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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, HAVEN FOR ALL HUNGRY SOULS: THE INFLUENCE OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE AND SCHOOLS ON MORRIS BROWN COLLEGE, by SERENA C. WILSON, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

HAVEN FOR ALL HUNGRY SOULS: THE INFLUENCE OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS ON MORRIS BROWN COLLEGE

By
Serena Celeste Wilson

Morris Brown College is a small, private historically Black college located near downtown Atlanta, Georgia. The College is the only post-secondary institution in Georgia noted for having been founded by Blacks for the purpose of educating Blacks. The relationship between Morris Brown College, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools presents an untapped area of research regarding the how external regulatory and fiscal contributing bodies influence the internal mission, culture and management of an institution of higher education. Morris Brown College presents a unique case because, since its founding, it has maintained a close affiliation with the Church that established it. The Church is closely connected to the College's identity and mission. Yet, in recent years, its financial existence has been dependent upon the receipt and use of public funding—which is intricately tied to accrediting standards and oversight. This research is timely because in 2003 the College lost its accreditation. This raises questions regarding the internal operations of the institution, as well as its interactions with external entities that affect its financial solvency. This study employs an ethnographic case-study qualitative research design to explore how the College's relationship with these bodies influenced the

institution's organizational structure, fiscal management, and administrative culture and identity.

HAVEN FOR ALL HUNGRY SOULS:
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THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS ON MORRIS
BROWN COLLEGE

by,
Serena Celeste Wilson

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the
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Doctor of Philosophy
in
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in
the College of Education
Georgia State University

Atlanta, Georgia
2008

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The most difficult challenge in the completion of this project was to do so while contending with the physical absence of my personal champion, my mother, my angel, Ms. Ruthie M. Wilson, who departed this earth on August 8, 2006. I credit her, wholeheartedly, as the source of both my motivation and my skills. It was with her and through her that I fully grasped that “I Can” is a limit-less concept. Similarly, the passion that I hold for this topic was partially birthed from my Uncle Dewey. From the time I was a child, he encouraged me to “grow up and write about Black people.” “Tell our story,” he would say. I’m not certain that this is quite what he had in mind! However, this is also in tribute to him, and the passion he put into the development of all of the children he knew and loved.

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I must thank the Morris Brown College family for accepting and embracing the need to document and share this story. Even as challenging as recent years have been, the mission at the heart of the institution (the education and social betterment of African-American children) remains pure. As scrutinized as the college has been, it nonetheless has positively touched the lives of many students—I stand as but one example. Thank you to Dr. Stanley Pritchett, Acting President of Morris Brown College, for granting me permission to do this research, and for encouraging me through this very personal project. Thank you to Dr. and Mrs. Robert Threatt for their insight that led to the publication of *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years*, and for their encouragement of my

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Thank you, this is who I am.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACOG	Atlanta Committee for Olympic Games
AQUIP	Academic Quality Improvement Project
AME	African Methodist Episcopal
AUC	Atlanta University Center
CHEA	Council for Higher Education Accreditation
COC	Commission on Colleges
HBCU	Historically Black College or University
ITC	Interdenominational Theological Center
MBC	Morris Brown College
MBCNAA	Morris Brown College National Alumni Association
MEAC	Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference
SACS	Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
UNCF	United Negro College Fund
WASC	Western Association of Colleges and Schools

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“In May 1885, the State of Georgia granted a charter to Morris Brown College of the AME Church. On October 15, 1885, just 20 years after Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, 107 students and nine teachers walked into a crude wooden structure at the corner of Boulevard and Houston Streets in Atlanta, Georgia. This bold, and powerful moment marked the formal opening of the first educational institution in the State of Georgia solely under African American patronage.”¹

Introduction and Purpose

Higher education in the United States occupies a peculiar social position—inhabiting a space somewhere between a place of learning and a place where community is generated. It is neither a fully public construct, nor a purely private entity. It belongs to no particular class (albeit distinguishable elitist tendencies exist), and is multiethnic. It is a place where philosophers pursue truth, teachers instruct students, artists shape, promote and sustain culture, literature is created and applied to life, social structures are analyzed, and politics are debated.² It is a place where research is conducted, scientific discoveries are made, and technology is developed.

According to researchers, the production of knowledge (essentially the result of post-secondary research institutions) affects the economic conditions of the United States, and has the capacity to alter the labor industry in the country.³ Higher education—

¹ Morris Brown College, Division of Institutional Advancement, *123rd Founders Day Celebration, Program Booklet* (Atlanta, 2004).

² Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Washington: Africa World Press, 1993), 3-4.

³ Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, Fourth Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 56-63.

the university as it is recognized today—is one of the oldest, most enduring social institutions ever designed.⁴ It is also complex, multidimensional, and not easily understood comprehensively by either its internal constituents or external bodies. Still, colleges and universities are shaped and massaged by the expectations and requirements of individuals and groups both internally and externally.

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the internal environment and organizational management of one struggling institution (a small, historically Black, liberal arts college), and the perceived or real influence of: 1) its relationship with the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, its founding body, and 2) the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the regional accrediting body for its geographic area. Specifically, this study examined organizational behavior(s) that reflected AME Church or accreditation influence. I looked for influence of either body on the institution's: a) administrative culture and identity, b) fiscal management and fundraising efforts, and; c) organizational structure. Given a college's need to meet the expectation of various constituencies (to maintain an adequate student enrollment, funding base, faculty body, etc.), it is my contention that the perceptions and expectations of external bodies (i.e., founders, sponsors, prospective students, parents) influence the internal structure and processes of a college or university, and must be considered in examining its governance, and results.

In developing the study, I made the following assumptions: 1) the College's historical relationship with the Church has contributed to the development of the College's mission a purpose—I expected to find some evidence of the Church's ideology

⁴ Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 2-5.

within the machinations of the College; 2) standardization—in the form of accreditation—has become an unavoidable process within the higher education system. While it is understood that an institution is (likely) not conceptualized and founded for the express purpose of measuring up to the expectations and standards of independent auditors, the relationship between an institution and external constituencies (e.g., donors and prospective students) strongly influences an institution's need for standardized approval, hence the need for accreditation. Further, because the accreditation review process is repeated every ten years, it is conceivable that policy development, planning processes, the execution of initiatives, and the development of an institution's culture may be constantly reviewed and revised based upon external expectations and the pending assessment of auditing bodies. Thus, to understand the institution (what it does, why, and how), one must fully understand the breadth of persuasion of two very influential bodies external to the College itself—the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Rationale for the Study

During the spring of 2003, Morris Brown College lost its appeal to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) to reverse its decision (rendered in the fall of 2002) to revoke the College's membership with the accrediting body. The removal of the College's accreditation was the result of a tumultuous period of self-study, external auditing, structural reorganization, fiscal struggle and stabilization, blossoming enrollments, and administrative changes. The College had, during the 1990s, come close to losing its accreditation, was laden with considerable debt, yet had rebounded to a certain extent. During the latter part of the 1990s and early 2000s, the College was

experiencing what some were calling the height of its existence—boasting a larger and more diverse student body than in years just prior, a competitive athletic program, impressive technology, accomplished academic programs, and a recognized and well-respected faculty and staff. There was a strong AME presence on the Board of Trustees, and the Church remained involved in the policy-development and funding of the College.

Leading up to the College's scheduled accreditation follow-up monitoring visit in 2001, the College was optimistic that it would remain accredited; at worst, perhaps some feared continued probation or warning status, but not complete loss of accreditation. Although there was some level of anxiety about the prospect of an external body discrediting the College (and perhaps crippling it in the higher education community), many associated with the College did not expect that possibility to actually play itself out quite so harshly. Yet, an extensive peer-review visit in 2001 led to the College being placed on probation for a year, and eventually resulted in the complete revocation of accreditation. Optimism met reality.

Following the loss of accreditation, there are numerous questions. How did this happen? Were there warning signs? Did the College ignore advisory directives, or is this the result of precarious financial risk taking? This study examined the College from 1989 to 2003. In 1989, the College began what would become its last successful reaffirmation process—a procedure that was not completed fully until 1994. In 2003, the College lost its appeal to revoke SACS' most recent decision to remove the College from membership, rendering it unaccredited. I looked for specific instances in which the College's policy, operations, and culture reflect the presence of either the AME Church or SACS as a governing force. Although the scope of this project ends with the loss of

accreditation, the study itself is not causal in scope—that is, its purpose is not to determine what/who caused the college’s eventual loss of accreditation. Instead, the study explored the experiences of the College during the years leading up to the loss of accreditation, and the way(s) in which its relationship with external bodies was evidenced in its internal operations.

This project has the capacity to increase the knowledge of how external governing bodies shape the development, or perhaps lack thereof, of specific institutions of higher education. It is my contention that each institution is uniquely positioned in relation to external forces, and that individuality at various institutions may account for variations in those relationships. There are, however, similarities common to institutions of similar size, scope, and/or demographic composition. It follows then, that an attempt to understand the inherent purpose, processes and culture of higher education should begin with an understanding of the uniqueness of various types of institutions.

Further, because individual institutions, even within categorical delineations, are unique as well, it is imperative that an exploration of any one category of higher education (i.e., Historically Black Colleges and Universities) begins with a detailed examination of specific institutions. Individual institutions have clearly distinguishable cultures and personalities that are distinctively their own.

Current research acknowledges the presence of culture, and “organizational culture” has captured my attention, particularly as it relates to this project. Tierney says, “culture pertains to core values that are explicit and supported by the broad population. Culture also deals in symbols and ‘ways of doing things’.”⁵ Some would argue that

⁵ William G. Tierney, *Building The Responsive Campus* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999), 27.

cultures are “matrices of expectability.”⁶ This project seeks to identify the values and beliefs that are unique to Morris Brown College, to examine if there is an identifiable “broad population,” and how values and beliefs are communicated internally and externally. I looked for characteristics unique to this institution in order to describe and document its particular culture.

From the outset, Black institutions of higher education have been juxtaposed against their predominantly White institutions, which of course have represented the standard in post-secondary education. Historically, Black education has been approached rather reactively—ideologically as well as financially. For instance, the establishment of land grant colleges by the Morrill Act of 1862 provided the vehicle for individuals of non-wealthy means to obtain an education.⁷ The Second Morrill Act (1890) succeeded in making specific provisions for the establishment of higher education for Blacks, when federal monies were received by states.

The post-Civil War period was ripe for the development of educational opportunities for Blacks, both in terms of those institutions that were established as a result of the Second Morrill Act, and private colleges and universities as well. In fact, prior to 1860, there were only about 28 individuals of “acknowledged Black descent” that had obtained a baccalaureate degree from an American college.⁸ However, from 1865 to 1896, the Freedman’s Bureau cooperated with missionary societies and church groups,

⁶ James D. Faubion, “Currents of Cultural Fieldwork,” in *Handbook of Ethnography*, ed. Paul Atkinson, Sara Delamont, Amanda Coffey, and John Lofland (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 45.

⁷ With the passing of this act, however, only Mississippi, Virginia and South Carolina allocated resources for the establishment of Black educational institutions.

⁸ J. John Harris III, Cleopatra Figgures, and David G. Carter, “A Historical Perspective of the Emergence of Higher Education in Black Colleges,” *Journal of Black Studies* 6 no. 1 (Sept. 1975): 56.

and educational institutions for Blacks were established. The Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations were very involved in the founding of these colleges (though most of the institutions established by the Freedman's Bureau contained elementary and secondary curricula as well).⁹ Thus, Black colleges became the major source of education for Blacks in segregationist states (and others), and became the only outlet for federal and state funds specifically designated to educate the Black citizenry.¹⁰

In academic circles, Black colleges and universities were disputed in terms of their educative value.¹¹ Some external sources evaluated Black institutions, relative to the standards and practices of White institutions, and found them lacking.¹² Discussions of Black higher education were descriptive of the successes and failures of these institutions to meet acceptable standards of education in a manner that juxtaposed them to other institutions.¹³

Well-referenced research by Jenks and Reisman, for example, documents that Blacks played little to no role in the overall establishment, financing and administering of Black institutions, and have historically received less financial backing than predominantly White institutions. As a consequence, they have struggled to achieve

⁹ Ibid, 59.

¹⁰ Gil Kujovich, "Public Black Colleges: The Long History of Unequal Funding," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (Winter 1993/1994): 75-76.

¹¹ Frederick Chambers, "Histories of Black Colleges and Universities," *Journal of Negro History*: 57 no. 3 (1972): 270-271.

