

HAS THE RISING COST OF A BACHELOR'S DEGREE AFFECTED THE SIX YEAR
COLLEGE GRADUATION RATE AT AN URBAN HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE
AND UNIVERSITY?

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Doctor of Education

By

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HAS THE RISING COST OF A BACHELOR'S DEGREE AFFECTED THE SIX YEAR COLLEGE GRADUATION RATE AT AN URBAN HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY?

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Ronald Thompson III, April 2018

Abstract

The rising cost of obtaining a four-year college education is consistently escalating. Students are being bombarded with enormous student debt loans due to their financing their respective secondary educational endeavors. This study will discuss and evaluate whether there is a perception of the rising cost of paying for a college education and has it affected the six-year undergraduate college graduation rate at an urban Historically Black College and University (HBCU). The results of this study can be used to help understand how the rising cost of earning a Bachelor's degree impacts our workforce, the economic stability of our citizens, and our nation as a whole.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The rising cost of obtaining a four-year college education is increasing rapidly. Today many students across our nation are being forced to use student loans to subsidize their education. Years ago many parents of students could afford to pay for a college education without the use of student aid loans. This is not the case today. In fact, some students are tens of thousands of dollars in debt due to student loans. Also, some students are leaving or quitting school because the cost of receiving a college education is just not affordable. Many individuals believe college tuition rates and fees will continue to rise over the next decade. As a result, the issue of increasing college tuition rates has become a national debate, particularly as it directly relates to student loans.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Some educational experts believe that we will have a national student loan crisis. According to Wilson, there are " some increasingly high-pitched campaigns aimed at exposing what some consider a national crisis: student-loan borrowing is treating the financial future of today's college students" (p.1) Lawmakers across our nation are debating just how to address, improve or fix the student loan dilemma. Recently, there has been much discussion during the presidential campaigns and debates on offering some form of free college for students. In the state of Tennessee, lawmakers have adopted a plan where college students can attend a two-year public community college at no cost to the student. However, this is not the single solution for helping students who are pursuing a four-year education. Due to the cost and perhaps the debt paradigm, deciding whether to receive a two-year education or a four-year education can be a difficult decision to make. In the article, "Making College Worth It: A Review of the Returns to Higher Education", Oreopolos and Petronijevics note that "Despite a general rise in the return to

college, likely due to technological change, the cost-benefit calculus facing prospective students can make the decision to invest in and attend college dauntingly complex. Oreopoulos and Petronijevics review research on the varying costs and benefits of higher education and explore in full the complexity of the decision to invest in and attend college. Optimal college attainment decisions are different for all prospective students, who diverge regarding what they are likely to get out of higher education and what specific options might be best for them. Earnings of college graduates depend in important measure on the program of studying and eventual occupation they choose. Students uninterested in or unable to complete a four-year college degree appear to benefit from completing a two-year degree" (2013, p. 41). It is essential and vital that a cost-benefit analysis should be completed before deciding to attend college or taking on debt to finance a college education.

Today a four-year education is not an option for many of our citizens in this country due to the associated cost that seems to continue to climb. We have laws on the books that have boosted college enrolled over the past several decades, but nothing has seriously been done on the cost front. Glater writes in the article, "Debt, Merit, and in Higher Education Access" that "When President Lyndon Baines Johnson signed the Higher Education Act (1) (HEA) on November 8, 1965, he proclaimed that the law means that a high school senior anywhere in the great land of ours can apply to any college or any university in any of the 50 States and not be turned away because his family is poor. (2) And in the fifty years since the Act passed, nothing less than revolution has occurred regarding college access. Colleges and universities in the United States are producing more than two-and-a-half-times as many graduates as in the past: 2.8 million in the 2012-2013 academic year, compared to 1.1 million in 1970-1971. (3) This 154% increase represents far more growth than can be accounted for by the 17% growth. (4) In the

number of high school graduates; currently, about two-thirds of students who complete high school enroll in a two-year or four-year college program, up from about half. (5) The increase reflects an ambitious and expensive effort to put college within reach of all aspiring students" (2016, p. 89). The main issue, however, is that many of these students are inundated with student loan debt. Many of these students are not receiving the type of career opportunities and job offers they were expecting once they have completed their degree program.

Statement of the Problem

The research problem is that the rising college tuition rates will lead to fewer and fewer students being fortunate to attend and complete a four-year degree. We now live in a dynamic 21st-century global economy. For our nation to succeed and reach new strives, we will need an educated citizenry. However, the issue is that tuition prices continue to rise and the destiny of many of our students is being challenged. In the article, "Financial Support and Its Impact on Undergraduate Student Financial," the authors Solis and Durband note that "The cost of higher education is increasing at an alarming rate, particularly at four-year public institutions" (2006, p. 93). What seems to be occurring is that public college institutions are privatizing themselves one dollar at a time by constantly and regularly increasing the tuition amount. For example, if a freshman student were paying 40 % of a \$10,000 tuition cost, then that would equate to \$4,000 for the school year. Let's, for instance, say the school raises tuition cost 25% by a student's senior year; then this would mean that the student will pay \$5,000 a school year or %50 of the total tuition amount. Some tuition increases are expected over time, but the amount of tuition increase has outpaced the rate of inflation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify if there is a perception that the rising cost of college tuition and student loan debt levels are affecting college retention and ultimately the college six-year graduation rates. This dissertation project will use a qualitative format. This phenomenological study will gather information and data from the participants so that their viewpoints and perceptions can be documented. The central purpose is to collect as much reliable information from the interviewee so that perception can be established. The research will be investigated to determine if there is a perception that there is a recent rise in the cost of attending college and if this is causing fewer students to complete a bachelor degree. The researcher seeks to understand and articulate the results of this phenomenon in detail. The research design will consist of reviewing previous data, literature, and findings. Also, the research includes a focus designed study interview data tool that will be used to gather information and data that will provide and evaluate any variables that may be used to present a clear summary and conclusion related to this study.

Students were interviewed at an urban Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in Nashville, Tennessee. The interview questions related to this tool have been developed to obtain critical data and information associated with the rising cost of college tuition and whether student loan debt may or may not be affecting college retention and the college six-year graduation rates. The researcher considers and views this study to be an essential and critical tool that will help university administrators and other higher education professionals better and more uniquely understand the dynamic effects of tuition continually increasing at colleges and universities across our nation. This scholarly project will make a positive

contribution to the field of higher education administration and also help our federal and state lawmakers better understand this critical issue and dilemma.

Research Questions

1. Do the students at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in Nashville, Tennessee have a perception that the rising cost of college tuition negatively affects student retention rates?
2. Do the students at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in Nashville, Tennessee have a perception that the rising cost of college tuition negatively affects the six-year college graduation rates?

Rationale for Study

Higher education is significantly relevant and needed in our nation. The issue of acquiring a four-year college and an advanced degree is the cost of obtaining a viable secondary education which continues to rise, often time increasing at a much higher rate than inflation. This could cause our most economically vulnerable citizens problems when they are trying to pay for a four-year college degree. Alexander writes in the article, Maintenance of State Effort for Higher Education: "Barriers to Educational Opportunity in Addressing the Rising Costs of a College Education" that "In addressing the issue of college and university tuition and fee growth, it is obvious that the higher education costs have differing effects on parents, students, and institutions" (2011, p.442). This article certainly needs to shed more research base knowledge on the rising college tuition problem. There is just not enough research data or other relevant information on this issue. Many individuals believe that the student loan crisis is one of

America's most concerning problems and because of the rising rate of tuition cost these debt levels are serious.

The overall mission of this research project is to gain insight and perceptions about how rising tuition rates are affecting the affordability of attending college. Currently, there is not a precise comprehend conclusion from a research perspective as to how this issue is changing graduation and student college retention. This qualitative study will bring to light relevant insights and much needed viable perceptions concerning this problem.

The Researcher Background and Relationship to Problem

The researcher has a passion for the field of education, notably higher education. Additionally, the researcher has previously worked at higher education institutions and plans to spend a significant portion of his work career teaching and being a college administrator. The researcher is committed to the field of higher education and also believes that college retention and graduation must improve so that our country can continue to grow and make technological advances in the world's 21st-century global economy. Furthermore, the researcher realizes and understands the financial burden that goes along with attending and finishing a four-year college degree. The researcher plans to use the results of the research study to help improve and understand the issue of rising college tuition rates. Also, the researcher intends to share the research finding with educational leaders and government officials so that they will gain the information needed to address this issue.

Definition of Terms

1. **Higher Education Act of 1965** - The Higher Education Act of 1965 was a legislative document that was signed into law on November 8, 1965, to strengthen the educational resources

of our colleges and universities and to provide financial assistance for students in postsecondary and higher education. (National Trio Clearing House, 2003 p.1).

2. **Pay Day Loans** - A payday loan is a type of short-term borrowing where an individual borrows a small amount at a high rate of interest. The borrower typically writes a post-dated personal check in the amount they wish to borrow plus a fee in exchange for cash. The lender holds onto the check and cashes it on the agreed upon date, usually the borrower's next payday. These loans are also called cash advance loans or check advance loans. (Investodia, 2016. p. 1)

3. **Morrill Act of 1862** - A “Land-Grant College Act of 1862, or the Morrill Act, Act of the U.S. Congress (1862) that provided grants of land to states to finance the establishment of colleges specializing in “agriculture and the mechanic arts” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016. p.1).

