the Center. Board members can help with fundraising, but they cannot have the responsibility of being the only fundraisers for WCUSA.

APPENDIX A:

AMENDED LITERATURE REVIEW FROM THE 2017 HCUSA EVALUATION REPORT

HCUSA's programmatic model reflects the students served by its program. The focus on Black male students from New Orleans requires consideration of intervening factors that may influence student success. Accordingly, best practice models of support programs must be equipped to identify and address the needs of said student populations.

Underrepresented Students in Institutions of Higher Education

The education gap between Whites and underrepresented students has had a continued presence in the United States, especially in the context of African Americans. As such, "equality of opportunity [has been] a lie for [B]lack Americans" (Tyack, 1974, p. 224). The gap in achievement is even greater for Black males who attend a community college (Bush & Bush, 2005).

A Deficit Model Approach

The deficit model is negatively associated with student achievement, and it serves to obstruct academic success of students who come from groups that have been historically disadvantaged. Developed in the 1960s, the model discusses inequalities that exist in the educational system. The model associates educational gaps between groups as resulting from innate and cultural differences within the groups and individuals, rather than institutional inequalities. Despite proven bigotry on part of IQ Testing, tracking, and other methods of educational subordination, the deficit theory places the poor and racial/ethnic minority groups at blame for educational deficiencies (Tyack, 1974).

The educational achievement gap that exists is largely the result of historical and present day forms of institutional discrimination that denies the poor and racial/ethnic minorities equal opportunities to attend highly resourced schools taught by highly qualified teachers, and to be encouraged to enter into institutions of higher education. By focusing on inabilities rather than abilities, underrepresented students are falsely characterized as lacking the requisite skills necessary for college success.

They can also be placed into a system that reinforces a hierarchical school system, decreases student self-esteem, and allows for the development of curricula that encourages deficit thinking (Harry & Anderson, 1994).

Within the city of New Orleans, educational inequalities and institutional racism serve as conduits for widening the educational gap between Blacks and Whites. The persisting education gap amongst low income, first generation, and minority students in the United States has been the result of obscure forms of institutional discrimination that limits access, primarily for Black students, into institutions of higher education. A college degree may be further from reality than one may think for students who come from underrepresented backgrounds.

Students in the FFAA pilot program at SUNO face barriers to educational success by being members of a racial minority group, low-income (LI) and first generation (FG) college students. As such, HCUSA aims to increase college graduation rates for African American males, but more specifically to “increase the number of well-trained African American male teachers serving underrepresented communities”.

Race, poverty and environmental pressures are contributing factors to educational deficiencies of African American male students (Epps & Epps, 2002; Harper & Davis, 2012). As educational opportunities are allotted in accordance with social standing, African American males who are low-income (LI) and/or first generation (FG) continue to be less prepared to succeed in institutions of higher education than their White counterparts do. They also have the largest academic deficiencies to overcome because of poor preparation. Specifically, research shows African American males not only have lower math and reading levels than their White counterparts on average, but also have a lower tendency to graduate from high school and continue on to a college or university (Allen, 1992; Stayhorn, 2010).

Racial and Ethnic Minorities

Educational disparities between racial groups stem from the permeation of racism within American social institutions. According to the Higher Education Act of 1965, racial minorities include African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Asian Americans, and Native American Pacific Islanders. Students from these traditionally disadvantaged groups in the United States have lower educational attainments than non-racial minorities. These groups also have a history of denied access to educational opportunities, especially with accessing the pipeline into higher education (Green, 2006; Bowen & Bok, 2016).

Under-preparation of African American students within the K-12 system serves as one explanation for the groups' divergence from higher education. As research shows, racial and ethnic minority students are generally not as prepared as their White counterparts are, and are more likely to need remedial courses (Chen & Carroll, 2005). Social factors, such as residential segregation and school funding affect resources available in the academic setting, and thus academic preparation. High concentrations of poverty, coupled with underfunded schools result in lower per student expenditures, fewer advanced placement courses, and less experienced teachers than suburban schools (McDonough, 1998; Orfield, 2001). Such measurable differences in the quality of education and educational experience often leave students underprepared for the rigor of college curriculum. It may also make them less competitive, thereby affecting their qualifications for college admissions. (Chang, 2002; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004; Griffin & Allen, 2006; Bowen & Bok, 2016).