¹² In 1916, the Phelps-Stokes study of Negro Education equated the curriculum and quality of these institutions with elementary schools. Twelve years after that, AJ Klein found that Negro post-secondary institutions were similar to high schools. Even later studies still negated their ability to provide serious scholarship and valuable research. Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

equity in the number or caliber of educational services, as compared to White counterparts.¹⁴

When compared to predominantly White institutions on factors such as library facilities, faculty salaries and research publications, some Black institutions fall short. Some researchers suggest that while Black colleges and universities have some merit, inadequate resources create an intellectual disservice to Black students.¹⁵ By most accounts, HBCUs have historically suffered from serious shortages of funds; administrators are underpaid, and faculty and staff spend a disproportionate amount of time on teaching.¹⁶ Jenks and Reisman are noted for their assessment of private and public Black colleges as “fourth-rank institutions at the tail end of the academic procession.”¹⁷

Despite these disadvantages, however, Black colleges and universities have made a notable impact on the socio-economic demography of the United States. At the undergraduate level, Black institutions are credited with having educated: 75% of Black Ph.D.’s, 75% of Black army officers; 80% of Black federal judges; 85% of Black physicians. Further, research suggests that Black students matriculating at predominantly White institutions often face an un-accepting cultural environment, and a lack of support, which thwarts their educational progress.¹⁸

¹⁴ Jacqueline. Fleming, *Blacks In College.*, (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1984), 4-5.

¹⁵ Fleming, *Blacks in College*, ix-xiii.

¹⁶ Paul Green, “Other Things Being Equal: Federal Aid and the Politics of Equal Opportunity for Historically Black Colleges,” In *New Perspectives on Policy and Practice*, ed. M. Christopher Brown II and Kassie Freeman, (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 65.

¹⁷ Fleming, *Blacks In College*, 15.

¹⁸ Fleming, *Blacks in College*, xiii.

The relative worth of Black colleges and universities is a complicated topic. Researchers have also established that many non-cognitive variables have an impact on the performance of Black students in college. Significantly, factors such as non-discrimination on campus, satisfaction with one's college or university, and peer group relations are particularly important to a student's success in college.¹⁹ Some research has demonstrated that there are differences between the collegiate experiences of Black students and White students. For instance, Black students (at White institutions) may experience lower academic integration (a feeling of connection with the faculty and institution), are less likely to perceive non-discrimination from the institution, etc..²⁰ If one accepts that Black colleges and universities are perhaps more adept at addressing or preventing some (or all) of these non-academic impediments, then the worth and/or relevance of Black post-secondary education is further complicated, despite considerable financial disadvantages at some of the institutions.

In contemporary society, Black colleges and universities have made considerable strides toward equality and academic excellence. Some of the more competitive institutions are working to attract students that would be interested in entering highly selective majority institutions (such as Harvard University or the University of Pennsylvania), and are attracting the attention of many selective corporate recruiters.²¹ However, the major challenge for many of these institutions is still financial in nature,

¹⁹ Michael T. Nettles, A. Robert Thoeny, and Erica J. Gosman, "Comparative and Predictive Analyses of Black and White Students' College Achievement and Experiences," *The Journal of Higher Education* 57 no. 3 (May- Jun., 1986), 300.

²⁰ Ibid., 303

²¹ Cheryl D. Fields, "Taking Care of Business," *Black Issues in Higher Education* 13 no. 21 (1996): 12.

and Black colleges and universities typically do not receive the types of financial gifts that majority White schools do.²²

However, inasmuch as there are distinct commonalities between the institutions that are categorized as Historically Black Colleges, and Universities, there is markedly little evidence of strategic study conducted at individual institutions. Data regarding Black institutions are usually presented collectively, under rubric such as “Negro Higher Education” or “Black Colleges.” Research on these institutions often resulted in conclusive “all-positive or all-negative” conclusions.²³ Scholars criticize the research of Jenks and Reisman for its one-dimensional critique of the complexity of Black education. Chambers posits that the Jenks and Reisman’s use of generalized comparison, rather than a study of each college or university, invalidates many of the findings of the work.²⁴

This creates a gap in academic research, and does an injustice to the histories and documentations of individual Black colleges and universities. Careful and strategic inquiry into the inner workings and ideology of Morris Brown College revealed useful information regarding how decisions and policies were made, processes were implemented, and objectives achieved (or not). Although this research is not intended to represent HBCUs in totality, it can be used to understand the processes and challenges of one small Black, liberal arts, religiously-affiliated institution. Contextual information gathered in this study may be applicable to other colleges of similar stature.

²² Linda M. Brown “Bottom Line Goals,” *Black Issues in Higher Education* 18 no. 20 (2001): 45.

²³ Frederick Chambers, “Histories of Black Colleges and Universities,” *Journal of Negro History*: 57 no. 3 (1972): 271.

²⁴ Frederick Chambers, “Histories of Black Colleges and Universities,” *Journal of Negro History*: 57 no. 3 (1972): 271.

Research Objective

Through this study I collected, analyzed, and documented data to support the development of a theory regarding the influence of the AME Church and the (SACS) accreditation process on the development and existence of Morris Brown College. The study focused particularly on: a) the administrative culture and organizational purpose b) the organizational structure (and hierarchy of command), and c) the fiscal management policies and practices of the College. The study was intended to provide a basis for understanding the relationship between ideology, accreditation, and the organization's operational procedures.

The objective of this study was to examine if and how AME Church and SACS ideologies are manifested in the College's ideology, structure, and/or fiscal policies.

These objectives were guided in part by the following questions:

1. Is the College's identity and purpose understood and communicated amongst various groups within the College? Is the identity operationalized in daily tasks or decision-making processes? If so, how?
2. What is the hierarchical structure and division of duties at the College, and how are they developed?
3. What is the fiscal state of the College? How is money managed, protected, raised? How are long-term fiscal goals established and approached?

It should be noted that the questions listed above were guides in the research process. They should not be considered comprehensive of my approach to inquiry. These questions were used as probes toward the development of a more complex investigation into the inner operational procedures of the College. As collected data led to other questions or query perspectives, they were incorporated into the study as well.

In developing/framing the process for collecting and analyzing data for this project, I developed some propositions regarding higher education, and external bodies closely related to the operation of the College. The propositions for this project were as follows:

- The mission and purpose of the College are related to the ideology given to it by its founding body;²⁵
- The organizational/authoritative structure of an institution is closely related to guidelines of accreditation;²⁶
- Fiscal management and fund raising efforts/results are influenced by the accreditation review process and results of the auditing process;²⁷
- The relationship between the College and its founding body impacts the College's fiscal standing and fundraising efforts,²⁸
- The culture and perceived identity of an institution are closely related to the results of the Church's ideology and accreditation review/standardization process, and are strongly influenced by the accrediting body's approval of the institution.²⁹

These propositions guided the data-collection and data-analysis processes of this project. My inquiry was not limited to proving or disproving these propositions, however. Rather, the purpose of these tenets was to serve as a point on entry—a focus for initial conversations with participants and exploration of the literature. Throughout the study,

²⁵ See James Findlay "Agency, Denominations, and the Western Colleges, 1830-1860: Some Connections Between Evangelicalism and American Higher Education," *Church History* 50 no. 1 (March 1981): 66; Walter R. Allen, and Joseph O. Jewell, "A Backward Glance Forward: Past, Present and Future Perspectives On Historically Black Colleges and Universities," *The Review of Higher Education* 25:3 (2002): 244-247; William Tierney, *Building The Responsive Campus* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1999): 66.

²⁶ My direct observation as a participant-observer at the institution suggests this.

²⁷ See "Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions: An Overview North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Institutions of Higher Education," ERIC Document ED478798 (1999): 11.

²⁸ Beverly McAnear, "College Founding In American Colonies 1745-1775," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 42 no. 1 (June 1955): 24; Fleming, *Blacks In College*.

²⁹ This assumption is crafted from 1) direct observation of the study's participants' internal written and verbal communication; 2) Research that suggests that an institutions values can be determined by what it talks about, how it spends its time, and its budget and audit processes; See Carl M. Hunt, Kenneth Oosting, Robert Stevens, David Loudon, and R. Henry Migliore, *Strategic Planning For Private Higher Education* (New York: Hawthorn Press, 1997), 78.

data emerged in patterns that were related to these propositions in varying degrees, but were not necessarily reflective of the assumptions, either individually or collectively.

Chapter 2 describes the research mechanism employed throughout this project. Haven For All Hungry Souls is an ethnographic case study, a qualitative project that utilizes print data and human subjects to inform the study and develop theory. Print data include self-study reports, strategic planning documents, employee and student orientation documents, publications, catalogs, etc. Human subjects include administrators, faculty, staff, alumni/ae, etc. The bounded system in this project is Morris Brown College (including the physical campus, employees, students and alumni/ae). The study allows data gathered from the documents and participants to tell the Morris Brown College story, and examines patterns of human and organizational behavior therein.

I acknowledge inherent biases and limitations at the outset of this study. I am a graduate and former employee of the College, and was involved with the institution during much of the time period covered by this research. However, a working knowledge and intimacy with the topic is essential to good qualitative research, and I allow this knowledge to foster access to data and other resources required to complete the project. The chapter also includes a description of my bias as a researcher, and some of the research limitations of the study.

Chapter Three is a condensed overview of literature, periodicals, and academic material that provide a theoretical and conceptual base to this project. The review is divided into the following categories:

- *Evaluation and Assessment*: The worth and value of colleges and universities are weighed against internal and external standards. Colleges and universities are assessed, and value is placed upon individual institutions—by the public, by its

various internal constituencies (i.e. faculty or alumni/ae), by external auditing agencies, and other entities. Overwhelmingly, the literature suggests that universities operate independently but are subject to the speculation of persons with expectations of how they should operate, whom they should serve, and to whom they should answer.

- *Planning and Governance*: Planning and governance are closely related; at the institutional level, it is critical to the survival of the organization. It is future-oriented. Education is, perhaps, internally defined yet externally-driven. The college is neither simply a business nor is it an independent collection of individuals. Colleges have a commitment to critical inquiry and a commitment to educating students. Thus, both the student and the production of knowledge are the intended results, and both must be reflected in the planning and governance of an institution.
- *Leadership in Higher Education*: an understanding of leadership will shape and help to define the decision-making process, and the resulting life and happenings of an institution. The literature offers a wealth of information about good leadership, and what is required of effective leadership. Administrators are expected to manage the institution to maximize the benefit to the people the institution serves. How, then, is maximum benefit defined when resources—and therefore services—are scarce or limited, and how then is good leadership defined? In meeting contextual demands, leaders must understand the organization and the people that are involved. An effective administrator, then, will be able to gain the understanding and support of diverse groups of people connected to an institution's mission.
- *Accreditation and Self-Study*: Accreditation is a peer review process that rates an educational institution's: purpose; effectiveness; education program; educational support services, and; administrative processes. The review process is conducted by a team of faculty and administrators from member institutions across a region. Accreditation provides validation to the certificates, diplomas, degrees, and credits awarded by an institution. It rates the college or university's acceptability. At the core of the whole concept, however, is comparability. Accreditation evaluates the worth of an institution based on a standard derived from the policies, practices, and effectiveness of other institutions. Administrators at four-year colleges desire accreditation for the legitimacy that it provides to the institution. It speaks to the quality of the school's operations, and provides the prestige that accompanies membership amongst ranked peers. Subsequently, it is the determining factor of an institution's eligibility for state licensure and federal funding.
- *Finances and Fiscal Management*: Colleges and universities, as a collective, are not money-generating entities. Financial flexibility and resources in higher education are highly valued, and even private colleges rely heavily on government subsidy for a great percentage of their operating budgets. Recently, however, government support of higher education has dwindled. The effects of under-compensated budgets and diminishing funds can be seen and felt throughout an institution. Data show that competition between institutions means spending more to recruit and maintain the best faculty members and to give faculty incentives

such as reduced administrative duties, teaching loads, and advisement. Thus, money (in addition to scholarship, it seems) is at the heart of a college's worth to the industry. There are clear demarcations between those colleges with money and those without, as well as those that manage money wisely, and those that do not. There are also a host of unspoken connections between an institution's financial well-being, and its worthiness as a vehicle for scholarship. Thus, fiscal health becomes an essential defining factor of what an institution represents.