4. **STEM** - is a curriculum based on the idea of educating students in four specific disciplines — science, technology, engineering, and mathematics — in an interdisciplinary and applied approach. Rather than teach the four disciplines as separate and discrete subjects, STEM integrates them into a cohesive learning paradigm based on real-world applications. (Live Science Contributor, 2014. p.1)

5. **Tennessee’s “Room to Grow” Report** – The report indicates that college completion rate in Tennessee is unacceptable. Tennessee ranked 38 in the nation in public university graduation rates. The report determined that low college graduation rates would decrease the possibility of employment (Tamburin, & Balakit, M. (2016. p. A 1)

6. **Historically Black College and University (HBCU)** - Institutions of higher education in the United States founded prior to 1964 for African American students. The term was created by the Higher Education Act of 1965, which expanded federal funding for colleges and universities. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2015. p.1)

7. **Social class** - a group of people within a society who possess the same socioeconomic status.

Besides being important in social theory, the concept of class as a collection of individuals sharing similar economic circumstances has been widely used in censuses and in studies of social mobility. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016. p.1)

Summary

There has been much discussion and debate about the issue of the rising cost of obtaining a bachelor's degree. Such cost just continues to escalate at an alarming rate with no end in sight. This research project will provide critical data and relevant information on how these rising costs are ultimately affecting college retention and graduation rates. Without question, student debt levels continue to climb. Without question, there seems to be a unique relationship between the rise of student loan debt levels and the rising cost of college tuition. One might believe that variables such as distance education (i.e., online courses) would curb the total tuition cost but this may appear not to be the case. Obtaining a college degree is perhaps one of the best decisions an individual can make concerning their respective future, but it must be affordable. The issue is that students are just taking on more and more student debt and in it appear that such debt is not leading to obtaining a bachelor's degree.

In the article, "Financial Knowledge and Student Loan Usage in College Students" the author, Javine indicates that "The level of student loan debt has increased significantly over the years. This continued increasing trend is cause for concern. Moreover, it is important that students understand the ramifications of taking student loans" (2013, p. 367). However, the issue is that some students must take these loans or they just cannot afford to attend college. This study will provide data and research-based insight on whether these rising tuition rates are affecting

college graduation rates and college retention. It is a well-established fact that America needs an educated citizenry. The 21st-century global economy is changing rapidly, and keeping pace with this change, American citizens need a viable education.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Broad Historical Literature on the Topic

The literature review will provide background information and data on the researcher's topic and study. The literature review will be guided by four distinct variables. They are student debt levels, tuition increases, graduation rate and retention rates. Furthermore, this literature review will provide the theoretical foundation for this research project.

Theoretical Lens

The theoretical foundation and framework are deeply rooted in the peer review journal articles and publications that have discussed the major issues concerning rising tuition cost. Much of the focus in this study will review and analyze previous literature that will be used as a foundation and basis for a rational and sound argument that will be made concerning rising tuition levels and how this phenomenon leads to higher student debt levels. The researcher of this study will look closely at the issue of how rising tuition rates and student loan debt amounts effects college retention and ultimately the six-year graduation rates. The existing literature finding will provide the roadmap for a more in-depth process in which the research for this project will address thoroughly and methodically throughout this paper and research study. The researcher developed a student interview questionnaire that will be used to build upon the existing literature on this issue. The researcher will provide summary findings that can be used by experts to begin to improve or solve the issue of rising college tuition and student loan debt levels.

Student Debt

The landscape of our nation's higher education system is changing rapidly. It seems each year that it cost more and more to attend a college or university and this is causing student debt levels to increase in an alarming way. The debt of college graduates has rapidly risen over the past years. Their high debt levels are causing college graduates to take jobs and career avenues that they may not have to take under normal circumstances (Palmer, Bliss, Gotezt and Moorman, 2010).

It is no longer an easy decision to decide whether to attend college. An individual must look at their respected budget situation and determine if the cost of college is a feasible choice for their future. Let's be realistic there are certain professions that you cannot enter into without graduating from college (e.g., doctor, lawyer, certified public account, engineer, nursing, educators, etc.). Many times, this means taking on heavy debt loads that are imposed by student loans. Higher education students have to deal with debt levels as they attempt to improve their marketability in the workforce. Debt above 10,000 dollars decreases the chance that students will graduate college (Dwyer, McCloud, Hodson 2012).

The college debt problem is a serious and ongoing issue. This situation according to the literature can be influenced even more if the student is a minority. Conclusive studies demonstrate that graduation from college is higher for black and white students with educational loans greater than 10,000 although minority students with 10,000 or more are less likely to graduate than students with loans somewhat between 5,000 and 10,000 (Zhan, 2014). This demonstrates just how severe this college debt issue is and that the most likely reason for the rising student debt levels is the rising tuition cost.

It seems that individuals on the lower spectrum of the social, economic ladder are struggling more than other students with the rising tuition levels and student loan debt issue. The issue is that poor and lower-income families' pay raises and incomes are not keeping up with the rapid and escalating cost of attending college. Almost everyone is aware that getting a college degree is one of the best opportunities to get social, economic mobility in our nation. In fact, some people view a college education as a ticket to the American dream and a better way of life for their family. Over the past several years there have been many debates as to whether the American dream is alive and well. The promising thing is that most people believe that it is still available and accessible.

The issue of student debt has become so grave and severe that some students are using credit cards to assist in financing their four-year degree. This is problematic from a debt perspective because credit debt carries double-digit interest rates which results in difficult repayment challenges. Students that attend college today are depending more and more on credit cards and student loans (Robb, Pinto, 2010). When students begin to turn to credit cards to finance their education, then we know that tuition prices are growing alarming level. Recently, there has been a presidential election in our country, and surprisingly the student loan debt amount and the rising cost of attending college was one of the significant topics and theme of the election platform. This was significantly interesting because many issues face this nation every day (e.g., crime, national debt, social security, Medicare financial shortfall, funding education, escalating drug costs, etc.). In fact, some of the presidential candidates had recommended that college at all public four-year institutions should be paid for by the government if some families cannot afford to send their child to college.

Tuition has increased over the years, and this occurrence has caused an increase in the need for financial aid (Javine, 2013). Javine is suggesting and affirming there is a notable and robust correlation between the rising cost of attending college and the increasing student debt phenomenon. The suggestion is that these two variables are significantly affecting the graduation rates at our colleges and universities.

For many college students taking on more and more excessive debt to attend college is just not a viable, acceptable and a realistic option. When students take on such debt in college, the actual cost of attending college is increased enormously. Students do not only have to pay back the principal loan, but they also have to pay back the accumulated interest. This means that every day that a student has an outstanding student loan balance; the loan debt is collecting more interest related dollars in additional debt. Often we have all heard the advice that it is essential and necessary to go to college if you want to have a successful life. The problem is that we have not heard about various ways of attending college without accumulating significant debt and student loan obligations.

When students start paying for college with a credit card, this is a sign that financial problems have developed and completing college may be delayed if new funds are not available to pay for tuition. College students today are borrowing too much money on credit cards. The debt levels are causing students to leave school before finishing the program, and the ones who do graduate are burdened with high debt levels (Dale, Beville, 2007). When students pay for their tuition bill with credit cards, then they are putting themselves into deep financial debt. Additionally, they are risking severe future financial problems which could include bankruptcy early on in their adult life. Therefore, students should think seriously about paying college tuition with a credit card or other high-interest loans such as payday loans.

Since 1965 the financial aid act has grown tremendously over the years. It is now typical for students in college to request financial aid (Daynaski, Clayton 2013). This means that more and more students are using debt to finance their educational endeavors.

It would seem that our government officials and educational leaders would want our students to get away from using student debt to finance their higher educational endeavors. Some knowledgeable and relevant leaders will need to determine the solution on how to better handle the way tuition rates continue to climb. It seems every year we turn on the television news only to hear that colleges are starting to increase the amount it takes for a student to acquire a credit hour at their respected institution of higher learning. We may need to start asking ourselves, do colleges and universities need to be funded like or comparable to the way we fund K thru 12 public schools? That may seem a to be a puzzling question, but something has to be done because many students are leaving their college campuses and not graduating additional member checks because they cannot pay the tuition amount due to the yearly increases in the overall college tuition rate.

Paying for college in America today is no easy task. It is an outright mystery as to why our government has not been more proactive in dealing with this issue. The United States economic recovery continues to be an issue because of debt that students incurred while attending college. Student tuition increases continue to be a new issue. Economists say that tuition rates increases at colleges will continue and that states and federal government support for college students will decrease (Hogan, Bryant Overmyer-Day, 2006). Students graduating today will have a difficult time buying a house or obtaining a loan for a vehicle. This is indeed a complex issue because this scenario of excess debt is likely to affect an individual financially for many decades after graduation negatively. This issue is even worse if the individual does not

complete or finish college because they are likely to have a lower salary than if they had completed a degree program.

The question remains that, are student loans beneficial to students? Most Americans believe attending college is the secret to success. America has over 7 thousand universities for students to pursue their endeavors. (Flanagan, 2016). There is no shortage of higher learning institutions in our nation. The issue is rarely how do you pay for this often expensive education without causing financial hardship for you and your family. Perhaps, even more, important is what happens if you run out of financial resources during your college tenure. It is scenarios such as these that warrant research and data analysis.

We need a country with a high rate of educated citizens. America without question has some incredibly bright and talented people. The issue is that we have to educate and train them at higher institutions of learning, but we must do this at the cost that is feasible and sustainable over the long term. We all look forward to the day when our citizens can be college educated in a reasonable and cost-efficient manner. The problem is just how some individuals can pay for this degree program. Student loans make a significant contribution to the overall debt in our nation. During the 1970's the need to give academic opportunity is what ultimately drove the expansion of higher education (Dwyer, Mccloud Hodson, 2012).