Low-Income (LI) Students

Poverty substantially affects the education gap that exists in the United States between students of different racial and ethnic groups. Some scholars, however, suggest social class and income are better predictors of success in college than race or other statuses (Choy, 2001).

In line with federal student aid guidelines, LI students are individuals made eligible to participate in the Federal Pell Grant Program based on financial need. The absence of financial resources influences academic preparation, an individual's ability to enter and succeed in a college or university setting, and a student's ability to finance their education. Research suggests that LI students are more likely to begin college academically underprepared compared to students from affluent backgrounds. Students who come from impoverished backgrounds have fewer resources, fewer opportunities, and often live in harsh conditions that are inhospitable to the learning process.

College enrollment gaps based on family income continue to widen; thereby LI students are less likely to apply to college than students from non-LI backgrounds. In addition, LI students are more likely to work while enrolled in school in order to cover school-related expenses. LI students are also more likely to live at home during their first year of college, whereas students whose parents have sufficient resources are able to fund or subsidize their child's college costs (McDonough, 1998; Ellwood & Kane, 2000; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Bowen & Bok, 2016).

First Generation (FG) Students

The generational educational attainment status within a family influences achievement for successive generations. Students who come from households where either one or both parents/guardians received a college degree have an advantage over their peers who do not.

Parental education level has a strong correlation with formation and actualization of college aspirations. Research shows students' degree attainment is related to whether their parents have a bachelor's degree (Terenzini, et. al., 1996; Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Parents/guardians tend to pass on the college-going culture to their children, which often becomes more of an expectation. Benefits of such status include access to the college experience, firsthand knowledge of post-secondary educational process, knowledge of the application and financial aid processes, and awareness of the benefits of attending college (McDonough, 1998; Choy, 2001).

FG students, on the other hand, experience a high level of family guilt due to college enrollment (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Parents who have not graduated from college tend to voice positive opinions and support for education, while at the same time expressing doubt in ability to pay for college.

Parental education level also correlates with financial resources and is linked to college enrollment, serving as an additional barrier to college access and retention for FG students. According to J.W.B. Douglas' theory of educational opportunity, a larger emphasis is placed on high educational attainment in middle-income homes. Middle-income parents are more likely than lower-income parents to show interest and knowledge of the middle-class institution of higher education.

A college education is critical for social mobility, especially for FG students. For these students, their FG status comes with barriers to knowledge, as well as access to institutions of higher education. Challenges facing FG students include lack of knowledge pertaining to the college and financial aid process, lack of support, and lower self-efficacy in regards to the college-going attitude in comparison to their non-FG counterparts. In addition, FG generation college students face experience uncertainty about career plans, financial illiteracy, lack of social support, gender and ethnic discrimination, lack of role models or negative role models, and not fitting in with others (Vargas, 2004).

According to a study on college retention and graduation, FG students are less likely to take college level courses, opting for remedial courses. They are also more likely to have lower grade point averages during their first year of college in comparison to their non-FG peers (Horn & Nuñez, 2000). For these students, the lack of support or guidance can result in a troublesome college experience.

Student Support Service Programs

Access and retention within institutions of higher education often come as a challenge to students from traditionally disadvantaged backgrounds. According to Tinto's theory on student retention, student involvement on campus, coupled with exposure, and relationships with faculty and staff serve as the basis of student retention. Within the framework of this theory, students are more likely to remain in school if they are supported, and if they feel like valued members of the institution (Tinto, 1975).

Support programs that aim to remedy external pressures and barriers to access have supplemented aspects of this model. Common services include academic and personal counseling, team building activities, cultural events, as well as community service. Within a larger scope of access and retention of underrepresented students, campus involvement and faculty mentorship serve as important factors of developing comfort on a college campus.