- *Historically Black Colleges/Universities*: Common perspective tends to consider historically Black colleges and universities as a collective. They have value and purpose—or not. They manage money well—or not. They uplift the community—or simply occupy a particular space in society. Black institutions, like their White counterparts, have been largely dependent upon the external funding for survival and growth. However, funding for these schools has been slow to materialize. Still, Black colleges and universities remain committed to their purpose, and are largely making efforts toward longevity and quality of service to students and to the community. Further, while enrolling only 20% of the nation's Black students, these institutions produce more than 1/3 of the nation's Black graduates.
- *Religiously-Affiliation and Higher Education*: There are approximately 900 self-described religion-affiliated campuses in the United States, enrolling more than two million students, and employing more than 600,000 faculty/staff. Further, faith-based educational philanthropy has been a deliberate effort, grounded in specific values and beliefs. Modern religious-affiliated colleges 'exist on a continuum, from the barely affiliated to the ultra-orthodox. In contemporary times, however, from the evolution of higher education have emerged questions and considerations with regard to the role of religion in free intellectual pursuit.
- *Culture and Internal Constituencies*: Culture—organizational culture—is perhaps one of the most intangible or least-documented topics in higher education research, and even less so with regard to policy and decision-making. Scholars observe that cultures do change, but that change is incremental, and often unrecognized by those involved. Organizations that navigate change successfully often have operational procedures in place that protect against mistakes made by individuals involved. Organizational culture tends to define what is possible, what is feasible. To understand an institution's culture, one must comprehend the core values and philosophy of the institution. An institution's culture details what the institution actually is in its daily thoughts and behaviors; it determines whether the particular mission can be accomplished.

Chapter 4 provides an encapsulated account of the College's recent organizational history. The section focuses on administrative changes, and specifically examines executive-level decisions that have affected the organization. The section presents data collected from print sources and research-participants that tell the Morris Brown College

story from the vantage point of persons involved. This section chronicles what took place at the College, who was involved, and the results of administrative actions. The section includes information regarding the College's administrative priorities during the years covered by this story, internal relationships, and the College's interactions with external entities, such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Print data sources include administrative documents (e.g. self-study documents, administrative memos), newsletters, correspondence to and from SACS, etc. Research participants include upper and mid-level administrators, faculty, and alumni/ae.

Chapter 5 presents categorized data collected from the print data sources and participants that have been utilized to inform Chapter 4. This section examines data in relation to the theoretical frameworks and discussions presented in Chapter 2. The data in this section are placed into thematic groups, in accordance with their relevance to prior-developed theory. This section attempts to go beyond what happened during this time period, and understand the relationship between persons involved, events/occurrences, and outcomes. Within this chapter, data are placed in categories, where patterns of responses can be observed and analyzed.

Chapter 6 discusses the results of the study. This chapter is an extension of Chapter 5, in that it attempts to make meaning of the data. This chapter provides a summary of what took place during this study, what was learned, and what gaps still exist in what is known about this topic. This chapter discusses how this study has contributed to the body of knowledge regarding higher education, and Black colleges. It discusses the study's relevance to policy-makers at Morris Brown College, and identifies areas of

research that should be further explored. Finally, the chapter suggests avenues for future research on this and related topics.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH CONSIDERATIONS

“Alma Mater, Pride of Earth
Gav’st To Me Another Birth
Haven For All Hungry Souls
Feeding Them Shall Be Thy Goal”

Qualitative Research

I approached this research with an appreciation for the purpose and value of systematic inquiry. I understand that disciplined inquiry in education, educational research, is unique because education itself is not considered a discipline. Instead, it is “a field of study, a locus containing phenomena, events, institutions, problems, persons, and processes that themselves constitute the raw material for inquiries of many kinds.”³⁰ Because of the exploratory and descriptive nature of the study, I opted to utilize qualitative research techniques, in the form of a cross design that combines ethnographic methodology and case study principles. Qualitative research, according to existing literature, looks for meaning in human action and context. The goal is often to understand (as opposed to the predictive/explanatory role of quantitative research).³¹

Such research seeks to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with little disruption of the natural setting. Qualitative research may encompass any of

³⁰ Lee S. Shulman, “Disciplines of Inquiry in Education: A New Overview,” in *Contemporary Methods For Research in Education*, ed. Richard M. Jaeger (Washington: American Educational Research Association, 1997), 9.

the following: naturalistic inquiry, interpretative research, field study, participant observation, inductive research, case study, and ethnography.³² It seeks to recognize how people construct meaning—of their world and their experiences. It looks at individual parts, and how they work together to form a whole.³³ Similarly, this study examined the experiences, perceptions, actions and results of the various actors and components of Morris Brown College. This research is syntagmatic, and seeks primarily to understand relationships and processes as they existed during the period prior to accreditation loss. Miles and Huberman define syntagmatic research as study that is process-oriented, following events and context over a period of time; this is compared to paradigmatic research which deals with relations between well-defined concepts or variables.³⁴

This study is intended to explore, describe, analyze, and understand the inner workings of a particular college, how that college (e.g. persons associated with the college) understands and perceives itself, and the events that led up to the loss of accreditation. I understand that, generally, scientific inquiry is considered to be that research (typically quantitative) that can be replicated and generalized across studies.³⁵ However, some supporters of qualitative research posit that a single case may in fact

³¹ Maxine Greene, “A Philosopher Looks at Qualitative Research,” in *Complementary Methods for Research in Education*, ed. Richard M. Jaeger (Washington: American Educational Research Association, 1997), 189-206.

³² Sharan Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 5.

³³ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁴ M.B. Miles and A.M. Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1994), 94.

³⁵ Joseph A. Maxwell, “Causal Explanation, Qualitative Research, and Scientific Inquiry in Education,” *Educational Researcher* 33 no. 2 (March 2004): 5

include and display a cause, an effect, and a causal relation.³⁶ Qualitative research is expected to contain thick description, experiential understanding, and multiple realities (different perspectives of different people). In that the goal of qualitative research is to discover and understand the happenings of a context (as opposed to focusing on the cause alone), causal relationships can emerge clearly.³⁷

Some would argue that all researchers seek to produce research with some degree of generalizability.³⁸ I too am in that category. I understand the college as an intricate tapestry of various internal groups—faculty, students, staff, alumni and alumnae. It operates in tandem with an even more complex network of similar phenomena (other colleges and universities). Further, both Morris Brown College and the other institutions exist in a larger social context within which there exist expectations, identifiable interests, and meaning.

The outcome of this study is narrative about the college, its culture and policies, as well as the internal context and external factors that influence the actions (and non-actions) of persons associated with the college. Ideally, this research will also contribute to the body of qualitative research that strengthens the acceptance of qualitative (and single-case) study as scientifically applicable and relevant to other studies. The study employed the following realist qualitative principles:

- Observation and documentation of objects and social relations that have causal powers (that may or may not produce regularities). The events that led up to accreditation loss at Morris Brown College may or may not

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Robert Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1995), 37-43.

³⁸ Lee S. Shulman, "Disciplines of Inquiry in Education: A New Overview," in *Contemporary Methods For Research in Education*, ed. Richard M. Jaeger (Washington: American Educational Research Association, 1997), 13.

produce regularities (in the same manner as variables in quantitative research); they may nonetheless have *causal* influence and results

- Observation of events and the processes that connect events. The focus of this research is the *process* by which decisions are made, and policy is developed and implemented at Morris Brown College
- Acknowledgement of the importance of the context in which the causal relationship exists. The *context* is at the center of the process of how the procedures and policy development at Morris Brown College are manifested
- Acceptance of intentions, beliefs, and meanings of causes. Some researchers have acknowledged that what institutions, roles, rules, and relationships are are contingent upon their meaning to members and/or to the social structure in which they exist.³⁹

It is my contention that meaning, and understood purpose and value (or lack thereof), is significant to the way Morris Brown College was conceptualized, acted upon/with, described, and supported or not supported.

Cross-Method: Ethnography and Case Study

I chose to approach this study as an ethnographic case study. I was drawn to the liberty that a cross-methodological design provides to incorporate inquiry methods that contributed to the depth of this project. Ethnographic research is guided by and generates theory; theory is modified throughout the research.⁴⁰ Theory can be developed in three ways: ground-up (inductive), top-down (deductive), or middle (working both up and down from the starting point).⁴¹ For this study, I allowed the data collection to develop the theory, although data collection was guided by the propositions stated earlier in this document. Robert Stake suggests that qualitative researchers treat the uniqueness of

³⁹ Joseph A. Maxwell, "Causal Explanation, Qualitative Research, and Scientific Inquiry in Education," *Educational Researcher* 33 no. 2 (March 2004): 4-7.

⁴⁰ Stephen L. Schensul, Jean J. Schensul, Margaret D. LeCompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 1999), 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

individual cases and contexts as important to understanding.⁴² Others, such as Robert Yin, suggest that propositions can be used to guide the research. Propositions help the researcher to know what data to collect, so that he/she won't be tempted to collect data on everything.⁴³

I used propositions (perhaps less rigid than formal theory), and within the context of those propositions I attempted to allow the data to tell its own story, and develop theory. I approached this research expecting to confirm that there is an identifiable and describable influential relationship between the college, the Church, and SACS. However, *how* those relationships manifested themselves and are incorporated into the existence of the college provided the substance of the study.

In that this research is ethnography, it was both a process and a product. The research looked at the “way of life” of an identifiable group of people.⁴⁴ It observed the individuals within and associated with Morris Brown College, what their interests are, what they do/produce, and how they interact with and affect each other. Essentially, I observed who did what, and what the outcome was.

The result of an ethnographic study ideally provides a picture of the social habits and behaviors of a select group of people. Ethnographers gravitate towards groups with identifiable cultures—in fact, are in some ways preoccupied with culture; culture is the perspective of how groups of people (or people within a group) interact with each other. Ethnography only exists, however, when a researcher systematically inquires about, and

⁴² Robert Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1995), 39.

⁴³ Robert Yin, *Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1994), 21.

⁴⁴ Harry F. Wolcott, “Ethnographic Research in Education,” in *Complementary Methods For Research in Education*, ed. Richard M. Jaeger (Washington: American Educational Research Association, 1997), 329.

then makes meaning of, the observed culture of the specified group.⁴⁵ Cultures are concerned with the processes and structures of sense-making and the way in which “sense” becomes “lived practices” in everyday activity.⁴⁶

In as much as the study is ethnographic (focusing on the administrative culture of the college), the overall structure and data collection technique of this study is patterned after case study research. Case study, much like ethnography, is understood as both a process and an end product.⁴⁷ Case study (observing and chronicling a single unit or bounded system) is often utilized to “gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved.”⁴⁸ Its focus is the particularity and complexity of a single case; the researcher moves to understand its activity within important circumstances.⁴⁹

This project employed a single case, embedded research design.⁵⁰ For this project, it was fitting to encompass case study technique because I am particularly concerned with the context and culture of the institution that is the focal point of the study. A case study considers a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. A researcher

⁴⁵ Ibid., 327-353.

⁴⁶ Joost Van Loon, “Ethnography: A Critical Turn in Cultural Studies,” in *Handbook of Ethnography*, eds. Paul Atkinson, Sara Delamont, Amanda Coffey, and John Lofland (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 273.

⁴⁷ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 27.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁹ Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, xi.

⁵⁰ Yin defines an embedded design as one that has multiple points of analysis within the study; this is compared to a holistic design that looks at one broad aspect of a particular case. See Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* Second Edition (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1994), 41-44.

uses case study method when context is very significant to the phenomenon of study.⁵¹

Case studies generally do not focus on or overly-emphasize the problem (in this study the loss of accreditation). Instead, the researcher examines the problem or issue for the purpose of examining the conditions, complexity, and the coping behavior within the case.⁵²

Case study research can typically be categorized in three ways: descriptive (which provides a detailed account of what takes place); interpretive (which uses descriptive data, but are designed to formulate concepts or support or refute existing theory); evaluative (which includes descriptive accounts, explanations, and analysis). Case studies are useful when the researcher desires to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of a particular entity.⁵³

In this research, the bounded system is Morris Brown College, encompassing its physical campus, people associated with it, its assets, and its perception/reputation (as understood by internal and external entities). This dissertation is interpretive in scope. Unlike experimental designs, which are meant to predict future events based on the results of a tightly-controlled research design, this study sought to describe the phenomenon of the case for a better understanding of what has happened, and the nature of the relationship(s) therein.

Case study inquiry allowed me to conduct a methodical inquiry into the structure of the college. Ethnographic principles allowed me to develop the description of the

⁵¹ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* Second Edition (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1994), 13.

⁵² Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, 127.

⁵³ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 33-34.

people and their habits in a way that allows the culture of the college to emerge, and speak for itself. Robert Stake suggests that the results of such a study should become a vicarious experience for the reader. That was my intent. It is my hope that the reader will have a clear perception of the perspective, customs, and habits that are unique to those that have experienced accreditation review, challenge, and loss at this institution.