This scenario and practice is without a doubt a positive paradigm. The challenge that ensued, however, is how do we pay for all of these individuals from various class system slots to finish college without causing a significant financial burden to themselves or their family members who may be financing college. The fact of the matter is that students that are from affluent homes are the only students who can afford the college tuition increases and living cost (Toby, 2010). This is true, but the system must do better in educating all students about the

consequences of borrowing money to go to college. In fact, many students do not finish college, and this only makes the debt that they have taken on more difficult to deal with over the course of their lives. Student grants may be an option, but they are limited in scope and availability.

Some individuals believe that colleges unfairly market loans to students. Some for-profit colleges are using marketing to persuade students to attend their school. Some experts believe this disproportionately affects the poor. The federal government has stepped in and limited the student aid that can be given to lower-income students so that they do not become overburdened with debt (Mettler, 2014). It is appropriate that our government is proactive in addressing the student loan aid dilemma. It would be ideal if these actions were to lead to student loan aid reform. We need and must have, an educated citizenry in this country. Our minds are essential to reaching out destiny but colleges and universities today are not preparing the student for the global economy (Keeling, Hersh, 2010).

It is critical to note that if college students are going to pay for college, and quite frankly many of them go into debt to do so, then the schools that they attend must deliver a meaningful education of value. College students have seen a college education as a ticket to better financial life. Most students think they will be able to pay their student loans back once they graduate from college. The economic recession of 2008 has lead students to believe perhaps paying their loans back after graduation may be a tougher task than they originally anticipated. (Bennett, Wilezol, 2013). This creates many problems for college students, and thus they have mounting issues that cause them not even to finish their college program and earn their degree.

The critical thing to remember is that college is an investment. Most students go to college to improve their economic, social mobility and career earning potential. When individuals no longer believe that there is an advantage economically to attend and complete

college, the number of people that our country's schools graduate is likely to decline. Good paying jobs in this economy are not easy to obtain. We are presently outsourcing many of our better-paying jobs in the technology and manufacturing sector to outside nations. College students must know and understand that if they invest the time and money into a four-year college education, they must have a good paying career waiting for them upon completing the degree. When college graduates do not see this paradigm, then they are likely not to attend and finish college.

Are schools the problem because they often have too much financial aid? We are not quite sure what the answer is to this question. The higher education act of 1965 components has grown substantially over the years. Financial aid is now standard practice and a tool that is used to fund a college education. (Dynark, Scott-Clayton 2013). Some people are using the financial aid because it is accessible and readily available. This sometimes causes individuals to take on unneeded and unwarranted debt, and many of these students are just not graduating and receiving a degree.

Online education is now a primary way of attending college (Miller, Hans-Vaughn, Zygouris-Coe 2014). Online courses have benefits that allow certain individuals to attend college. For example, many of us have friends or co-workers who are enrolled in college via the internet and are participating in college online. Often working older adults have family commitments and the only way that they can attend college is by using the internet option. The other advantage for older adults and any student is that more colleges and universities are offering online courses. The irony of using online courses for adults is that enrolling in such courses cost more than taking a course in a traditional classroom setting. In reality, the cost factor for adult students may be more of a financial challenge. Therefore, the need for student

loans can be higher in the older adult student population.

People, in general, seem to be more uncomfortable or concerned with debt in general. Almost everyone in our country borrows money to buy a car or home. Furthermore, credit cards are widely used for many purchases. It is this philosophy of debt and the use of debt that has spilled over into people financing their college degree endeavors with borrowed funds. Perhaps there needs to be a fundamental change in how we all view consumer personal debt levels. For most individuals in this nation, their wages and earnings growth potential has been sluggish. Many students are highly leveraged as it relates to debt accumulation. Interest rates are somewhat historically low now, but at some point, these borrowing rate costs are likely to rise again. On top of all of that, some people have to deal with predatory lending practices such as subprime loans, overly high credit card rates, payday loans and balloon style loan payments. Some students attending college would be better served from a financial perspective if they worked and put themselves through college paying for one course at a time. Therefore, when these students finish their college degree and journey, they would be debt free and not concerned with student loans. Colleges and universities are an essential and vital component to the progress of our nation. An educated citizenry only increases the probability that we will be successful and innovative as a nation. Most likely the nations around the globe that best educate their general population will be the nation that thrives and produces a high level of gross domestic product over the long term. Educating students is no easy task and funding education, in particular, higher education, is often tough. Running a college or university is expensive. First, the administrative staff is paid well and secondly, and more importantly, you have tenured professors that are highly educated and skilled that command a high salary for their teaching and

professional knowledge. It is these costs that often get pushed down to the students, and they bear much of this cost structure.

The cost of getting a college education is expensive, but what's the cost of not getting a good education. Most likely if you do not have a good education, then you are likely to miss out on many professional opportunities. On the other hand, though, if you are highly educated, then you will likely get an opportunity to earn an above average wage and lead in the organization that employs workers. Getting an education pays but the question is how does one feasibly pay for this education without being debt riddled and challenged.

The present state of the economic higher education pricing model is indeed a concern. Every year there will most likely be a tuition increase at colleges and universities across our country. Lawmakers and quite frankly many citizens are not fully engaged and increasing discussing the rising cost of college tuition paradigm. Most citizens and their governmental representatives are mainly concerned with the rising healthcare costs in our country, but the representatives are not dealing with the rising cost of attending college with the same level of urgency.

There are other factors that may cause a student's tuition bill to increase, and student college readiness is one such example. Some of the factors that encompass a student's non-college preparation are:

1. Need for remedial courses or intervention
2. Repeating courses because of non-passing grades
3. The cost associated with tutoring

All of these factors and more add to the rising cost of attending college and the rising student debt accumulation. Also, the overall cost of textbooks, student activity fees, and installment payment related fees only further complicate this issue.

State Funding of Colleges

College funding plays a vital role in lives of the American college student. The amount of funding that a student receives could affect if they can attend or continue in college.

Public colleges have had a difficult time balancing their budgets because states are not giving them the funding they need to remain viable. This means state college administrators must look at tuition as a way to fund the college budgets and administrative goals (McPherson Schaprio).

Colleges and universities budgets are tight, and there is just not a lot of financial resources to waste. Lawmakers have been cutting funding to colleges for many years (Sav 2016). Without proper funding colleges and universities will likely have to raise their tuition cost. This scenario will probably affect the student's ability to matriculate through the academic program. There are other ways to view this issue though. State lawmakers are now funding college based on performance-based results. This includes variables such as retention and graduation rates (Tandbery, Hillman 2014). Funding a college is indeed a daunting and difficult task. Many states continue to reduce financial support. Money is indeed flowing into state financial accounts, but despite this revenue growth only a small percentage of states plan to increase spending on higher education (Meyer 2010). The author is suggesting that this burden will eventually affect the student's ability to pay for and continue their academic journey towards the completion of a degree. So, where do we go from here? Colleges and universities should transform to an operation similar to corporations. The fact of the matter is that states are not increasing funding

to higher education institutions (Nica 2014). The author is suggesting that cost-sharing, as it relates to paying for college, is the new norm and this philosophical pathway is the best way to address the issue.

Rising Tuition Cost

A college degree is still one of the best cornerstones of a solid financial life and wealth building. However, the more tuition rates increase, the more individuals wonder and contemplate if earning a college degree is worth the significant cost increase and debt obligation that may last several decades. This section will analyze and critique reasons why the cost of college tuition continues to climb. Also, this section will provide the theoretical basis for the rising tuition cost variable.

It is these high and escalating tuition rates that affect the poor and minorities even more. For example, many students at historically black colleges and universities are struggling to pay for school and remain in college. Many of these students are applying for more scholarships or looking for student financial assistance from churches or other community groups. Tuition rates are likely to rise in the future, and this will likely make it tougher for many students to continue their coursework and remain in their degree program. College administrators need to stay in tune with the tuition increase issues. We do not want a college degree to be only for the rich and privileged. A college degree should be obtainable from a cost structure perspective to anyone who is able to complete the degree requirements. Students that decide to attend college must decide on a major. Many students are now deciding what to major in based on the anticipated salary once they graduate, science, math, and computer programming are majors that have an excellent return on investment. It is a fact now that college degrees are possibly one of the most significant investments an individual is probably going to make in their life other than the cost

and purchase of a primary residence. The decision whether or not to attend college must not be taken lightly. An individual who decides to attend and pay for college must know that they are spending a lot of money and it is highly plausible it will take many years to recoup the initial investment of a college education.

In demographic areas, such as the African-American Community, a rise in college degrees could help lower the overall unemployment rate. Minority communities have historically had higher unemployment rates which could indicate attending college is one way to help lower the overall unemployment rate in this demographic. The problem is though that college is expensive, and the tuition increases continue to progress.

It is important to remember the great recession that occurred a few years ago, and its effect on college graduates and students. Certainly, this was a tough financial time for much of the country. However, the issue is that the recession was a much worst time for recent college graduates and college students. College students and graduates during this time were finding it challenging to gain employment. It was a tough time for students to afford and continue to pay rising tuition rates when the U.S. economy nationally was not producing jobs. It was an even more alarming and troubling time for parents and family members to assist students with college tuition. The economy was losing a high number of jobs. This situation caused many college students to closely review the financial risk/reward about paying for and investing financially in a college degree and education.