Student support programs that emulate the college experience help students adapt to college life and gain a level of comfort on campus. The organizational framework of student support services programs as outlined by Corwain, Colyay & Tierney (2005), delineates necessary components of student success. Success of support programs is measured by their ability to retain students and promote high achievement. Under this model, the characteristics of a successful program include: an emphasis on student culture, family engagement, incorporation of peer groups, early structured intervention (no later than the beginning of secondary education- 9th grade), consistent structure, competent counselors who exhibit knowledge and are available to students, access to college preparation curriculum, little to no emphasis on co-curricular activities, and mentorship.

Special emphasis on the development of the entire student in addition to his or her academic life offers a perspective that the development of the individual relates to their academic success. Mentorship, college-going strategies, building of self-efficacy, and knowledge of financial aid and financial planning are essential to the structure of support service programs.

Tutoring, summer employment, exposure to cultural activities and financial support serve as useful strategies for student success despite minority, LI or FG labeling.

Student Support Programs: A Focus on Black Males

In addition to national student support programs that provide access and support to underrepresented individuals in institutions of higher education (e.g., federal TRiO Programs, GEAR UP, and the College Access Challenge Grant Program), there are a host of institution-held programs that specifically focus on the admission and retention of African American male students. Such programs include Morgan State University's MILE Program, Clark Atlanta University's MIRROR Program, and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University's Black Male College Explorers Program.

The Campaign for Black Male Achievement (CMBA) is a national program that currently provides support to six national initiatives with the goal of ensuring growth, sustainability, and impact of leaders and organizations committed to improving the life outcomes of Black men and boys.⁷

Similar initiatives to improve male retention and college success can be found at other institutions. For example, the Atlanta Technical College, Institute for Males (AIM) initiative serves to increase enrollment and retention of male students at Atlanta Technical College. In addition to academic support, the program recognizes and accounts for external factors that may impede student success such as lack of education, unreliable transportation, criminal history and a lack of understanding of the legal system, need for guidance and counseling, and lack of understanding of workplace behavior.

There have also been initiatives to increase recruitment of teachers (i.e., Teach for America, The New Teacher Project, Urban Teachers, etc.). More specifically, there are programs across the country that focus on recruiting and supporting Black male educators.

- The **Black Community Alliance** is a Teach for America initiative that focuses on increasing the number of Black teachers across the country.
- The **Boston Teacher Residency Male Teachers of Color Network** provides support to Black male educators already in the profession.
- **NYC Men Teach** is a district-wide recruitment initiative under Mayor Bill de Blasio that aspires to hire 1,000 Black, Latino and Asian male teachers to reflect the diversity in the school system.

⁷ The CMBA provides support to community leaders and educators who primarily work with Black males. In the city of Milwaukee, WI support is given at Milwaukee Area Technical College, a two-year community college, with the goal of increasing the number of Black males with an Associates' degree. Although support given to MATC has not resulted in a program similar to the HCUSA or WCUSA, there are similarities in terms of its goals and strategies for success. Initial funding for the CMBA was provided by the Open Society Foundation.

- The Thurgood Marshall College Fund initiated the **Teacher Quality and Retention Program (TQRP)** in 2009. TQRP provides training and mentorship to new teachers who have graduated from a HBCU.

Other institutions have adopted efforts similar to HCUSA in developing African American males into K-12 teachers.

- The **Black Men Teaching Initiative** comprises four colleges and universities in Pennsylvania that recruit African American males into teacher education programs.
- **Call Me MISTER (Mentors Instructing Students Towards Effective Role Models)** started at Clemson University in 2000. Key tenets of the program include academic assistance, a cohort model for social support, job placement, and tuition assistance through loan forgiveness for students who successfully fulfill program requirements. According to a report by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, since its inception the program has graduated 150 Black men who have received teaching certifications and secured teaching positions. The program has since expanded to 18 participating universities.
- **Project Pipeline Repair: Restoring Minority Male Participation and Persistence in Educator Preparation Programs (Project PR)** is an initiative funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) to support the work of HBCUs in increasing the number of Black male teachers. Participating schools include Southern University, Tuskegee University, the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Alcorn State, and Claflin University.