Domain

This project is an ethnographic case study of one historically Black college in the South. I define the “college” as the physical campus, including official policies/-ordinances of the institution, as well as employees, students, and alumni/ae of the institution. The study is intended to provide a basis for understanding the relationship between the College’s policies and operations, its organizational identity and culture, and two external bodies of influence, the AME Church and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. I further expect the study to provide a foundation for future research on higher education—specifically historically Black colleges—and external governing bodies.

Morris Brown College, even outside of its recent challenges with accreditation review, occupies a unique position in higher education. The College was founded by the African Methodist Episcopal Church—and is the only institution in the state of Georgia to be founded solely by Blacks, for the purpose of educating Blacks. Thus, in some ways it is the educational manifestation of the philosophy behind the contemporary fashion company FUBU (For Us By Us), a “Black for Black” company. The self-defined history of the College is enigmatic, steeped in intrigue and high idealism, drawing readers and

hearers into what seems to be a nobility of cause, a higher calling, a selflessness, a mission of pure intent. History regales the social context at the time of the institution's beginning as

a period characterized by a strong determination on the part of some of those who constituted a slaveholding class, to see to it that former slaves, despite their new status as freemen, would be denied the ballot, equality before the law, freedom to live, work, worship and play wherever they choose, and educational opportunities commensurate with those available to the white majority.⁵⁴

Much of what is recorded by those associated with the College represent the institution as the result of efforts to combat social injustices, a lack of appreciation of the needs and intricacies of educating Blacks, and oppressive factors faced by the Negro population of the day. Thus, to those who may champion self-help, bootstrap heroics, and collective triumph, Morris Brown College may be a contemporary unsung victor- having established itself as an educational option for students of color, and having educated and graduated thousands of individuals for more than a century.

Yet, despite its internally-proclaimed esteem, externally Morris Brown College sits physically, philosophically, and economically in juxtaposition to some other well-known historically Black institutions. Until shortly after the loss of accreditation, Morris Brown College was an official member of the Atlanta University Center (AUC). The Atlanta University Center was formally established in 1929, as an affiliation of Morehouse College, Spelman College and Atlanta University—partially birthed from the concern of some educational and social activists for the survival (and financing) of Negro educational institutions in the South. The affiliation was solidified with the understanding

⁵⁴ George A. Sewell and Cornelius V. Troup, *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years 1881-1981* (Atlanta: privately printed, 1981), xi.

that Spelman and Morehouse would provide undergraduate education to women and men, respectively, and together would serve as feeder schools for Atlanta University's graduate and professional programs. Clark University (sic) and Morris Brown College would later join the affiliation.⁵⁵ Avery's research details the considerable planning (e.g. the positioning of the new Atlanta University campus to adjoin Morehouse and the leasing old Atlanta University buildings to Morris Brown College) and organizational considerations (e.g. ownership and operational control of library facilities) that took place during the establishment of the Atlanta University Center.⁵⁶

To date, despite organizational affiliation, the institutions comprising the Atlanta University Center (which now also includes the Interdenominational Theological Center-ITC- and the Morehouse School of Medicine) are in many ways as polar as their respective histories. Spelman College and Morehouse College, both often cited as elite institutions of the upper (financial, educational, and social) class of African Americans, are philosophically and economically distinct from the (AME) self-supported Morris Brown College. With substantial contributions from well-established philanthropic sources (such as the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund) and new-money structural support (Bill and Camille Cosby's multimillion dollar contribution to Spelman in the early 1990s and Oprah Winfrey's multimillion dollar gifts to Morehouse in the early twenty-first century), both Spelman and Morehouse are far removed from the desolate economic conditions of Morris Brown College, whose challenges with

⁵⁵ Ibid., 75.

⁵⁶ Vida L. Avery, "A Fateful Hour in Black Higher Education: The Creation of the Atlanta University System" (Ph.D. diss., Georgia State University, 2003), 276-290.

accreditation approval are largely financial in nature.⁵⁷ Clark Atlanta University, the largest HBCU in Georgia, is the relatively recent birth-child of the merger between a financially-struggling Clark College and Atlanta University in 1989. Since its founding, it too has experienced some increase in prestige, enrollment, and overall stability, despite some reported financial challenges during the past 15 years.⁵⁸

Because of the formal relationship between the schools, coupled with the border-to-border physical proximity of the campuses, these institutions are often compared, both internally and externally, to one another. Understandably, the relationship and ranking between the colleges has an effect on enrollment (quantities and qualities), philanthropic gifts, public opinion, and internal culture. Thus, an understanding of Morris Brown College (even of its relationship to the two externally influential bodies—the Church and the SACS) is affected by how it is understood, internally and externally, in relation to the other AUC schools, as well as the larger context of higher education. Perception and reality are in some ways the proverbial chicken and egg.

Data Sources, Sampling, and Data Collection

A researcher should try to reason through or hypothesize, in advance, what may happen during a study. By defining conceptual structures (or focal points or issues) a researcher is able to draw attention to particular complexities or concerns. Issues are not simple, but are intricately connected to political, social, historical and personal contexts. They help us see the moment in historical context, and highlight pervasive problems in

⁵⁷ “Class of 2005: Graduation Rekindles Hope At Morris Brown,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Atlanta), 15 May 2005; 1C.

⁵⁸ Linda Megget Brown, “Bottom Line Goals,” *Black Issues in Higher Education* 18 no. 20 (11/22/2001): 45.

human interaction.⁵⁹ In this research, as is likely the case in most, the value of the study was contingent upon my ability to identify and engage human and printed resources to provide key information regarding what happened (and how) at the college during this period.

There are two types of sampling in case study research: selecting the case to be studied/researched; selecting whom to interview, what to observe, and which documents to analyze. Both of these selections are purposeful, and may be done prior to data collection (although theoretical sampling may be done in conjunction with data collection). The researcher should develop criteria for determining who and what to include in the sample.⁶⁰ Further, sampling should be large enough to maximize variability within the group. The greater the heterogeneity of the target population, the larger the sample needed.⁶¹

Data sources were selected based upon the source's ability to contribute to the understanding of the research objectives, and included documents produced internally (meeting notes, college catalog, student handbook) as well as externally (SACS review notes). Most of the documents were owned by, and housed at, the College. Some documents were owned by alumni/ae and former students, while others were administrative records and publications held by officials of the Church.⁶²

⁵⁹ Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, 15-17.

⁶⁰ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 65-66.

⁶¹ Stephen L. Schensul, Jean J. Schensul, Margaret D. LeCompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 1999), 267.

⁶² Because of the College's on-going efforts to regain accreditation and the sensitivity of some of the data, I primarily used correspondence from SACS (i.e. SACS Review-Team reports, directives, assessments) as the voice of the accreditation agency. I did not request any material directly from the accreditation agency.

Participants

This study utilized participants from the College's internal constituency groups (employees and former employees, alumni/ae), external educational partners (i.e. AUC officials), and individuals knowledgeable of the AME Church's involvement with Morris Brown College. Participants were selected based upon: 1) their affiliation with the college between 1989 and 2003; 2) availability, and; 3) knowledge of the College's relationship with the Church and SACS during this period.

I utilized six participants for this study. As a contingent of each participant's involvement in the study, I have protected their identities by using pseudonyms. Two of the participants are graduates of the college. The two graduates matriculated at the institution at different times; there were approximately 25 years between the two periods of enrollment. One of the graduates has been an officer within the Morris Brown College National Alumni Association, the official governing unit of alumni/ae, which coordinates communication and activities between the college and the alumni/ae body. Five of the participants have worked at the college, as faculty members, administrators, or both. The current and/or former employees have each held a position of upper administrative rank within the institution, and had direct reporting duty to the president of the college and/or the board of trustees. As such, they were intimately familiar with the policies, practices, and culture of the board. Three of the five current and/or former employees have held multiple positions within the college. Each of the current and/or former employees have worked at the institution through the transition between presidents and have been very involved in accreditation-related exercises.

Participants provided the study with information regarding the College's operating procedures and how policy was created, reviewed, and manifested. They informed the study of the communication mechanisms at the college—how, for example, a president might convey to the faculty and staff a change in policy or practice. They also provided insight regarding the culture and identity of the institution.

My goal was to determine if and how the College's operations were consistent with the expectations of its governing bodies, and if the expectations of each individual body meshed (easily or at all) with the other. Further, I expected participants to provide information regarding how the College is perceived and understood, and how that perception parlays into an organizational culture. I was particularly interested in how that culture is communicated, both internally and externally, and whether it is consistent with internal and external expectations.

Interviews

A common method of eliciting information from participants is through formal interviews. Interviews may be open-ended or focused.⁶³ The most common type of interview is the person-to-person interview in which one person asks for information from another. Additionally, group interviews may be used, to account for group processes and behavior.⁶⁴

Researchers vary in their approach to recording and documenting interviews. Some suggest that verbatim transcription of recorded interviews provide the best database for analysis; this, however, can be tedious, time-consuming, and perhaps expensive (if the

⁶³ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 84.

⁶⁴ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 71.

researcher hires a transcriber).⁶⁵ Others caution that recording devices should not be utilized if they disrupt the interviewees' comfort or creates a distraction during the interview.⁶⁶ An alternative method is to listen, take notes, and serve as a repository for what is being said. A researcher should reconstruct the interview responses and submit the document for review (for accuracy) to the participant(s). Some consider it better to listen well, take few notes, and ask for clarification than to record and/or write furiously.⁶⁷

I conducted recursive (repeated, increasingly probing) individual interviews to obtain information from participants. Each interview lasted approximately 1 ½ hours, and was audiotaped. I asked questions such as “please describe the College’s policy with regard to xxx, and how you go about implementing this policy,” “what, if any, unique characteristics exist at Morris Brown College? Feel free to speak of historical and/or current characteristics,” or “Describe the relationship between the Church and the College. Was the relationship manifested in daily activities?” I used these interviews as a mechanism for discerning individual perceptions of college policy and operations, identity, and culture. My goal was to assess and document individuals’ understanding of the college’s identity and goals, and how that understanding was manifested in the individual’s experience(s) at the college.

⁶⁵ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 88.

⁶⁶ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 86.

⁶⁷ Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, 65-66.

Conducting interviews with multiple persons associated with the College during this period assisted in determining whether the college culture and operational standards was a shared experience.

Printed Data Sources

The study also used printed data sources from the College, to ascertain how the College officially defines itself, how the College was structured (and why), what the fiscal state of the College was (and how it was managed), and the extent to which the College's culture was represented in written material. I utilized print data sources provided by the institution, administrators, alumni/ae. Significant information was gathered from the College's self-study and accreditation archival history (i.e. strategic planning notes, correspondences to and from SACS, organizational charts), as well as publications distributed to internal and external constituencies. I focused specifically on those documents that would give "voice" to the perceptions and actions of the College's administration, faculty, staff, alumni/ae.

I examined the documents for recurring themes with regard to the College's relationship with the two external bodies. The primary data sources utilized during the study are as follows.

Institutional Policies/Mission Statement

The official mission statement of the College contains pertinent information regarding the way in which the college defines itself. As the mission of the College is intended to be the guide for the subsequent operations of the college, it is an ideal starting point. Further, the official policies and procedures of the College help to shape the perception and understanding of the organization to internal figures, as well as external

bodies. This study utilized the college's catalog as the primary data source regarding the institution's self-definition and policies. It is the contract between the institution and its students, provides the parameters of the academic experience (i.e. defining the curriculum), and is also a primary source of information for external funding and auditing sources.

Institutional Publications

Institutional publications are often targeted toward specific audiences. Within these publications, one can expect to find statements about the institution, who is the specific target audience, and how the institution intends to represent itself (essentially its public identity) to the audience. Statements from these publications were used to assess the institution's self-defined identity, and the measure of communication that exists to convey the identity to others. This study also incorporated data from alumni/ae bulletins, to determine if and how internal group and individual perspectives and behaviors—an identifiable culture—is conveyed in the language between the college and one of its strongest support groups.

Curriculum and Student Orientation Documents/Publications

Colleges often incorporate information about the college into the curriculum, particularly for underclassmen. The existence of courses that define the college's identity to its students will be useful in understanding how the college communicates its identity and culture to its students. Additionally, colleges often host student-orientation programs for the purpose of acclimating students to the institution. The content and nature of such a program can provide essential information regarding how students and employees understand the college. The college in this study has a formal New Student Orientation

program, which consists of programmatic seminars and activities during New Student Orientation week, as well as a mandatory New Student Orientation class. This project utilized data from publications used during the New Student Orientation class.

Internal Memoranda and Staff Notes

The study utilized official memoranda and notations detailing the College's approach to strategizing, implementing given goals, or problem-solving. Such documents indicate the official position of administrators with regard to certain issues. Usually written in plain language (meant to galvanize action or compliance), such documents should be relatively- easily interpreted to distinguish any relationship between the content of the document and external influence.

