Since the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision of 1954, profound changes have occurred in patterns of college attendance among black Americans. Researchers report increases in the number of black students in higher education and the shift of black students from traditional black colleges to predominantly white colleges (Fleming, 1984, Mingle, 1981, Jaynes and Williams, 1989). Black students on white campuses were a rare sight until the late 1960s (Fleming 1984; Mingle, 1981; Jaynes and Williams, 1989). Black college enrollment peaked by the late 1970s with almost 60 percent of black students enrolled in predominantly white colleges (Mingle, 1981). The enrollments of African American students at the vast majority of our nation’s highest-ranked colleges and universities have shown significant improvements over the past quarter-century (JBHE, 2006). Recent statistics show that although growth has occurred in the graduation rate of African American students (42%), they still graduate at a lower rate than white counterparts (62%). Another astounding factor is that African American athletes graduate at a rate well below that of whites (Wieberg, 2006).

Allen (1992) examined aspects of black students’ lives on predominantly white campuses and concluded that, though much is made of real and implied differences between black students at black schools and those at white campuses, those comparisons are usually based more on conjecture than fact. Because of this, further research is needed to identify what factors create satisfactory or non-satisfactory environments that influence the potential graduation of African American students.

Nettles, Gosman, Thoeny and Dandridge (1986) reported a relevant finding that student/environment fit was essential for academic success. This student/environment fit has positive results on students’ achievement. Although students need to feel comfortable in their environment, both academically and socially, Patton (2006) reports that African American students face challenges at predominantly white institutions. African American students attending predominantly white institutions endure challenges related to college adjustments.

A review of statistical data suggests that a major group of African American students that graduate far under the number of their counterparts is that of African American athletes. Based on the literature, this study suggests that variation in an environment may create a lack of congruency between the athlete and the university and thereby influence their ability to engage in an educational experience conducive to retention (completing their education at the institution). Although there have been few studies conducted on black student-athletes in predominantly white settings, very few have examined the experiences from a qualitative or phenomenological perspective. Such a technique allows for the identification of specific factors that may not be identified when using other forms of research. The research questions addressed included: 1) what factors influence African American Athletes’ satisfaction with their chosen institution, and 2) are there differences in factors that influence satisfaction with chosen school between African American student athletes who attend predominantly black institutions and those who attend predominantly white institutions?

In this study, the person and environment interaction examined is that of African American athletes attending predominantly white institutions compared to African American athletes attending historically black institutions. The “person” examined in this study is that of African American male student athletes. The person includes background information related to the individual, such as GPA, demographic information, persons influential in their choice of schools, and financial abilities. The “environment” examined is that of African American male athletes attending predominantly Black institutions and those attending predominantly white institutions. The environment is inclusive of classroom and faculty experiences, and interactive experiences with the predominant race on the chosen campus. Any factors identified by the student athletes during their interview are recognized as influential variables on their satisfaction with the chosen school. Factors identified in the literature also help to identify environment but are not conclusive. The interaction of the athletes and the different environments are compared between student athletes at predominantly Black and predominantly white institutions.
Subjects from both groups indicated that athletics and academics (which included educational programs) were the main reasons for choosing the particular university. All of the subjects from the predominantly white university indicated that athletic scholarships were more of a focus than the academic arena. These subjects also stated they would not have been able to attend this institution without athletic scholarship support, and would have attended a smaller, less costly state university. The subjects attending the historically black institution indicated that their choice was based on the academic reputation, the positive standing of the university in society and being a historically black university. Close proximity to home was also a factor and did rank high on the list of considerations. In contrast to the historically black university, subjects attending the predominantly white institution said that GPA, wanting to get away from home and the school itself were considerations for their institutional choice. A qualitative research method was used to compare the college achievements and experiences of African American student athletes at predominantly white and black institutions. The subjects for this study included ten black male student-athletes from two NCAA Division I-A universities; five from a historically black university and five from a predominantly white university. The most noticeable observations as a result of this study were in the areas of social relationships and classroom experiences between faculty, other students, and the black male student-athlete.