High School students and their parents are beginning to be concerned and often worried about how rapidly college tuition rates are increasing. Many graduating high school seniors have higher educational aspirations that they want, but many times they are taking on debt to pursuing this education (Nicoletta, 2015).

This is obviously not by choice. It can become a significant burden on poor and even middle-class families which often are just struggling to make ends meet. Parents and students are discussing in detail the rising cost of student tuition debt, as well as the fall of the median income of many Americans (Bennett, McCarty, Carter, 2015). It is without question that if tuition rates continue to climb, then some students will, unfortunately, have to leave college because they simply cannot afford the high price of obtaining a four-year degree. This occurrence and scenario will be devastating for our country. An educated citizenry is a way for our country to succeed in the 21st-century global economy. Americans are now competing with other developed nations across our globe. We often hear of American companies relocating to other nations. Therefore, the U.S. must invest in our people by ensuring they receive a solid and meaningful college education at a realistic and reasonable cost.

It is often the case that one of the rapid and long-standing ways to exit poverty or a negative financial framework is to obtain a higher education degree. Grants are much better for students attending college as opposed to student loans most students have family obligations when they graduate and this makes paying back student loans difficult (Toby, 2010).

This student debt loan crisis is one of the most serious problems in America's portfolio of issues today. It seems this issue just will not go away. Perhaps it is because there appears to be no quick fix solution to the problem. A college education is essential to an individual's future and destiny. Also, a college education allows one to climb the ladder of success and to dream of a better life for themselves, their family, and for future generations. A college degree is one sure way to break the cycle of poverty and the lack of an individual's financial stability and the economic stability of their families' life (Alkandri, 2014).

One of the new practices that are occurring in higher education from a cost perspective is the privatizing of public state schools. This is an issue that is often ignored or frequently not discussed. This phenomenon manifested when state schools raised tuition cost but do not increase the state funding in direct correlation to the tuition increase. The government seems to no longer be concerned with student's financial issues related to college tuition and expenses. Most of this financial responsibility falls on the student family now. (Alkandari, 2014)

First, the financial education rate is increased and secondly, the percentage in which the state subsidizes also increases. The financial problems for some students in college are so dire that they cannot afford to feed themselves on a daily basis. Colleges across our nation are developing food pantries for their students. College enrollment continues to escalate. It is true that college tuition is rising at double-digit percentage rate annually. On the other hand, family median incomes are only rising modestly (Lubosco, 2016). The underlining issue is that students cannot even afford to feed themselves because tuition rates have increased so much. This demonstrates that there is a rippling effect such as hunger by college students that are being caused because tuition has become unaffordable. The root cause is that tuition rates have increased too much and too fast. It is difficult to focus on graduating and completing college courses if a person is hungry and have not had a decent nutritious meal (Sawhill 2014).

The rising cost of college tuition increases certainly cannot continue without it starting an adverse effect on our economy. College tuition rates are rising entirely too fast. Our national government has tried to lessen the impact of these rising rates by providing more student loans and other financial aid tools. Indeed a college degree is a wonderful and valuable accomplishment. In fact, college enrollment rates continue to increase, but the college graduation rates have not moved forward. (Sawhill, 2014)

The six-year graduation rate is probably not going to change for the better unless something is done to lower tuition fees at our colleges and universities. The rate that individuals are attending college has positively increased over the years. The issue is that not all demographics are benefiting from this occurrence. Worries about equal access to college governmental policies have to surface helped to address the needs of college students from economically challenged backgrounds (Fallis, 2015). The fact that tuition continues to rise at higher learning institutions simply means that many qualified students basically may not be able to afford to attend or continue their college journey. However, there is encouraging news on the college participation rates for women (Fallis, 2015).

Colleges have raised tuition amounts because other funding sources have evaporated. Tuition at public universities has risen at twice the inflation. Colleges are depending on tuition increases to balance their core budget operations and provide a solid educational experience for their respected students. Many people believe that online education could help curb the theme of tuition increases over many years. (Desjardins, Ahibury, McCall, 2006).

Research has demonstrated and shown that America needs college graduates to meet the needs of the changing dynamics of our economy. It is particularly true as it directly relates to science and math associated curriculums. This includes other science-related areas such as engineers, scientists, computer programmers and medical professionals. Science, technology, engineering, math (STEM) workers have been on a rapid decline over the past ten years. The lack of science, technology and math workers effects the labor pool in our country (XUE, Carson, 2015).

It will be difficult to produce these graduates if tuition rates continue to accelerate at the current pace. Starting in 2012, America started to place major urgency in the STEM field of

study. The plan is to have over one million student graduate with a STEM degree over the next ten years (Drew, Oli, Rice, Ardisone, Galindo-Gonzalez, Salasa, 2015).

The question remains, however, is how are all of the STEM-based degrees going to be paid for? Should tuition rates continue to climb, it will make it significantly difficult to reach the STEM college graduate projections. America continues to struggle to produce and develop new engineers and individuals who want to become scientists (Moakler, Minson, 2014).

Perhaps offering more scholarships is the answer to the financial dilemma that is encompassing the goal of earning a STEM-related bachelor degree. Our lawmakers must address how we need to tackle the cost of obtaining a college degree. On a positive note, however, America already has a solid infrastructure as it pertains to colleges and universities. These valuable assets mean that once we determine how to control the cost related to attending college, then we should be able to continue to produce talented, knowledgeable and intelligent college graduates. It is without question that the issue and argument on how to best address affordable higher education will likely continue for the foreseeable future. This problem has proven to be a difficult and trying dilemma to solve. Affordable education should consist of federal loans. Pell grants should be expanded because tuition has risen so consistently (Kuttner, 2008)

These are all excellent suggestions and ideas, but more research and studies will likely be needed before viable, relevant and feasible potential solutions can be fully understood and vetted. The future of our colleges and universities as we know them are at stake. However, given this fact, the cost of college continues to increase. The problem and data show that the rising cost of higher education cost is not much different at for-profit colleges. An example of these types of institutions includes the University of Phoenix and Strayer University. There is a major difference in price when you compare a for-profit, and a state ran university. For reasons that are

unclear, the higher tuition at a for-profit university draw some poor and lower-income individuals to their institutions (Cellini, 2012).

Most likely it could be determined that the for-profit higher education arena could benefit from more regulations and tougher rules related to their financial aid programs. Many times, students do not graduate and some of the ones that do have difficulty finding appropriate and desirable employment. This is because there are few internship programs and student employment placement program services associated with for-profit college system platforms.

The global economy is difficult and demanding from a skill base perspective. Some older Americans believe that they will be unable to located suitable employed because of their lack of technological training Adult education has become a major component of the overall college curriculum and strategy. Colleges all across this country are competing for the adult student market. Generally, adult's financial budgets are significantly challenging. Therefore, any rise in tuition rates is considerably noticed and often cause the adult learner to stop attending school or to take a semester or two off from school due to financial concerns and demands(Wang, Craton, 2013).

Whether an individual is a traditional adult student learner or online learner, the problem of student debt related to higher tuition cost is troubling and a life-impacting issue. For our nation to thrive, we need people with drive and dynamic 21st century technical and educational skills so that America can lead the world in terms of positive change and innovation. For many people, the American dream starts with obtaining a four-year college degree. Many families plan and save so that they can send their children to college. The problem is, however, are the savings enough in general, and are they saving enough to keep up with the rapidly changing cost structure and model that colleges are presenting students? Fixing this issue will probably never

seem trivial or easy. A significant amount of thought and strategic planning is needed to find solutions that help make college affordable for all who want to attend and to further their learning objectives.

The college experience must be made more affordable for all Americans. Tax-deferred college saving plans have become more prevalent because of the rising tuition rates across our country. In addition, prepaid tuition plans are being used as well to combat the escalating tuition amounts (Baldwin, McCracken, 2013).

Low-income student graduation rates

Lower social, economic class individuals have a different experience paying for funding their college endeavors. Conley and Hamlin views on this issue are that African Americans and poor people negatively affected by lower retention rates (Conley and Hamlin, 2009) Low-income student often struggle to pay for tuition, books, food, and transportation in college. The issue though is not all experts agree with this assumption. Hoxby and Avery believe that Statistics show that both lower-income students and higher income students enroll in college at a similar rate. (Hoxby and Avery 2013)

Middle-income student graduation rates

In many ways, middle-class families' struggles are similar to poor and lower class individuals. Leonhardt argues that "middle-income students are an ever-rarer breed at universities over the last generation" (p26). Colleges and universities must be proactive in their efforts to recruit, retain and ultimately graduate middle-income students. Students with unique financial concern often need more coaching and possibly encouragement to complete their college objectives. Colleges are using analytics to gain knowledge and insight into the middle-

class college student financial world. According to Leonhardt "we combined data on enrollment and tuition costs to measure how hard each college is trying to attract and graduate middle-class students" (P3). Knowledge college needs to use data to solve their most pressing issue related to their middle-class students. The issue is colleges have to reach out to middle-class students. According to Leonhardt "at many colleges, poor and truly, middle-class students remain a distinct minority. Colleges for their part say that they want to enroll more of these middle-income students. However, only some colleges have followed up these words with actions" (P3). The point the author is conveying is that colleges must put strategic plans together that include retaining and graduate students from a middle-class background.

Upper-class student graduation rates

Individuals with more financial resources tend to fair better in college than students with financial needs. Family income and family net worth play a vital role in this equation. Wealth accumulation is a major indicator of whether a student will graduate from college (Zhan 2014). The author suggests that if your family has financial power, then you are likely to continue through college and eventually finish your journey by graduating. It is evident that the rich have an advantage over the poor as it relates to college progression. Children from low economic backgrounds generally have problems related to educational college attainment (McPherson, 2015).