Self-Study Reports, Audits, and Institutional Research Documents

An internally-directed self-study project allows a college to comprehensively examine itself, strategize, and determine any areas of weakness or in need of specific attention. Although self-study is a useful tool in itself, the impetus for it may be a pending accreditation review; thus, the information/recommendations contained in such a document may be a direct reflection of the perceived or expressed expectations of the accreditation body. Audit documents likely provide useful information regarding the College's financial status, revenue, debt, and projected fiscal health. These were used to augment information collected regarding the College's projected overall fiscal management. This project is not intended to replicate a fiscal audit of the College. Therefore, the study contains information regarding the general financial health of the College. The data provided for this study informs: how and if financial management was prioritized; the impact of finance-related decisions; how external bodies impacted the

College's financial stability and monitoring, etc. Institutional research documents contain statistical information relating to students, finances, graduation rates, and employee credentials that will be helpful in understanding the institution. The study incorporated these data in an analysis of what the College does, and how it approaches strategic planning.

Data Analysis and Research Constructs

Some researchers suggest that data analysis is best done as data are collected.⁶⁸ It means giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations. Analysis should not be viewed as separate from on-going efforts to make sense of things. Whereas quantitative researchers may look for meaning in the repetition of phenomena, qualitative researchers look for meaning to emerge from a single instance. The integrity of the qualitative researcher is the mechanism that allows him/her to offer interpretation of events, behaviors, and things.⁶⁹ During data collection, I documented data using field notes. Field notes and files may be organized in the following ways: chronology, genre or data type, by group and individual source, by event, by topic, quantitative data.⁷⁰ Field notes provided information regarding the variables and theoretical constructs that are important to this study. Case study research may document data in two ways: coded data and narrative. Both require early identification of what relevant variables are, what issues are of concern, etc. Coded data are primarily obtained from categories dividing a variable (i.e. coursework divided into handouts, reading, and in-class assignments). Coding is

⁶⁸ Miles and Huberman, *Alternative Data Analysis*, 50.

⁶⁹ Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, 71-72; 76.

⁷⁰ Margaret D. LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul, *Analyzing and Interpreting Ethnographic Data* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 1999), 38.

used to classify interviews, documents, and other data sources, to make data easily retrievable, useable, and understandable throughout the study.⁷¹

I organized the data by: 1) developing a narrative of the College's recent history, using print data sources and participants to inform the story; and 2) coding the data to examine themes and patterns in constructs, perspectives, or behaviors. The narrative served as an effective mechanism to document specific events, such as administrative changes and accreditation processes. Following the construction of the narrative, I organized the data categorically, to quizzically examine nuances and patterns that emerged from the data which may not be obvious within the larger narrative format. I maintained a codebook to organize and document the codes that was used throughout the research. A codebook is a useful method of maintaining the names of the variables that the codes represent, and a list of the kinds of items to be coded.⁷²

I employed a bottom-up approach to data analysis, and utilized variable coding and visual methods of linking variables into categories via tree diagrams, matrices, and other cognitive networks. A tree diagram uses "logic, empirical observation, and inquiry to generate linkages or relationships along a continuum from the most abstract level (domain) to the most concrete levels (variables and items or attributes). Tree diagrams assist in the identification of patterns in the data."⁷³

Qualitative researchers expect patterns to emerge from the data. Patterns may emerge in the following ways: declaration, frequency, omission, similarity, co-occurrence

⁷¹ Stake, 29-32

⁷² LeCompte and. Schensul, *Analyzing and Interpreting Ethnographic Data*, 85.

⁷³ Stephen L. Schensul, Jean J. Schensul, Margaret D. LeCompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 1999), 59.

(when x happens, so too does y), corroboration, sequence (x happens, then y happens), and a priori hypothesizing (although new patterns and sub-patterns may emerge as the study progresses).⁷⁴ During data collection, I categorized the information, identified gaps (and collected data to compensate the gaps), and revised my propositions, as needed. As information was received, I categorized the data, and organized it for interpretation and further analysis.

I was also cautious to remain respectful of data that did not fit within my expectations or pre-established propositions. Experienced researchers assert that one should not ignore evidence that disconfirms the research theory. The process of looking for disconfirming evidence is considered analytic induction.⁷⁵

Participant-Driven Data

After each individual interview, I transcribed all interview notes, and allowed participants an opportunity to review the transcriptions for accuracy. Member-checking the responses in this manner ensured that what was recorded was what the participant intended to convey, and also allowed the participant an opportunity to expound on any ideas that he or she felt was underdeveloped in the original response. Once interview notes were reviewed and (if necessary) modified, I coded the transcripts, noting emerging themes, sub-themes, and supporting details.

After coding the transcripts and interview summaries, I created a concept matrix of the answers provided during the interview sessions. Developing a concept matrix allowed me to explore individual relationships to the College, the interrelationship

⁷⁴ LeCompte and Schensul, *Analyzing and Interpreting Ethnographic Data*, 98-105.

⁷⁵ LeCompte and Schensul, *Analyzing and Interpreting Ethnographic Data*, 77.

between various constituencies, as well as the relationship between the College and the external bodies. The concept matrix was particularly helpful in determining patterns of behavior internally, examining patterns both within the interview response from individuals as well as similarities or differences from one individual to another. It also helped to look for similarities or dissimilarities from one time period to another.⁷⁶ Further, a concept-matrix highlighted the emergence of any sense of directive, external authority, or internal crisis, as perceived by individuals and groups within the college

Written and Printed Documents

The process for examining and analyzing written/printed documents mirrored that used for processing interview transcriptions. Prior to conducting an analysis, however, I sorted written data by type (i.e. internal correspondence to constituencies, externally-sponsored or externally driven reports, institutional structural documents (i.e., manuals, directives). I reviewed the documents for statements regarding the institution's identity, culture, mission, goals, processes, etc., and coded the data using the same codes that were used for interview analysis. I developed a concept matrix for written documents as well, particularly noting any changes in institutional procedure, chain of command, and philosophical position over the time period discussed in this study. I utilized these data to better understand the official voice and position of the college as they relate to its identity, culture, finances, and organizational structure.

⁷⁶ In this research, participants tended to refer to various time periods in accordance with who the president of the college was at the time of reference.

Quality Assurance

Some important measures of the quality of qualitative research (and other research methods) are validity and reliability. Following are important considerations in the construction of a good research study:

- Construct validity refers to developing appropriate measures for the concepts being studied;
- Internal validity (usually used for causal or explanatory studies) refers to the researcher's ability to establish causal relationships which lead to other conditions; internal validity may be addressed through pattern-matching, explanation-building, and time-series analysis;
- External validity is the process of establishing the domain to which a study's findings can be generalized;
- Reliability demonstrates that the study's operations can be repeated elsewhere with the same results; reliability can be successful only if the researcher properly documents the procedures he/she uses to implement the study. Otherwise, it cannot be duplicated;⁷⁷
- Internal reliability measures whether research efforts conducted again within the same study would produce the same results.⁷⁸

Because ethnography deals with human behavior and events that cannot be rigidly controlled, some argue that validity and reliability are not appropriate ethnographic constructs. Rather, they say ethnographic research should be assessed based on credibility, goodness, believability, and potential for impact on lives and behavior.⁷⁹ Despite this assertion, I sought to maintain a high level of internal reliability amongst various participants and/or documents, as to accurately record and document events and conditions as they exist. To do this, I incorporated systematic methods of protecting the integrity of the data and my interpretations of them. Triangulation is a commonly-

⁷⁷Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* Second Edition, 32-35.

⁷⁸ Stephen L. Schensul, Jean J. Schensul, Margaret D. LeCompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 1999), 275.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 272-273.

accepted method of ensuring that data is documented accurately. Some useful types of triangulation are:

- Data source triangulation: the researcher looks to see if the phenomenon or case remains the same at other times, in other spaces, or as individuals interact differently;
- Investigator triangulation: the researcher has other researchers review the phenomenon;
- Theory triangulation: the extent to which other researchers interpret a phenomenon or case similarly;
- Methodological triangulation: using multiple methods of observations and diagnosis of the same construct.⁸⁰

I primarily used data source triangulation, methodological triangulation and member-checking to protect the data that I collected. Member checking is the process of having participants review rough drafts or notes. Because some of my participants were administrators and faculty members in higher education (with a level of interest in this topic), having select participants from these groups member-check also served as investigator triangulation as well.

Research Considerations

Access

One barrier that many researchers face with regard to conducting meaningful research is access. Access to the research domain, participants, and data is critical, but may prove to be challenging.⁸¹ For this project, access to the research domain and participants was facilitated by my connection to the institution. However, because the institution in this study is still contending with some very challenging conditions (non-

⁸⁰ Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, 114.

⁸¹ Yin, *Case Study Research*, 40-41.

accreditation, trustee board reform, economic stability, external image, etc.), gaining full access to some pertinent information was still difficult. I obtained full approval and support for this project from the managerial team of the institution. This maximized the use of internal documents, such as the accreditation report from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Bias and Researcher Participation

In a descriptive account of what an ethnographic research project is and does, Wolcott asserts that the researcher must him or herself experience not only a culture (for the purpose of understanding culture as a phenomenon, but that he or she must experience the culture of the group/entity that the research is focused on. He or she must become a part of the local scenery.⁸² I am a part of the fabric of Morris Brown College, and have experienced it from the perspective of various groups—as a student, an alumna, and an administrator. For this project, my intent, and indeed my challenge, was to simultaneously use these collective experiences for access to various individuals and groups within the college, but acknowledge and identify my subjectivity in order to conduct, participate in, and produce scientific inquiry.

Qualitative researchers recognize four categories of researcher interaction: 1) complete participant (the researcher's role as an observer is concealed as to disrupt normal activity), 2) participant as observer, 3) observer as participant, and 4) complete observer.⁸³ Research suggests that participant-observation may be stressful to a researcher, who is concerned with observing the right things and people at the right times,

⁸² Wolcott, "Ethnographic Research In Education," 331-333.

⁸³ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* , 100-101.

and making sense of what he or she is observing. A researcher must also be cautious as to not contaminating the study with his/her participation and the interdependency between the observer and the observed. Further, the researcher may feel guilty about observing people with whom he or she has come to identify.⁸⁴ As a researcher, my goal was to maintain a position whereas my role as an observer is dominant to my role as a participant

As a participant (at one point a student, and later an administrator during the years included in this study) and an observer, I have experienced prolonged engagement with the institution and the individuals associated with it. This increased my sensitivity to nuances (in language, behavior, custom and ideology) that may be hidden to the more neutral researcher. For example, there is a fine (sometimes nearly invisible, but nonetheless dichotomous) line between a student's or alumnus/a's pride or understanding of what the institution represents and its ideology, and his or her distaste or chagrin for how the institution operates. Internally, one might hear one individual exclaim, "There goes Morris Brown!" (implying that the institution is defunctive or disorganized). The same student may be heard exclaiming in a similar tone, "That's Morris Brown!" In this instance, however, the student is defending the familial camaraderie, the accomplishments of the athletic program, or the excitement of the social atmosphere, to vocal detractors at other institutions.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 103.

⁸⁵ It is common for employees, students, and alumni/ae to borrow phrases from the colleges Alma Mater when referencing the college, its mission, or its culture. For example, one favored moniker for the institution is "Dear 'Ol Morris Brown." Others frequently describe the significance of the college—as compared to other institutions—in that it serves as a "haven for all hungry souls."

I acknowledge that I have a biased perspective with regard to this particular project. I am closely connected with the project domain, and some of the participants, and am familiar with the challenges that the institution is facing due to loss of accreditation. I am a graduate of the College, and I served for a number of years in various administrative capacities. I have worked with prospective students, alumni/ae, and with donors. Thus, I have experienced firsthand the intricacies of the College's operations, and its relationship with both internal and external individuals and groups.

However, because the (ethnographic) focus of this study requires personal and intimate knowledge of both the College and the individuals associated with it, my familiarity with the domain was more of an asset than a hindrance to the project. Further, I understand the need to explore concepts and relationships as objectively as possible, to ensure the accuracy and usability of the data and research.

To minimize my bias in the implementation of this project, I limited the use of my personal knowledge about the institution to locating and accessing certain data sources that will be useful to the study, and to interpreting certain lingual nuances and phrases (e.g. "Haven for all Hungry Souls"), in understanding the data. I allowed the participants and printed data to describe events, relationships, and concepts. By knowing what exists (in terms of data and human participants) I was able to collect the necessary information. Additionally, I allowed participants and documents to suggest other potentially useful sources of information.