HCUSA shares a similar mission with the aforementioned programs, while focusing on a specific demographic group: young Black men from New Orleans, who are less academically prepared, face large barriers to success, and who are most susceptible to falling into the cradle-to-prison pipeline. As such, the program is unique in that it focuses on providing an opportunity to students who would otherwise not be admissible into a four-year college or university. Furthermore, the primary objective of HCUSA is to train young Black men to become teachers and return to the local New Orleans communities from which they come. The Louisiana state legislature provided funding to help launch the program. The feature of the program that seemed to interest the legislators the most was the program's goal to increase black male teachers in Louisiana.

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APPENDIX B:

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF STUDENT INTERVIEWEES

ACADEMIC CLASSIFICATION (AS OF JANUARY 1, 2021)		
Classification	Frequency	Valid Percent
First Year - Freshman	4	40.0
Second Year - Sophomore	1	10.0
Third Year - Junior	5	50.0
TOTAL	10	100.0

AGE (AS OF JANUARY 1, 2021)		
Age	Frequency	Valid Percent
18	2	20.0
19	2	20.0
20	0	0.0
21	4	40.0
22	0	0.0
23	2	20.0
TOTAL	10	100.0

YEAR OF ENROLLMENT IN THE WILLIAMS CENTER

Semester	Frequency	Valid Percent
Fall 2017	1	10.0
Spring 2018	1	10.0
Fall 2018	3	30.0
Spring 2019	0	0.0
Fall 2019	1	10.0
Spring 2020	0	0.0
Fall 2020	4	40.0
TOTAL	10	100.0

CURRENT ENROLLMENT STATUS IN THE WILLIAMS CENTER

Enrolled (Yes/No)	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	5	50.0
No	5	50.0
TOTAL	10	100.0

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Status	Frequency	Valid Percent
Employed	6	60.0
Not Employed	4	40.0
TOTAL	10	100.0

APPENDIX C:

RANKING OF RESOURCES AND SERVICES

PROGRAM SERVICES AND RESOURCES RANKING				
Guest Speakers	Ranked #1	Ranked #2	Ranked #3	Total
Student	1	7	3	11
Staff/Stakeholder	1	2	0	3
Peer Group Meeting	Ranked #1	Ranked #2	Ranked #3	Total
Student	6	1	1	8
Staff/Stakeholder	1	0	2	3
Community Service	Ranked #1	Ranked #2	Ranked #3	Total
Student	1	1	4	6
Staff/Stakeholder	0	0	0	0
Academic Counseling	Ranked #1	Ranked #2	Ranked #3	Total
Student	1	2	2	5
Staff/Stakeholder	1	1	2	4

APPENDIX D:

ASSESSMENT OF RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Williams Center Support and Services Help Students Maintain Good Grades					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Nor Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Student	11 (91.7%)	1 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Staff/Stakeholder	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Williams Center Support and Services Help Students Make Progress Towards the Completion of Their Degree					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Nor Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Student	12 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Staff/Stakeholder	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Student Participants are Provided with the Necessary Resources and Services to Help Them Enter Into the Stem Field					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Nor Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Student	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Staff/Stakeholder	3 (75.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

APPENDIX E:

ASSESSMENT OF WILLIAMS CENTER STAFF

Williams Center Staff Members Create a Comfortable Environment on Campus					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Nor Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Student	12 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Williams Center Staff Members Direct Students to Valuable Campus Resources					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Nor Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Student	10 (83.3%)	2 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Williams Center Staff Members are Sensitive to Students' Unique Needs					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Nor Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Student	11 (91.7%)	1 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Williams Center Staff Members Encourage Students to Do Well in their Classes					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Nor Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Student	12 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Williams Center Staff Members Encourage Students to Stay in College

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Nor Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Student	11 (91.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Williams Center Staff Members Encourage Students to Continue with their Education After Graduation from Southern University at Shreveport, LA

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Nor Agree/Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Student	11 (91.7%)	1 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

NOTES



Ronald W. Walters
Leadership and
Public Policy Center