Graduation and Retention Rates

This part of the literature review will provide theoretical data and information about student graduation and retention rates. Graduating from college is perhaps one of the most significant investments an individual can make in a lifetime (Ozdagli, Trachter 2014). The most

likely reason for this scenario is deeply rooted in the cost model that attending college represents. One would believe that the cost of college tuition would begin to rein in at some point and more mirror the rate of inflation in the United States. However, at this point, there seems to be no evidence or data to support this argument at this point. Perhaps one of the primary reasons that this issue has not seen much change lately is because no one person or group is genuinely championing this cause. It seems that the status quo is just to keep doing nothing and allow the college tuition rates and personal debt profiles of students to continue to climb. Action needs to be taken immediately, and strategies need to be put in place that will begin to slow the tuition rate increase down. The main and desired goal should be to make college financially accessible to everyone who has a desire and ability to attend college (Ozdagli, Trachter 2014).

The correct way to make college both more accessible and affordable has not been established to date. In this century there has been a major focus on college graduation and retention rates. Governmental officials and college leaders all seem to be concerned about college graduation and retention rates (Titus, 2006). More research and studies must be done so that we can unequivocally say that the cost of attending college is affecting a school's ability to retain a student and ultimately graduate that student. The fact of the matter is 58 percent of student's graduate from college within a six-year time frame (Turner, Thompson, 2014). College is only a good and viable investment if a student graduates. Remember, student loan debt is likely to be a part of an individual's life for several decades. Also, the cost to attend a four-year institution continues to rise, and this is in a meaningful and alarming way.

While a 58% graduation rate may sound acceptable, it is not. Remember, this means that 42% of our college students are not graduating in a six-year period. Many of them are not completing the journey because the tuition rates are going up much too fast. Therefore, this

means when we look at the 58% graduation rate 5 or 10 years from now it is likely to be lower due to the cost variables associated with obtaining a four-year degree.

Completing a four-year degree requires perseverance and outright determination. The concern is why have educational completion rates in this nation peaked? This may be because of the salary that college graduation now earn (Bowen, Chingos, McPherson, 2009). What the authors are identifying and critiquing is whether or not completing a college degree makes good and viable economic sense. With the way college tuition is rising so quickly, many students are contemplating if college is worth taking on substantial debt. The issue is that even if a college student borrows money and takes on debt, then they are likely to have this significant debt for many years, much like an individual would have a mortgage payment for the purchase of a home. Don't misunderstand; financial aid does have its proper place in higher education. Financial aid has been around for many years. The Morrill Act of 1862 established land grants for the respected states of this nation. Even today the trend of helping lower-income students go to college continues. Federal financial support has even moved more toward middle-income students (Kelly, Goldrick-Rab 2014). Remember, however, the majority of this student aid is in the form of loans, and the students must pay the loans back with interest over time. This means that students that take out student loans will be paying this money back most likely for many years. This makes the overall monetary effect even more expensive when addressing the total amount an individual could pay for earning a college education. Therefore, perhaps students need to look at community colleges. Often a college student can do their first two years at a junior college which is much less expensive. Another advantage to a two-year college other than cost containment is that students can transfer as a junior to a traditional four-year institution. This

could cut the total cost for students significantly and could perhaps boost graduation rates for individuals who are pursuing a four-year college degree.

Many people believe that academic expectations have declined (Ravitch's 2013). Schools across this nation cannot accept this standpoint as the norm. Simply put, students that are accepted and enter college must be ready for the rigorous study platform on day one, or they risk the opportunity of not graduating. Such students who do not graduate and receive a degree are then faced with having accumulated an enormous amount of student debt related to student loans that may have financed their higher education endeavors. The statistics of individuals not completing college is alarming, and many times it is because tuition rates continue to proceed upward. The better that colleges and universities are at delivering a solid education, the more likely America is to succeed in today's ever-changing global economic climate. At the end of the day, when colleges succeed at educating our students at a reasonable cost, then we all succeed as a nation.

College data shows that 44 percent of students who start college never finish (Chediak, 2015). The students that do not graduate are at serious risk of financial difficulty throughout their life. The college debt is real and serious. Many believe that the student debt phenomenon is affecting our nation economically.

The State of Tennessee recently published a newspaper article related to college graduation rates in the "Room to Grow" Report. The issue remains that less 45 percent college student in Tennessee graduate. The rate for minorities is, even more, challenge only about 5 percent of African American students to graduate from 2-year colleges on time. At public universities and the University of Tennessee system, less than 20 percent of black students graduated with three years" (2016, p.16A). These statistics seem troubling, and some view them

as outright alarming. The future of our nation, families, and local communities are about a society that must produce an educated citizenry that can compete in the diverse and ever-evolving 21st global economy. Many of these students are not graduating because the incremental cost that is associated with attending college. Without argument and question, most individuals would agree that something has to be done to rein in the cost of obtaining access to higher education. America's citizens do not want to become a society where only wealthy families can afford to send their family member(s) to college. America needs people with higher education for the country to strive and be competitive and knowledgeable in the workforce. We need individuals who have been trained at colleges and universities to lead the way in our quest to grow our country's economy and gross domestic product. All of this starts with making college affordable for everyone who has a desire to attend and complete college.

Over the past decade and a half colleges in America have been to focus on the academic issue (Conner, Rabousky, 2011). Students are not doing well in college, and many do not get a degree, so this means that college debt numbers increase however the graduation rates do not increase in accord with the student debt portfolios. Higher tuition cost affects the economy of this nation (Hogan, Brant, Day, 2013). Lawmakers and school administrators must become more cognizant of this issue so that viable and feasible solutions can be established and realized.

Over the past decade, women enrollment rates at colleges have increased (Adebayo, 2008). This is indeed a great occurrence, but the rising cost of attending college could begin to negatively affect college graduation and attendance rates for a woman in America. College leaders say that they must continue to raise tuition to stay competitive and relevant. Administrators site college infrastructure, staff and other expenses (e.g., development and maintenance of structural buildings, administrative staff, educator cost, recruiting professionals,

safety and security of students, etc.) cost continue to escalate consistent with tuition cost. During the past ten years' online education has increased. Millions of students now take college courses online (Moloney, Oakley, 2010). It is still up for much debate as to whether the role of online education will have in the future of tuition rates and the overall graduation rates.

Older adult students are also concerned about how quickly tuition rates are increasing. Individuals whom complete college tend to have more opportunity than a non-college graduate (Wuestewald, 2016). Obtaining a four-year degree generally will lead to better career opportunities and a higher standard of living. Many adults are moving toward the virtual classroom by enrolling in and taking online college courses.

Many researchers are now studying college retention rates. Variables such as economic status play a role in an individual finishing a college degree program (KO, 2005). We all know that college is an investment that is likely to produce financial fruit throughout an individual's career, but it still has to be an affordable proposition for attending students.

Summary

The budgets for colleges and universities are evolving and seemingly ever-changing. School presidents and chief financial officers are tasked with the assignment of balancing the school budgets every day. The research from this chapter demonstrates that tuition rates for colleges and universities are increasing steadily from year to year. Despite the rising cost of tuition growth, students are not receiving any more educational value for the additional tuition rate escalation that is being realized every school year. The growth in tuition cost is causing student debt profiles to increase. According to the literature, many experts believe some of our economic woes as a nation are related to the student loan crisis. For many minority students,

these tuition increases affect them significantly more from a financial perspective, and often student loans keep individuals in decades of debt for many years after they have graduated or stop attending college.

Without question, the road to a better and more prosperous life relies on the ability to obtain a college diploma. However, the issue is many students and individuals just cannot pay for college because it has become unaffordable and just too expensive. The research demonstrates that some students are not graduating because they are simply running out of ways to pay for their college tuition. This happens at a time when colleges are working diligently on increasing their enrollment numbers and retention rates. Financial aid is an option for many students, but much of this aid is in the form of loans that must be repaid with costly interest over time. It is time for our government officials to step up and begin to debate and develop viable solutions that will help bring the cost of college down to a more reasonable level. Our nation needs people who have the skills and knowledge that can only be gained by attending college. This can only occur when our government leaders and citizens ensure that students can attend these colleges and universities at a cost that is affordable and economically priced.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Description of Research

This study will review and analyze the relationship of rising student debt levels that are derived from consistently escalating higher college tuition and how this affects the overall student retention and graduation rates. This research project will gather information and data that will answer the following two research questions:

1. What is the perception of HBCU in Nashville, TN regarding the rising cost of college tuition and student retention rates?
2. What is the perception of HBCU in Nashville, TN regarding the rising cost of college tuition and the six-year graduation rates?

Survey Process

The students were selected at random as they entered the student union building of the campus. Half of the students selected were male, and half were female. The selection process was done in an alternate manner. The purposes of this brief survey are to gather perspectives of a broad audience, inform the content of the interviews, and assist in the selection of participants for the semi-structured interviews. The interview questions emerged from the research and then were vetted by a professor to ensure validity and a few students to ensure reliability. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey. The last question on the survey will ask the students if they are willing to volunteer for the semi-structured interview.