I kept a journal describing my experiences as the researcher of this particular project. I maintained a journal for the duration of this project, and used the journal to assist me with understanding and maintaining my own perspective with regard to some of

the information that I am documenting and analyzing. It was my intent to allow the journal to speak back to me, regarding me, so that I am able to more clearly understand my position and thoughts regarding this topic.

This chapter has provided a discussion of the methodology employed in this study. I have discussed the basic tenets involved in qualitative research, and the relevance of a cross-methodology (in the form of case study and ethnographic research) to this particular study. The chapter contains a discussion of data sources, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques used for this study. I have also disclosed my researcher-bias, and the limitations that I bring to this particular study.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Ever Let Thy Banner Be
Emblem of the Brave and Free
A Welcome True to Everyone
Until Thy Work is Done”

Introduction

A perusal of literature regarding colleges and universities, their governance, and relationships with external entities revealed that there are largely commonalities between post-secondary institutions as a whole, common threads that create the context in which higher education exists. The following sections will identify and discuss some of the thematic recurrences that inform and guide educational ideology and management in the higher education arena. The following items provide the premise for my interpretive analysis of Morris Brown College, and the impact/influence of the accreditation review process and the AME Church on the College’s governance. The items are not intended to provide a comprehensive consideration of higher education in its totality. However, each of the following discussion areas is directly related to the plight of a small, private, liberal arts historically Black college that has been scrutinized, evaluated, reprovved, and later removed from membership with an accreditation agency—the sovereign regional voice on the quality and worth of an institution of higher learning. This study of Morris Brown College was thus guided by the following areas.

Evaluation and Assessment

Higher education is under scrutiny. The worth and value of colleges and universities are weighed against internal and external standards. Colleges and universities are assessed, and value is placed upon individual institutions—by the public, by its various internal constituencies (i.e. faculty or alumni/ae), by external auditing agencies, and other entities. Overwhelmingly, the literature suggests that universities operate independently but are subject to the speculation of persons with expectations of how they should operate, whom they should serve, and to whom they should answer. What is notable, however, is the large quantity of the bodies to which colleges/universities are held accountable—the multiplicity of perspective, so to speak.

The United States, unlike other countries, has no centralized governance of education.⁸⁶ State control of education, and the proliferation of private institutions creates a complex network of educational philosophies, ideologies, and educational practices—yet most are vying for the attention of students who are largely seeking similar results, and donors and sponsors who all demand accountability. Thus, assessment of effectiveness in higher education becomes a measurement of benchmarks such as outcomes (i.e., what a graduate of a particular institution can do with his or her degree).⁸⁷

However, even the evaluation of outcomes and other similarly-measurable factors becomes muddled given the diversity in higher education, and the multifaceted landscape of the offerings and operational practices of various institutions. The birth and growth of branch campuses, for-profit institutions, and e-learning, for example, have added

⁸⁶ Thomas E. Jordan, *Measurement and Evaluation in Higher Education* (Philadelphia: The Falmer Press, 1989), 1.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 2;38-39.

assessment-worthy dimensions to higher education within recent years that academicians have not had to previously contend with. This is posing quite a challenge in the assessment of curricular compatibility and comparability.⁸⁸

Accordingly, assessors and other interested parties continue to rely on two primary considerations: the quality of the educational experience for the students that are enrolled, and the proper and efficient use of money.⁸⁹ Together, these inform and influence the overall accomplishments of an institution, and the fulfillment of its mission and purpose. However, researchers also acknowledge that assessment is a complex venture, in that many factors (academic and non-academic) affect student development and success. It becomes difficult to attribute a student's progress, or lack thereof, on one or two identifiable unit(s) or experience(s).⁹⁰

While assessment is difficult and complicated, it becomes more complex when an institution's effectiveness is being critiqued both internally and externally. While the six regional accreditation agencies have seeming autonomy and the autonomous authority to render final decisions with regard to an institution's membership, the ideology of the accreditation process is philosophically grounded in self-study.⁹¹ Institutions are expected to exhibit academic integrity, collective responsibility, and the ability to

⁸⁸ Center for Educational Research and Innovation, *Quality and Recognition in Higher Education: The Cross-Border Challenge* (Organisation For Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2004), 21-31.

⁸⁹ Ronald Baker, "Keystones of Regional Accreditation: Intentions, Outcomes, and Sustainability," in *Outcomes Assessment In Higher Education*, ed. Peter Hernon, Robert E. Dugan, and Candy Schwartz, (Westport: Libraries Unlimited, 2004), 1.

⁹⁰ Jordan, *Measurement and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 18-23; 29-36.

⁹¹ The six accreditation agencies are: The North-West Association of Schools and Colleges; The New England Association of Schools and Colleges; The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; The North Central Association of Colleges and Universities; The Western Association of Colleges and Universities; The Middle Atlantic Association of Schools and Colleges.

regulate its processes internally, to ensure compliance and effectiveness. Further, the accreditation process expects and mandates institutional self-study and evaluation from member institutions.⁹² What is not clear, however, is the process of resolving any potential discrepancies between the final assessment of the external review (through peer review) and an institution's internal conclusion, resulting from self-study. What if that policy, tradition, governance, or ideology which an institution strongly considers sound academic practice is deemed unworthy by the peer-review team assigned by an accreditation agency?

External accountability refers to the public's assurance that institutions are in faithful pursuit of their mission, and using money honestly and responsibly toward that end. Both types of accountability are best recognized when tied to a formal reporting structure (i.e. accreditation). While membership with a regional accreditation agency is perhaps the most widely-acknowledged means of holding institutions accountable, responsible governance and quality may also be enforced externally via: specialized professional accrediting bodies; regulations governing the usage of federal funding; state and local regulating bodies; boards of trustees (and their relationship to the larger society); trade union memberships (for non-academic employees); external publications (that provide the public with data regarding colleges and universities).⁹³

External governance, as it is discussed in the literature, is not a static, uncontested concept. Higher education's basic form of governance, the autonomous entity, stems

⁹² Robert Dugan, "A Local Institutional Plan," in *Outcomes Assessment In Higher Education*, eds. Peter Herson, Robert E. Dugan, and Candy Schwartz (Westport: Libraries Unlimited, 2004), 103-105.

⁹³ William G. Bowen and Harold T. Shapiro, eds. *Universities and Their Leadership*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 30-35.

from ancient Roman Empire models, and has been implemented in modification in the United States.⁹⁴ Historians note that as higher education in the United States itself has changed (particularly during the twentieth century), so too did its governing boards, necessitated by the need to adjust to the changing needs and expectations of society.⁹⁵ Thus today, post-secondary education in this country is commonly understood as an entity with which the public has the right to tinker. Federal, state, and local political leaders, the courts, federal regulatory agencies, faculty and staff unions, and specialized interest groups all assert some level and form of oversight to academic institutions.⁹⁶ By definition, the governing (trustee) board form of governance of a private college or university is structured so that professionals (e.g. faculty members) are governed by laymen (trustees). Research suggests that in order for this arrangement to be functional, there must be some level of constraint or acquiescence to academic authority shown to faculty by individual trustee members.⁹⁷ Academia must have the autonomy and liberty to exist, but it also exists within a system of checks and balances.

Researchers suggest that there are powerful social, economic, and technological forces that influence society and its institutions. The contemporary university has many activities—some non-profit, some publicly regulated, some operating in highly competitive markets. An increase in complexity, financial pressures, and accountability to the government, media, and public at large require stronger management than in the

⁹⁴ Edwin D. Duryea, *The Academic Corporation: A History of College and University Governing Boards* (New York: Falmer Press, 2000), ix.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 167-168.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

past. To cope, universities have developed administrative staffs, policies and procedures, as well as massive paperwork and regulations.⁹⁸ In short, the university is a public corporation that must be governed with competency and accountability to stakeholders.⁹⁹ This is true of public institutions as well as private institutions that accept and utilize public monies and private philanthropic gifts toward operational costs.

In exchange for the receipt and use of public money, the public expects post-secondary institutions to use the money “to a good end and with demonstrable benefit.”¹⁰⁰ Recent decades have yielded an increase in the level of external pressure for greater efficiency and better documentation of results. Government’s provisions of funds became more limited, and competition for resources heightened—even to the point where post-secondary institutions vied for the same monies as other entities (i.e. human and social service agencies), increasing the emphasis on fiscal accountability.¹⁰¹

Even more, private colleges and universities have generally had to strive more persistently to vie for a smaller percentage of available public money. Private college officials often seek to demonstrate that, albeit non-public entities, private institutions are an efficient use of state money, and may offer programs not available at public institutions. To their benefit, however, private institutions have the autonomy to create, eliminate, or modify services in response to external forces more easily than public

⁹⁸ James J. Duderstadt, “Governing the Twenty-first Century University,” in *Competing Conceptions of Academic Governance*, ed. William Tierney, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 138-142.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁰⁰ Laurence Marcus, “Self –Study In Higher Education: The Path to Excellence,” *ERIC Digest* (1984).

¹⁰¹ Bruce Anthony Jones, “Toward Strategic Planning: Issues and Status of Black Colleges”, in *Black Colleges: New Perspectives on Policy and Practice*, ed. M. Christopher Brown II and Kassie Freeman (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 151-152.

institutions—although they may mimic their public counterparts in many ways. Thus, autonomy and innovative programming have become tools for the private institution to attract and retain public support in an ever dynamic and competitive market.¹⁰²

Internally, the various counterparts of an institution are expected to adhere to the institution's mission, self-evaluate, and work diligently toward the improvement of processes and results. An institution may measure its effectiveness and efficiency using the following indicators: quality of faculty; quality of students; quality of research and scholarship; quality of curriculum, courses and instruction, and; coordination and monitoring of the mechanisms of quality control.¹⁰³ The literature does not specifically address, however, the process by which institutions may define quality internally (regarding students or curriculum).¹⁰⁴ The differences in individual institutions' ideologies, missions and approaches to education will likely be reflected in the way that the institutions define quality, as well as their subsequent approach to providing a quality educational experience.¹⁰⁵

Interestingly, there seems to be substantially more literature on the benchmarks created by external bodies than there is about internal control indicators. Externally, factors such as faculty caliber, graduate and professional school admission, ratings by

¹⁰²Jordan, *Measurement and Evaluation in Higher Education* , 3.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 89-95.

¹⁰⁴ There is some literature on the self-study process that provides the steps toward self-evaluation and goal attainment. However, it is difficult to discern, in the literature, what quality means to specific institutions, how it is recognized, how the definition was constructed, and if it is a dynamic concept.

¹⁰⁵ While I will address institutional governance in greater detail later in the dissertation, it is important to note that research suggests that governance may be enhanced when participants at a college or university are speaking the same language (i.e. to use the verbiage "customer" or "student". A shared language does not mean consensus, but it does set the foundation for a productive dialogue on the institution's history, current circumstances, and future. See William Tierney, "Improving Academic Governance," in *Competing Conceptions of Academic Governance*, ed. William Tierney (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2004), 212.

secondary educators and job attainment of graduates seem to be the most common indicators of quality.¹⁰⁶ However, given the diversity of mission, purpose, and scope of post-secondary education, it would seem plausible that research would reflect the process by which individual (types of) institutions define, measure, and report quality. Yet, even as individual institutions must, in respect to individualized missions, define and work within somewhat tailored definitions of quality as well as internal definitions and practices, internal accountability is still intricately connected to external accountability. External accountability is the understood measure of an institution's effectiveness and competitiveness, while internal accountability may account for the sensitive issues within an institution (i.e., personnel and structural decisions).¹⁰⁷ Both are undoubtedly crucial to the effective operation of an institution, although internal accountability may make allowances for the cultural or organizational perspective in the final assessment of the institution's worth.

In terms of attracting and maintaining the support of the public, however, internal approval must translate into something that the public values as well. Educators recognize that internal quality (no matter how it is defined or crafted) only exists to the extent that external entities recognize it. Thus, to be successful, each organization must find the balance between the demarcations of success as defined by internal constituents and quality as defined and recognized by consumers and supporters- the appraising public.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Larry H. Litten and Alfred E. Hall, "In the Eyes of Our Beholders," *Journal of Higher Education*, 60 no. 3 (May/June 1989): 305.

¹⁰⁷ William G. Bowen and Harold T. Shapiro, eds. *Universities and Their Leadership* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 28-40.

¹⁰⁸ Litten and Hall, "In the Eyes of Our Beholders," 321.

Planning and Governance

“Institutions can go along for the ride—until the ride ends. Or each institution can shape its future within the scope of its vision and mission.”¹⁰⁹ Planning and governance are closely related; at the institutional level, it is critical to the survival of the organization. It is future-oriented. It is the organization’s acknowledgement that it desires a future, a specific future, and that it has plans.

Planning is defined as “a managerial activity which involves determining your fundamental mission as an institution, analyzing the external environment, and the internal culture (including its underlying value system), setting objectives, deciding on a specific action plan needed to reach the objectives, and then adapting the original plan as feedback on results is received.”¹¹⁰ Planning is a coordinated effort between administrators, faculty members, trustees, and perhaps others. Institutions, recognizing that planning requires expertise and collaboration, may establish planning teams to ensure the involvement of all key players on a college’s campus. Researchers acknowledge that the president must be actively involved in the planning process in order for the plan to be successful.

Planning at a college or university is unique in ways that perhaps distinguish them from organizations in other industries. Education is, perhaps, internally defined yet externally-driven. The college is neither simply a business nor is it an independent collection of individuals. Colleges have a commitment to critical inquiry and a

¹⁰⁹ Carle M. Hunt, Kenneth Oosting, Robert Stevens, David Loudon, and R. Henry Migliore, *Strategic Planning For Private Higher Education*, xi.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

commitment to educating students.¹¹¹ Thus, both the student and the production of knowledge are the intended results, and both must be reflected in the planning and governance of an institution.

Much of the literature regarding institutional planning and governance focuses on long-range planning and strategic planning. According to one text, there is a distinctive difference between the two. Long-range planning is static; it is focused on what has already happened, what has created the conditions that currently define the organization. Strategic planning, in contrast, begins with a scan of the environment in which the institution operates. It involves trend forecasting, goal setting, and the implementation and monitoring of results. It requires administrators to set identifiable goals, assign responsibility to persons who will accomplish the goals, and a timetable for attaining results.¹¹² Strategic planning is the how-to-get-to-where-we-want-to-be planning process.¹¹³ Literature on strategic planning reflects that it is often prompted by crisis as opposed to proactive deliberate forecasting.¹¹⁴ This assertion is intriguing, if one considers that the potential loss of accreditation may be a perceived threat to most institutions. Absent this threat, according to this assertion, perhaps self-study, strategic planning, and calculated development may occur less often. Accreditation, in this vein, is a silent (or perhaps not so silent) dictator of college policy.

¹¹¹ William Tierney, *Building The Responsive Campus* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 12-16.

¹¹² Carle M. Hunt, Kenneth Oosting, Robert Stevens, David Loudon, and R. Henry Migliore, *Strategic Planning For Private Higher Education*, 7-9.

¹¹³ Elaine Howell, "Strategic Planning For a New Century: Process Over Product," *ERIC Digest* (2000).

¹¹⁴ Bruce Anthony Jones, "Toward Strategic Planning: Issues and Status of Black Colleges," *Black Colleges: New Perspectives on Policy and Practice* (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 151.

A shorter, more task-specific process relates to tactical planning. A tactical plan is a short-term action plan that is developed to address specific issues (threats or opportunities). It may be used to move the institution toward its long-term goals.¹¹⁵ In periods of unrest (e.g., the potential loss of accreditation), it is plausible that an institution will utilize a combination of these planning techniques and categories. Long-term planning, strategic planning and tactical planning may be used in concert, but requires the consent and participation of various entities within an organization. The literature does not provide a clear understanding of how much time (in an effective, well-run organization) an administrator or faculty member can expect to spend (weekly, monthly, or annually) participating in planning processes to sustain the long-term viability of the institution. Clearly, planning takes time and coordination. It would be helpful to have an understanding of the time commitment, and organizational structure (e.g. personnel hired specifically for planning and forecasting), that may increase an institution's ability to effectively plan and operate.

Cohen and March suggest that planning is essentially a function of the executive leadership of an institution. Presidents, for example, recognize the importance and purpose of leadership. Administrators recognize that a plan ought to involve academic planning, fiscal planning, physical planning, personnel planning, research planning, and organizational planning. However, despite its recognized importance, traditionally planning rarely took place on a consistent basis in American institutions, and many times

¹¹⁵ Carle M. Hunt, Kenneth Oosting, Robert Stevens, David Loudon, and R. Henry Migliore, *Strategic Planning For Private Higher Education*, 7-9.

decisions were made independent of an existing plan—which itself was often under revision.¹¹⁶

Planning is intricately tied to the mission of an institution, and will reflect the values of the institution. The mission of an institution is the institution's extrapolation of its reason for being, and is often accompanied by a vision of what the institution might one day be, given the accomplishment of goals.¹¹⁷ Thus, the plan, driven by the mission becomes the logical starting-point for the collective operation of the college or university.

Effective managerial control allows information flow to guide an organization, allocation of resources, and the attempt to accomplish goals and objectives. Such procedure is necessarily situation-specific, and must work within the context of the specific institution.¹¹⁸ Specifically, planning must accommodate the needs and goals of the particular institution. Some institutions may position themselves to construct buildings to compete with other institutions. Some may generally focus on meeting the demands of the students. Some circumstances may necessitate an emphasis on meeting bond requirements, lowering debt, etc. Still others may desire increased technology, tighter security, or development.¹¹⁹

Institutional planning is inherently connected to institutional governance. Governance is the mechanism and processes through which an institution's goals and

¹¹⁶ Michael D. Cohen and James G. March, *Leadership and Ambiguity*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 112-113.

¹¹⁷ Carle M. Hunt, Kenneth Oosting, Robert Stevens, David Loudon, and R. Henry Migliore, *Strategic Planning For Private Higher Education*, 53-55.

¹¹⁸ Joseph Maciarrello and Willard Enteman, "A System For Management Control in Private Colleges," *Journal of Higher Education*. XLV no. 8 (Nov. 1974): 595.

¹¹⁹ Susan M. Cox, "Tackling Key Challenges," *American School and University* 70 issue 5 (Jan.98):49.

operations are carried through. Institutional governance is neither simplistic, nor static. Conversations about governance include assessments of effective college leadership, budgetary concerns, changing student demographics, and the increasing involvement of governing boards and alumni/ae.¹²⁰ Colleges and universities today are different from colleges and universities at the beginning of the twentieth century. During the early part of the twentieth century, the college or university president, a select group of other administrators, and few others organized the goals of the institution and determined how it would carry out its mission. Faculty members did not have tenure or much leadership.¹²¹ Today, a deliberation of college governance must include considerations of internal and external forces that influence what the leadership of the college must focus on.

During the 1990s, colleges and universities focused heavily on two issues: growth and change. Who directs the growth and change are contestable questions, and have greatly affected academicians' concept of effective governance, leadership, and control issues.¹²² As a result, researchers have developed competing models of what proponents of each say are effective governance. Some advocate management with a focus on traditionally non-academic principles such as stakeholders and accountability measures. Some propose unionization (in which faculty bodies orchestrate a rigorous form of participation in the governance of an institution, as a mechanism for collective bargaining). Still others support the idea of shared governance (which involves collective

¹²⁰ Mary Burgan, "Why Governance, Why Now," in *Competing Conceptions of Academic Governance*, ed. William Tierney (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), vii.

¹²¹ William Tierney, *Building the Responsive Campus* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1999), 1-2.

¹²² Mary Burgan, "Why Governance, Why Now," vii-viii.

decision-making regarding areas such as peer review in hiring and retention of colleagues, curricular revision, admissions policies, etc.)¹²³ Shared governance is given the preponderance of coverage in the literature, and seems to be the most acceptable approach to governance that protects the involvement and interests of various parties, academic freedom, and diversity of perspective.

Instead of autonomous leadership, most leaders in higher education (provosts, department chairs, and faculty leaders) believe that shared governance is important in an institution.¹²⁴ Some studies of contemporary institutions show that the president of a college often has less power than people think; much of what the president does is ceremonial or consists of reactive activities that must be attended to at the request of others.¹²⁵ Shared governance can mean a committee or faculty senate, a president's collaboration with faculty on a decision, etc.¹²⁶ Proponents of shared governance posit that there are powerful social, economic, and technological forces that influence society and its institutions. It is questionable, then, whether a board of lay people (e.g. trustees) alone can effectively manage the complex financial, management, and legal affairs of the university, or provide oversight to the large complex institutions that comprise higher education in the United States.¹²⁷

¹²³ Ibid., viii-xiii.

¹²⁴ William Tierney, "Improving Academic Governance," in *Competing Conceptions of Academic Governance* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 202.

¹²⁵ Cohen and March, *Leadership and Ambiguity*, xix.

¹²⁶ William Tierney, "Improving Academic Governance," in *Competing Conceptions of Academic Governance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2004), 202.

¹²⁷ James D. Duderstadt, "Governing in the Twenty-first Century," in *Competing Conceptions of Academic Governance*, 138-139.

Shared governance is both complex and contested. For some, shared governance means consulting with various constituency groups. For others, mere consultation is patronizing, and is an illusion of shared governance.¹²⁸ Still, others argue that shared governance may be an encumbrance that slows down an institution's ability to adapt to external changes and contexts effectively. For example, because of community activities and community relationships, campuses are often in situations that require quick action and response (not regarding curriculum or research). Issues of planning (i.e. property acquisition) require immediate action that shared governance is not equipped to handle.¹²⁹

Tierney suggests that colleges and universities must undergo dramatic organizational transformation based on the following views of academic institutions. First, academe is less fiscally healthy today than a generation ago; some would argue that the U.S. has under-funded higher education since the mid 1970s. As costs (i.e. higher faculty and staff salaries/benefits, more student services) have increased, revenue hasn't been able to keep pace. Institutions raised tuition, but found that the need for financial aid was much greater, even more than was available in federal grants. Basically, revenue has become barely enough to cover expenditures, much less meeting the expectations of society.¹³⁰

Second, there is the on-going consideration of who should go to college, and what should be taught. Statistics maintain that the higher the skill level and training, the higher

¹²⁸ Tierney, "Improving Academic Governance," in *Competing Conceptions of Academic Governance*, 206.

¹²⁹ John Flower, *Downstairs, Upstairs: The Changed Spirit and Face of College Life in America* (Akron: The University of Akron Press, 2003), 15-16.

¹³⁰ Tierney, *Building the Responsive Campus*, 3-4

the earnings. This raises questions about the canon and curriculum, multiculturalism, and other pedagogical issues regarding what students should learn. Post-secondary institutions must address who needs what training, for what.¹³¹

Third, technology is changing the face of college governance. Computers, faxes, email, voicemail, teleconferences, and virtual reality have changed the way the academic system works in less than a generation. Technology affects how individuals work with others in the organization and those external to the institution. Prior to the technology-driven age, administrators, trustees, and their cabinets controlled and explained issues to the constituencies. Now, all participants can receive the same sort of information within a matter of minutes.¹³²

Bowen, too, suggests that the cost of operating and maintaining post-secondary educational institutions has complicated the simplicity of academic pursuit and research. He reminds us that American higher education has benefited the nation, increasing our ability to compete (technologically) with other nations and increasing the productivity and quality of life of individuals. However, recent decades have produced a scarcity of resources available to colleges and universities, and these institutions have had to operate on what he terms stringent budgets—a feat well accomplished by some, while some smaller and obscure colleges have faced bankruptcy and closure. In response, modern colleges and universities have attacked the increasing need for revenue in various ways—such as cuts in expenditures as well as revenue-generating initiatives such as research institutes, land development, conferences, and partnerships with major business firms. He

¹³¹ Ibid., 5.

¹³² Ibid., 9-10.

cautions, however, that these initiatives have not demonstrated an ability to improve educational quality.¹³³

Thus, the need for effective planning and governance is given considerable coverage in literature regarding higher education. Planning and governance involve strategy. It is about knowing the institution, its environment(s), and its constituents. Two strategic planning management models that help to understand how organizations (and the people in them) operate are the Adaptive Model and the Interpretive Model. The Adaptive model considers the organization as an organism, with its own goals. The return, or benefits, to members of the organization are considered costs. The organization in this instance must remain cognizant of market trends in order to meet expectations and to maintain adequate resources. The Interpretive Model considers the organization as a social contract, with no identity apart from its members. The network of participants comprises the organization, and participants have individual goals that they pursue through association with the organization. Important to this model is the use of symbols and communication to convey the collective reality of participants (called the “management of meaning”).¹³⁴

Successful institutions, according to one researcher, employ a combination of both models—knowing, for example, market trends and environmental contexts, yet also developing detailed conceptual systems and communication mechanisms (used to guide and interpret changes in the organization).¹³⁵ Once again, however, there are questions

¹³³ Howard R. Bowen, “Opportunities For Optimism,” *Change* 6 Issue 6 (Nov./Dec. 1994): 37-41.