Interview Process

The survey data will include demographic data as well as the participant perspective. Three males and three females were selected at random. When the students finished the survey, they were asked to participate in the structured interview format. This was done by choosing a male student and then a female student in an alternate fashion until six students had been selected. These six students were from various backgrounds, ethnicities, financial situations, and stages in college. These students were selected randomly to provide a range of perspectives. The interview questions will come from both the review of the literature as well as being informed by the survey data. It will be a semi-structured interview to leave flexibility for the students to be able to tell us their stories. See Appendix B for a copy of the survey.

Focus Group Process

The themes that emerge from the analysis of the interview data will inform the content of the focus group discussions. The six students from the interviews will be invited to the focus group. The students gathered in the school library. The researcher asked the questions while the students answered. This was an open format where all students responded and were active in the process. The themes that emerged from the interviews will be shared with the participants. They will ask to respond to each of the themes. In this way, the focus group will serve as a member check as well as offering the participants a chance to clarify or help us better understand their story.

Selections of Research Participants

The surveys were administered randomly to one hundred fifty students in the student union building. All students agreed to be interviewed. Three males and three female students

were selected at random for the structured face to face interview format. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form, and they agreed to sign the form and be a participant in the research study. These individuals also participated in a focus group conversation. The structured face to face individual interviews and the focus group took place in the library at the school's campus.

Coding Process

The researcher handed the students the surveys face to face. The students filled the surveys out on site, and the researcher collected all surveys. The researcher will use open coding to review and analyze the data that was obtained from the structured interview process. The researcher will read and cycle through the data many times so that categories can be confirmed and established. These categories were used to recognize themes throughout the interview process. These themes were put into piles and sorted separately based on the labeled category. The researcher used a table to lay out all the data into their respective categories. The researcher took visual pictures of the coding process. As patterns and themes are identified from the structured interview process, a peer debriefer will be consulted so that the themes for the data that were found can be truly vetted by the peer debriefer. The researcher ensured themes could be directly linked back to the original raw data by reviewing the text and recording repeatedly. This provided final conceptualization and validity. Lastly, the researcher will use focus group data to closely examine the information to the themes that were identified from the structured interviews. A clear and deep understanding was interpreted from the themes and answers from the direct interview quotes.

The researcher collected survey data from one hundred and fifty students. One hundred and fifty students were given a survey so that their views could be recognized in this study. This

qualitative study also included face to face interviews with six students at an Urban HBCU located in Nashville Tennessee. The purpose of the interviews was to collect the student's viewpoints, perceptions and thoughts pertaining to the rising cost of college tuition as it directly relates to the six-year graduation and retention rates.

The researcher also convened a focus group of the six interviewees. This focus group served as a member check and strengthened the overall finding of the study. This chapter will present the finding of the study. The findings were gathered and analyzed. The central purpose was to provide a conceptual framework for the study results.

The mission of this study is to determine the student's reaction and responses to the questions, to which this research project is established. The results of the data will be outlined and discussed in this chapter. Student interview questions and responses as well as a survey data and focus group data will be used to establish the finding in the study. Open coding was used to identify keywords, phrases, repeated words and voice tones of the structured student interviews. The researcher took notes from the focus group and listened to the recordings five times. The researcher listened to the recording repeatedly to identify patterns, themes of agreement or disagreement and overall perceptions. The researcher paid close attention and noted key language and facial expresses during both the student interviews and the focus group. The research survey tools were used to build a consensus and provide triangulation to the research by providing three data sources.

The researcher used an open coding process. The process consisted of taking each question and putting the answer into appropriate groups or piles. For example, each question related to tuition increases were put in a pile, and the answers findings were recorded. This process was followed for the five major categories. The categories are tuition increases, debt

levels, graduation rates, retention rates, and college value. The survey finding section outlines the results and outlines the results of this coding process.

Member Check

The researcher will use member checking to establish and improve both credibility and validity. Member checking will allow the study's accuracy to increase. Member checking provides a level of trustworthiness and research integrity (Hays and Wood 2011). Member checking ensures each answer that the participant gives has been fully vetted, understood and documented by the researcher. The reliability of the study will be much more dependable and consistent. While the interview is in the process, the researcher will summarize and verify the correct comments and statements. In addition, the researcher will develop a field report to document the participant's intentions and also for participant observation. Furthermore, a focus group will be convened so that additional data and information can be collected and analyzed. The focus group will help strengthen the credibility of this study by providing an additional member checks. Also, a key staff member from the university financial aid office will be interviewed to see if the study participant stories are relevant and similar to what the financial aid representative has been observing.

Peer Debriefing

The researcher has selected a seasoned researcher as a peer debriefer. A peer debrief allows the researcher to discuss with them the analyses of the data and the research findings Peterson, Goodman, Keller, McCauley (2004). This individual is a tenured epidemiologist with over 30 plus years of experience with qualitative studies. The peer debriefer has a Ph.D. in epidemiology and will provide keen insight into the methodology and creditability of this study.

The peer debriefer will help the study by giving support and feedback on vital components of the study. The peer debriefer asks the tough questions and advises the researcher as well as provides mentorship.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to conclude if the rising cost of student college tuition at an Urban HBCU was negatively affecting six-year graduation and retention rates. The following chapter presents the findings of the survey, focus groups, and individual interviews.

Survey Findings

General results from the survey were as follows listed in Table 1 below:

Key Statements	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Disagree
1. There has been too many tuition increases while I have been enrolled in school.	70%	12%	4%	14%	0%
2. The tuition increases have been responsible in terms of amount.	20%	46%	2%	22%	10%
3. I expect to finish my degree within six years of my first semester.	86%	4%	0%	10%	0%
4. I have no concerns with borrowing money to attend college.	24%	22%	2%	30%	22%
5. I understand why higher education schools must raise tuition rates.	38%	22%	0%	20%	20%
6. Much of my professional success in life depends on my ability to pay for and finish college.	12%	38%	4%	14%	32%
7. A college degree has become too expensive.	72%	4%	2%	20%	2%
8. I work to be able to pay for some or all of my college tuition.	26%	60%	0%	0%	14%
9. I fully expect tuition rates to continue to increase.	78%	6%	2%	10%	4%
10. There are enough ways to help an individual afford college (e.g., loans, scholarships, work-study, etc.).	14%	22%	4%	16%	44%
11. My student debt level is manageable.	76%	2%	0%	12%	10%
12. I plan to borrow money by taking student loans in order to finish college.	76%	14%	0%	0%	10%
13. I may not be able to finish college due to tuition increases.	0%	80%	0%	4%	16%
14. I may not be able to finish college because my student debt is too great.	0%	86%	0%	4%	10%
15. College is still a great value despite tuition increases and total cost.	34%	28%	0%	22%	16%

There were one hundred fifty students that participated in the survey. The survey results were conclusive and convincing. The questions that stand out and bring clarity and credibility to the finding are: There have been too many tuition increases while I have been enrolled in school produce a 92 percent strongly agree or agree on a response. The statement: I expect to finish my degree within six years of my first semester, produced a 96 percent strongly agree or agree on the answer. The statement: my student debt level is manageably produced an 86 percent agree or strongly agree on the answer. One of the key survey statement: I may not be able to finish college because my student debt is too great to produce a 96 disagree or strongly disagree answer. The other major key statement: I may not be able to finish college due to tuition increases produce a 96 disagree or strongly disagree answer. This survey, based on the students' answers, provides the evidence that despite tuition consistently rising students still believe that they can remain in school until they graduate.

Interview Findings

The following trends were determined using the open coding process listed in Table 2 below:

Major Categories	Key Concepts
Tuition Increases	Higher school fees, food cost, total cost of attendance
Debt Levels	Student loans, work study scholarship
Graduation Rates	Six-year graduation
Retention Rates	Continuance in college
College Value	Improve standard of living, the ability to earn a better wage

These trends were identified partially by the data from the interviews listed in Table 3 on the next page:

Table 3

Key Statements	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Disagree
1. There has been too many tuition increases while I have been enrolled in school.	70%	12%	4%	14%	0%
2. The tuition increases have been responsible in terms of amount.	20%	46%	2%	22%	10%
3. I expect to finish my degree within six years of my first semester.	86%	4%	0%	10%	0%
4. I have no concerns with borrowing money to attend college.	24%	22%	2%	30%	22%
5. I understand why higher education schools must raise tuition rates.	38%	22%	0%	20%	20%
6. Much of my professional success in life depends on my ability to pay for and finish college.	12%	38%	4%	14%	32%
7. A college degree has become too expensive.	72%	4%	2%	20%	2%
8. I work to be able to pay for some or all of my college tuition.	26%	60%	0%	0%	14%
9. I fully expect tuition rates to continue to increase.	78%	6%	2%	10%	4%
10. There are enough ways to help an individual afford college (e.g., loans, scholarships, work-study, etc.).	14%	22%	4%	16%	44%
11. My student debt level is manageable.	76%	2%	0%	12%	10%
12. I plan to borrow money by taking student loans in order to finish college.	76%	14%	0%	0%	10%
13. I may not be able to finish college due to tuition increases.	0%	80%	0%	4%	16%
14. I may not be able to finish college because my student debt is too great.	0%	86%	0%	4%	10%
15. College is still a great value despite tuition increases and total cost.	34%	28%	0%	22%	16%

The above data provided information to identify trends in the student’s answers.

Tuition Increases

The students in the interview process all seem to have some level of concern for the rising cost of student tuition. When asked the question, do you feel there have been too many increases while you have been enrolled in college, please explain? The researcher noticed and documented that all six student interview participants had a look of concern on the face. There were noticeable body movement and sense of uneasiness, from the interview pool. According to participant 1, “I

am an out of state student, so tuition jumped five thousand last year.” According to participant two “The tuition was only \$8,000 this semester, so I can not complain at all.”

Participant 3 stated, “I cannot really complain because of only a \$1,000 increase,”. Participant number three did not have a major increase because they were an in-state student. Participant number four stated “A majority of the time my tuition remains the same.” The theme will clear that the tuition increases affected out of state students more than in state. The positive occurrence was that in-state students had much of the student tuition paid for by the state and the out of state students were forced to pay the higher increase amount. One important thing to note is that all six interviewees were focused and passionate about the topic of tuition increases. All of the students that were interviewed experienced across the board tuition increases during their college journey, but the in-state students fared much better because they did not have the increases associated with out of state student fees.

Student debt levels

This was a topic that all six participants had some unease and apprehensions about. The student interviewee’s viewpoint was that the debt is an issue and does bring about some level of anxiety. All students have had some level of student debt to deal with during their college journey. The researcher asked the question, do you have concerns about borrowing money to attend college, please explain? According to participant number two “, I know that borrowing money can have a long-term effect on life.”

Participant 4 states that “the majority of the time I have a scholarship or taken out a loan, but I really do not have to borrow much money.” The interviewees were indeed concerned and troubled about student debt, but overall, they felt if they could get the debt manageable or as low

as possible then this was indeed a plus. According to participant interviewee number five “It should not be necessary to borrow money to attend college.” Without question, the finding shows a level of concern for all participants pertaining to borrowing money to attend college. The students that were in-state had to borrow less money for school and thus were not as concerned as the students who had to pay out of state fees. The out of state students ended up borrowing on average more money per semester than the in-state students. Thus the out of state students debt ratios were higher than the in-state students.

Graduation

This portion of the interview was extremely one-sided, and all face to face interview participants believe overwhelmingly that they all would finish college within six years. This was despite the tuition increases in the past, and their student debt level. The participants speak boldly and with clarity that they all would finish college within a six-year time frame. Their facial expressions, and word choices all displayed a strong level of conviction and certainty. According to participant two “Yes, I expect to finish in four years” she said with a smile. When asked the question, do you think you will not be able to finish college due to tuition increases, 100 percent of the students stated no. In addition, all the students that were interviewed smiled and gave the researcher eye contact. This was convincing evidence that all the student interviewees believed that they would be able to finish college despite the tuition increases.

Retention

The findings related to student retention were convincing. All students that were interviewed plan to stay in college until they finish. They all definitely recognize that tuition has risen in the past and will likely rise in the future, but this is not a major factor from a retention standpoint.

They all expressed the desire to stay in school until they complete their respected programs. When asked the question, do you expect to finish your degree within six years of your first semester, 100 percent of the students said yes, all while smiling. Participant 5 states that “tuition will not be the reason that I do not finish college. I will stay in school each semester until I finish.” The data shows that the students were confident that retention was not an issue.

College Value

According to participant number 6 “seems like more people are saying they cannot afford to go to college.” The researcher discovered that all six participants were concerned and alarmed at how fast college tuition has increased. Despite student loan debt levels, they all seem to think college was important and should help them in their professional life. The researcher noticed that all of them were convinced and certain that attending and graduating from college was the right choice that they made despite the challenges that were outlined in this study. When asked the question, do you feel that college is still a great value despite tuition increases and total cost, 83.30 percent of the students said yes and only 16.70 percent of the students had the answer as no. It was clear from the research data that students feel college is still a great value despite the tuition increases and total cost continuing to rise.

Table 4

Individual Student Interviews	Yes	No
1. Do you feel there has been too many tuition increases while you have been enrolled in school? (Please explain)	83.30%	16.70%
2. Do you think the tuition increases have been responsible in terms of amount? (Please explain)	16.70%	83.30%
3. Do you expect to finish your degree within six years of your first semester? (Please explain)	100.00%	0.00%
4. Do you have concerns with borrowing money to attend college? (Please explain)	33.30%	66.70%
5. Do you understand why higher education schools must raise tuition rates? (Please explain)	50.00%	50.00%
6. Do you feel that professional success in life depends on your ability to pay for and finish college? (Please explain)	33.30%	66.70%
7. Do you think a college degree has become too expensive? (Please explain)	83.30%	16.70%
8. Have you had to work to pay for some or all of your college tuition? (Please explain)	50.00%	50.00%
9. Do you expect tuition rates to continue to increase? (Please explain)	66.70%	33.30%
10. Do you feel there are enough ways to help an individual afford college (e.g., loans, scholarships, work-study, etc.)? (Please explain)	16.70%	83.30%
11. Do you believe your student debt level is manageable? (Please explain)	83.30%	16.70%
12. Do you plan to take out student loans in order to finish college? (Please explain)	83.30%	16.70%
13. Do you think you will not be able to finish college due to tuition increases? (Please explain)	100.00%	0.00%
14. Do you think you may not be able to finish college because your student debt is too great? (Please explain)	16.70%	83.30%
15. Do you feel that college is still a great value despite tuition increases and total cost? (Please explain)	83.30%	16.70%

Table 5

Individual Student Interviews Body Language Chart	Smile	Frown	Head Nod/ Agreement	Head Shake/ Disagreement	Eye Contact
1. Do you feel there has been too many tuition increases while you have been enrolled in school? (Please explain)	83.30%	16.70%	83.30%	16.70%	100.00%
2. Do you think the tuition increases have been responsible in terms of amount? (Please explain)	16.70%	83.30%	16.70%	83.30%	100.00%
3. Do you expect to finish your degree within six years of your first semester? (Please explain)	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%
4. Do you have concerns with borrowing money to attend college? (Please explain)	33.30%	67.70%	33.30%	67.70%	100.00%
5. Do you understand why higher education schools must raise tuition rates? (Please explain)	50.00%	50.00%	50.00%	50.00%	100.00%
6. Do you feel that professional success in life depends on your ability to pay for and finish college? (Please explain)	33.30%	66.70%	33.30%	66.70%	100.00%
7. Do you think a college degree has become too expensive? (Please explain)	83.30%	16.70%	83.30%	16.70%	100.00%
8. Have you had to work to pay for some or all of your college tuition? (Please explain)	50.00%	50.00%	50.00%	50.00%	100.00%
9. Do you expect tuition rates to continue to increase? (Please explain)	67.70%	33.30%	67.70%	33.30%	100.00%
10. Do you feel there are enough ways to help an individual afford college (e.g., loans, scholarships, work-study, etc.)? (Please explain)	16.70%	83.30%	16.70%	83.30%	100.00%
11. Do you believe your student debt level is manageable? (Please explain)	83.30%	16.70%	83.30%	16.70%	100.00%
12. Do you plan to take out student loans in order to finish college? (Please explain)	83.30%	16.70%	83.30%	16.70%	100.00%
13. Do you think you will not be able to finish college due to tuition increases? (Please explain)	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%
14. Do you think you may not be able to finish college because your student debt is too great? (Please explain)	16.70%	83.30%	16.70%	83.30%	100.00%
15. Do you feel that college is still a great value despite tuition increases and total cost? (Please explain)	83.30%	16.70%	83.30%	16.70%	100.00%

Focus Group

The purpose of the focus group was to provide member checking to the study. This portion of the study offered credibility to the student statements and comments. The focus group allowed study participants to speak honestly, freely and provide meaningful dialogue concerning the study's questions. Participants appeared to give honest and heartfelt answers. Students discussed how they were all concerned about how tuition increases had escalated, but as a group, they felt that college was still a good value and investment into an individual's future. All the students were concerned about how the school was allocating the tuition increases. For example, the students gave in-depth thoughts pertaining to a dorm that had been out of hot water for several months. The group all had a look of frustration, sadness, and concern as they discussed the dorm's hot water situation. In addition, participant 3 stated, "I have a lot of friends that are trying to figure out ways to pay for school." Participant 6 stated "at the end of the day we are not worried about borrowing money for school." Participant 2 stated, "I am going to finish school on time despite student debt." Participant 1 stated, "I feel college is a good value regardless of tuition prices because it is a life-changing experience." In total, the focus group confirmed the finding of the individual's structured interviews and provided clear evidence to support the answers from the face to face interviews.

Conclusion

As the literature review demonstrates, college tuition costs continue to escalate at most colleges and universities in our nation. The fact is students are forced to pay more money to attend a college or university each and every year. This study seeks to identify if these rising tuition rates are affecting graduation and retention rates. The study consists one hundred fifty person survey from students, a student focus group of six, and face to face interviews with six students. The

researcher believes based on the information from the study that this may draw a conclusion that graduation and retention rates have been unaffected by tuition increases.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

At the beginning of this study, it was my perception that the rising cost of tuition was negatively impacting graduation and retention rates. However, the study's perception is that there was no effect and showed that despite tuition rates consistently climbing, there was no effect on graduation or retention rates. The structured survey, interviews, and the focus group all showed that students continue to be unaffected by the tuition increases. The questions allowed the researcher to collect the data that was needed to reach a strong conclusion.

Summary

The research begins in Chapter One by presenting the background of study and defining the Statement of the Problem. The purpose of the study was explained, and the researcher provided the theoretical lens and a rationale for why this study was being done. The research questions were also a part of chapter one as well. Chapter Two gave a thorough review of the literature. The literature review discussed how graduation rates and retention rates were being affected by student tuition increases. The literature review also showed how student debt levels had risen due to tuition increases. In Chapter Three, the researcher discussed and outlined how the research methodology would work. This included how the overall methodology would work and included the overall methodology as well as data collection and coding methods work.

The findings of the study were outlined and presented in Chapter Four. The survey provided data from one hundred fifty students. The six structured interviews provided a more in-depth answer to the topics related to how tuition increases were effecting graduation and retention rates. The focus group provided even more in-depth themes on how tuition increases were affecting graduation and retention rates.

Overall Findings

Based on the survey data, individual interviews, and focus group, the researcher has concluded that there is not a concern about rising costs at this HBCU as was originally was asked by the research question. Students found ample opportunities for financial aid and loans to help with costs of attending this university.

In addition, based on the survey data, individual interviews, and focus group, the researcher has concluded that there is not a concern about the six-year graduation rate at this HBCU as was originally was asked by the research question. Students felt there were other factors that contributed to the graduation rates, not necessarily cost.

Need for future studies

The recommendation is for more studies to be done on this topic. More research needs to be done. For example, a qualitative look at all student loan data and compile the data by college would be useful. This includes surveying more students at multiple colleges. The need for more studies would allow more data to be reviewed and analyzed. More HBCU's need to be included in these studies because this would give the researcher more data to critique. The more students that are interviewed increases the opportunity to strengthen the research data and findings. In addition, more face to face interviews with students needs to take place. The researcher believes

that more focus groups on the national level need to be established so that more insight and data can be collected and analyzed. An affordability study would be useful. An online survey tool would allow for more students to participate in the study and more time to complete the survey information.

Concluding Statement

College tuition costs continue to rise. Students across this nation are racking up more student loan debt than at any time in our nation's history. Something must be done. Some people believe tuition costs and student loan debt is a national crisis. This is an issue that the researcher is passionate about. The researcher plans to continue to study this phenomenon. The research is vitally important because students are still continuing to attend college despite tuition increasing. Further studies should be done over multiple years to identify if there are any trends or evidence over time that the rising cost of tuition is affecting graduation and retention rates. This is indeed a complex issue that probably needs government assistance to solve the problem. The people in this country are resilient and will work on solutions that will allow our students to continue to be able to attend college.

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Appendix A

Consent Form

Title of project: _____

Name of researcher: _____

I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary and I can withdraw for any reason at any time. I understand that my identity will not be revealed and that the data in the data results will only be used for this research study. I agree to participate in this study.

Sign: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B

Survey instrument

College Student Participant Survey

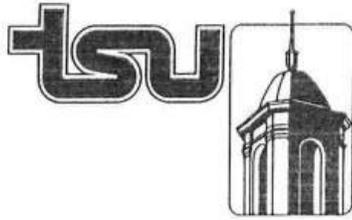
Check answers that reflect your views

Key Statements	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Disagree
1. There have been too many tuition increases while I have been enrolled in school.					
2. The tuition increases have been responsible in terms of amount.					
3. I expect to finish my degree within six years of my first semester.					
4. I have no concerns about borrowing money to attend college.					
5. I understand why higher education schools must raise tuition rates.					
6. Much of my professional success in life depends on my ability to pay for and finish college.					
7. A college degree has become too expensive.					
8. I work to be able to pay for some or all of my college tuition.					
9. I fully expect tuition rates to continue to increase.					

10. There are enough ways to help an individual afford college (e.g., loans, scholarships, work-study, etc.).					
11. My student debt level is manageable.					
12. I plan to borrow money by taking student loans in order to finish college.					
13. I may not be able to finish college due to tuition increases.					
14. I may not be able to finish college because my student debt is too great.					
15. College is still a great value despite tuition increases and total cost.					

Appendix C

Approval Letter



Student Activities
Tennessee State University
Campus Box 9548
3500 John A. Merritt Blvd.
Nashville, TN 37209-1561
Office: (615) 963-5653/5085
FAX: (615) 963-5051

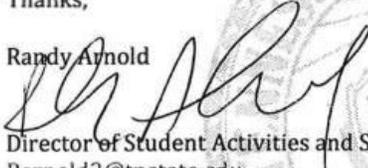
February 1, 2017

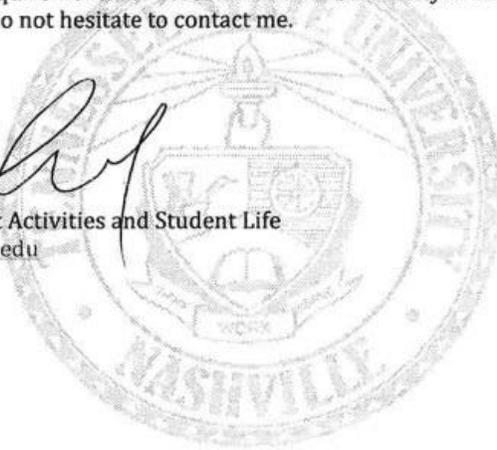
To Whom It May Concern:

Tennessee State University gives Ronald Thompson III permission to conduct dissertation research and gather survey information for the purpose of completing the dissertation requirements for Carson Newman University. If anyone has any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thanks,

Randy Arnold

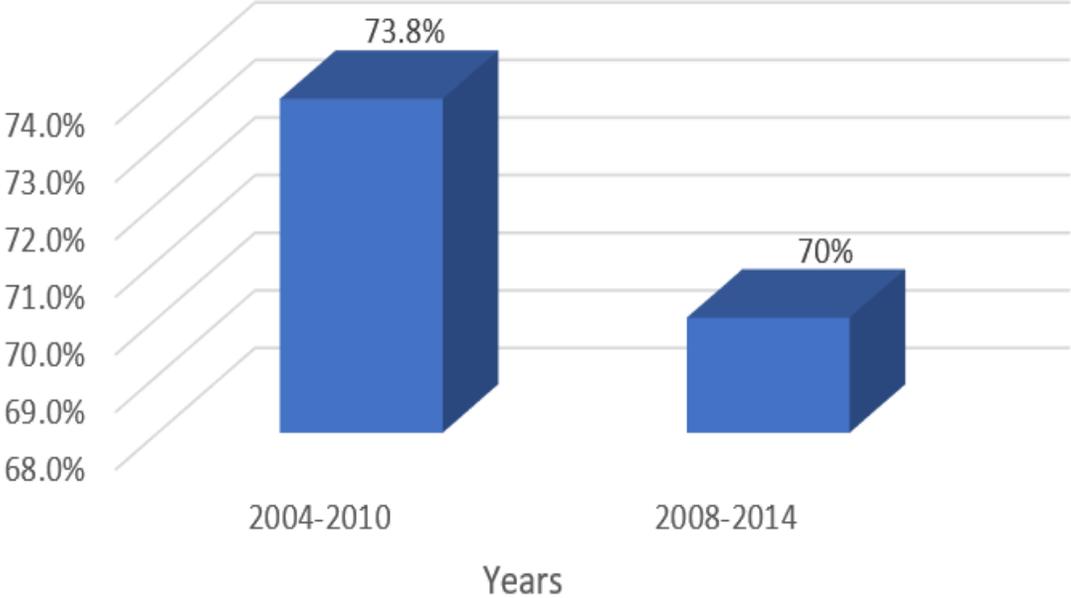

Director of Student Activities and Student Life
Rarnold2@tnstate.edu
615.963.5119



Appendix D

Visual Aid for Tennessee State University Retention Rate

Tennessee State University Retention Rate

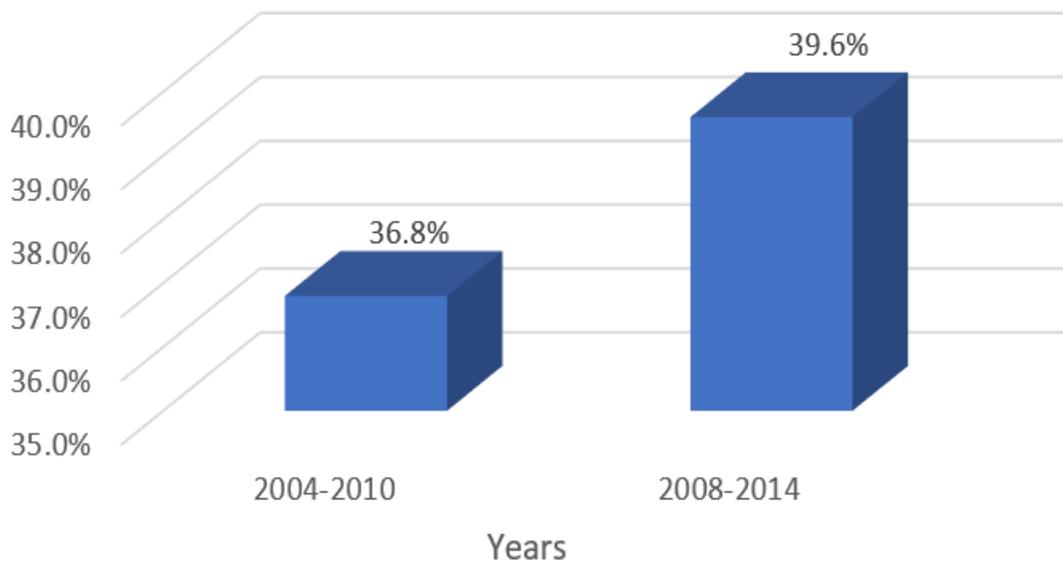


■ Source: Tennessee Board of Regents

Appendix E

Visual Aid for mean Tennessee State University six-year graduation rates

Tennessee State University Six Year Graduation Rate



■ Source: Tennessee Board of Regents

Appendix F

Tennessee State University Mean Tuition Rates

Tennessee State University Mean Tuition Rate Per Years