¹³⁴ Ellen Earle Chaffee, “Successful Strategic Management in Small Private Colleges,” *Journal of Higher Education*. 55 no. 2 (March/April 1984): 213.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 214.

regarding who, specifically, in an institution is likely or logically responsible for the creation of the meaning, for conducting the environmental scan, etc. Even more, if (as the definition of the Interpretive Model suggests) individuals within an organization are there to accomplish their own goals (through affiliation with the organization), is there a category or group of individuals that are more likely to have a vested interest in the survival of the organization as a whole? Who takes on the onus of managing the meaning that is the crucial part of the implementation of this model?¹³⁶

Regardless of the approach taken to management in higher education, much of the literature seems to acknowledge that post-secondary institutions are in constant motion to survive or compete. Institutional policy and practices change periodically for two reasons: to ensure financial support from special-interest supporters and in response to what is being done at other colleges/universities.¹³⁷ Institutions, driven by the need for support and students, must find ways to address threats to its existence, while remaining productive enough to attract and maintain a student body. The rotation of periodic accreditation creates a cycle of study-and-assessment that requires constant action and reaction from higher education administrators. Colleges under close scrutiny from accreditation agencies have had to take measures such as freezing hiring, liquidating assets, and partnering with private companies for program implementation. Stabilization

¹³⁶ In posing this question, the immediate answer that comes to mind is the president or other upper-level administrator at the institution. However, when crisis results in frequent presidential succession and other administrative turnover, what then happens to the process of managing the meaning? Further, if the academic unit of an institution is charged with developing and approving the mission and vision of the institution, what role does it play in the communication of the “collective reality” of the organization’s members—and is their direction and input well-received by other members of the organization?

¹³⁷ Paul Dressel, “Mission, Organization, and Leadership,” *Journal of Higher Education*, 58 no. 1 (Jan/Feb. 1987): 105-106.

and growth are commendable from the perspective of accrediting bodies.¹³⁸ Further, when not effecting self-improvement strategies to maintain accreditation, institutions are in direct competition with other colleges and universities for the same pool of students. Administrators accept that one cannot market a product (or institution) at a higher price than the competition unless the product (or institution) is distinctive or serves a special need.¹³⁹ This is particularly significant for private colleges, whose cost of attendance tends to be higher than state-funded institutions.

However, along with the need for external value and appreciation and a competitive edge within higher education comes the need for an institution to maintain its integrity. Research suggests that the basic integrity of private colleges may be threatened by the need to adapt to survive. Studies indicate that a change in mission is a complex venture, and may result in adverse morale and other environmental effects in addition to the obtainment of financial resources and/or other support.¹⁴⁰

The literature suggests that an institution without effective planning is an institution that will not exist very long. Planning governs behavior, and is the root of logical, goal-oriented behavior. The implication of the texts is that effective planning leads to effective results. Some authors suggest that planning does not always lead to expected results, and that adaptation may be required.¹⁴¹ It is unclear, however, the extent to which an effective plan (with undesired or unexpected results stemming directly from

¹³⁸ Ben Gose, "Meeting Community Needs," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49 no. 47 (8/1/2004): A23.

¹³⁹ Richard Anderson, "A Financial and Environmental Analysis of Strategic Policy Changes at Small Private Colleges," *Journal of Higher Education* 49 no. 1 (1978): 30.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 43

¹⁴¹ Carle M. Hunt, Kenneth Oosting, Robert Stevens, David Loudon, and R. Henry Migliore, *Strategic Planning For Private Higher Education*, 43-45.

the plan or loopholes in the plan) is awarded or accepted by external auditors, despite undesirable results or effects. Is there flexibility, from the public's perspective, for "an A for effort" type of conditional approval? It would seem, given the competitive market of post-secondary education, that almost good enough (in terms of planning and governance) simply is not good enough.

Leadership in Higher Education

Although leadership and governance are inextricably connected, leadership is deserving of its own consideration, and is significant to the study of higher education. Leadership is, perhaps, the catalyst for governance. Organizational re-design relies on leadership at various levels; individuals alone cannot transform an organization, although leadership can help to create or stimulate an environment for change.¹⁴² Thus, governance (and planning), effective or ineffective, flows directly from the leadership, or lack thereof, of the academic and administrative structure of a college or university. Ambiguous though the term may be, an understanding of leadership will shape and help to define the decision-making process, and the resulting life and happenings of an institution.

Leadership and management are two terms that are commonly linked in texts concerning higher education and administration. Leaders must have followers; others recognize them as those that understand their role in securing resources for the institution. A leader recognizes potential in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person. A manager, it is said, is responsible for the performance of those to whom

¹⁴² Tierney, *Building the Responsive Campus*, 48.

his/her performance depends. Managers are often focused on maintaining the existing organization, while leaders are often committed to change.¹⁴³

Expectations in higher education have increased, while confidence in it has declined. The focus on accreditation is a direct reflection of the desire of those external (and internal) to an institution for accountability of activities, justifications of decisions, etc. Accreditation is (ideally) a safeguard against arbitrary power, corruption, fraud, manipulation, and malfeasance.¹⁴⁴ All of these are negative conditions that happen as a direct result of someone's (some leader's?) action(s). Leadership, then becomes a defining mechanism for an institution (and its operative effectiveness), and is thus vitally important to its operations and survival.

The literature offers a wealth of information about good leadership, and what is required of effective leadership. Administrators are expected to manage the institution to maximize the benefit to the people the institution serves.¹⁴⁵ How, then, is maximum benefit defined when resources—and therefore services—are scarce or limited, and how then is good leadership defined? The literature suggests that presidents who are recognized as successful usually preside over schools that are both larger and wealthier. Successful presidents are presidents at successful schools. Factors that are indicative of success include fiscal status, educational programs, growth, quiet (campus atmosphere),

¹⁴³ Kathryn Hoff, "Leaders and Managers: Essential Skills Required Within Higher Education," *Higher Education* 38 (1999): 314.

¹⁴⁴ William G. Bowen and Harold T. Shapiro, eds. *Universities and Their Leadership* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 16.

¹⁴⁵ Paul Dressel, "Mission, Organization, and Leadership," *Journal of Higher Education* 58 no. 1 (Jan/Feb. 1987): 101.

quality of faculty, quality of students, respect of faculty, respect of students, respect of community, etc.¹⁴⁶

Is the leader of a struggling institution never to be deemed successful, because benefits and outputs are necessarily minimal? Or does the leader of a struggling institution receive his or her atonement from the continued survival of the institution? Contrary to popular beliefs, research indicates that some functions of an institution are unaffected by the particular leader that is in office. The president for example, is widely accepted as the determining factor upon which an organization's success rests—we often contend that the success of a particular organization will follow on the coattails of effective leadership—as if the latter creates the former. In fact, some literature suggests that this is fallible; although there is evidence that the president of an institution does have a profound impact on its operation and success, there is also evidence that management often only has a small impact on organizational performance.¹⁴⁷ The college presidency is a reactive position. The president is concerned with the concerns and interests of others—the trustees, the faculty, community leaders, and students.¹⁴⁸

Rather than attributing the success or failure of an institution squarely in the lap of its leadership (its president), Cohen and March suggest that management and problem-solving at an institution may likened to what they describe as a garbage-can model of decision-making. In accordance with this model, an organization (a college or university) is considered a collection of solutions looking for problems, issues and feelings looking

¹⁴⁶ Cohen, and March, *Leadership and Ambiguity*, 43.

¹⁴⁷ Robert Birnbaum, "Presidential Succession and Institutional Functioning In Higher Education," *Journal of Higher Education* 60 no. 2 (March/April 1989): 123.

¹⁴⁸ Cohen, and March, *Leadership and Ambiguity*, 1.

for decision-situations in which they may be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer, and an outcome or interpretation of several relatively independent streams in an organization.¹⁴⁹ This theory meshes well with other theories (i.e. the Interpretive Model of organizational governance) that consider the multiple interests and perspectives of various individuals and constituency groups in an organization. In this vein, the leadership of an organization may be considered a collection of individuals/groups and their interests, not a lone person or small cadre of persons in whose hands the fate of the organization lies.

Management in higher education often requires a different skill set than was learned in academic training. Rising leaders are expected to adapt to new expectations.¹⁵⁰ In meeting contextual demands, leaders must understand the organization and the people that are involved. An effective administrator, then, will be able to gain the understanding and support of diverse groups of people connected to an institution's mission.

Just as significant is the coupling between leadership and culture. Colleges and universities are organizational cultures (of structures and processes that change and adapt). The organizational culture has a notable impact on academic quality and governance issues. Improvement is effectuated through an interpretation of the organization as a dynamic culture.¹⁵¹ Leaders, create, manage, and operate within a given culture.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 81-89.

¹⁵⁰ Sharon A. McDade, "Leadership In Higher Education," *ERIC Digest* 1988.

¹⁵¹ Tierney, "Improving Academic Governance," in *Competing Conceptions of Academic Governance*, 203.

The contextual conditions of an organization directly affect a leader's ability to accomplish given goals. In fact, strategic planning and financial management, it is said, begins with environmental scanning.¹⁵² Leaders must understand the key players in an institution in order to foster an environment where various counterparts work to carry out the mission of the institution.

In addition to carrying forth the mission of the institution, there is often the (sometimes underlying or unspoken) understanding that an effective leader will effect change. It seems that post-secondary institutions are not expected to remain stagnant (at least the literature does not speak directly to successful institutions that in fact desire to maintain a status quo). Instead, texts speak about change. Change takes place to ensure financial support from special-interest supporters. Change is influenced by the activities of other institutions. Change results from shifts in the demographics of the school.¹⁵³ Change happens. And leaders are expected to drive, direct, and harness that change for the benefit of the institution and those that it serves.

Accreditation and Self-Study

The amount of literature on accreditation is relatively small within the larger body of information relating to higher education and its governance, though its principles (accountability, fiscal efficiency, self-study, etc.) are found in plenty elsewhere. Accreditation is a peer review process that rates an educational institution's purpose, effectiveness, education program, educational support services, and, administrative

¹⁵² Kathryn Hoff, "Leaders and Managers: Essential Skills Required Within Higher Education," *Higher Education* 38 (1999): 328.

¹⁵³ Paul Dressel, "Mission, Organization, and Leadership," *Journal of Higher Education*, 58 no. 1 (Jan/Feb. 1987), 103-106.

processes. The review process is conducted by a team of faculty and administrators from member institutions across a region.¹⁵⁴ It was difficult to ascertain how site review teams are constructed, who is eligible to review institutions (i.e. whether the institution to which the individual belongs must be in good standing with the accreditation body), or whether it is preferable or allowable that the same review team visit an institution during follow-up reviews (after an institution is placed on warning or after the next full accreditation review cycle).¹⁵⁵

The results of accreditation are clear. Accreditation provides validation to the certificates, diplomas, degrees, and credits awarded by an institution. It rates the college or university's acceptability. At the core of the whole concept, however, is comparability. Accreditation evaluates the worth of an institution based on a standard derived from the policies, practices, and effectiveness of other institutions.¹⁵⁶ Administrators at four-year colleges desire accreditation for the legitimacy that it provides to the institution. It speaks to the quality of the school's operations, and provides the prestige that accompanies membership amongst ranked peers.¹⁵⁷ Subsequently, it is the determining factor of an institution's eligibility for state licensure and federal funding.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Ronald Kern "A Model Addressing Institutional Effectiveness: Preparing For Regional Accreditation," *Community College Review* 18. no. 2 (Fall 1990): 23.

¹⁵⁵ I expected a closer review of primary documents to provide the answers to these and other similar questions. However, the general literature regarding accreditation focuses more on the purpose of accreditation, and the significance of the relationship between an institution, self-study, and the accreditation body and process.

¹⁵⁶ Jerry Miller and L.E. Boswell, "Accreditation, Assessment and the Credentialing of Educational Accomplishment," *Journal of Higher Education* 50 no. 2 (1979): 219, 223.

¹⁵⁷ David G. Imig, and Mary Harrill-McLellan, "Accrediting Standards Affecting Mid-Level Teacher Evaluation Preparation in the Community College," *New Directions For Community Colleges* 121 (Spring 2003): 80.

¹⁵⁸ Laurence Marcus, "Self -Study In Higher Education: The Path to Excellence," *ERIC Digest* (1984).

Although accreditation agencies are autonomous to the institutions that they review, the purpose and process of accreditation, as well as the accreditation agencies themselves, are not above censure. Critics admonish that regional accreditors have “vague and widely varying standards” and that there is a reluctance to penalize weak institutions. Further, they assert that the standard process of accreditation is a mere “stamp of approval” that does not offer a mechanism for addressing the real issues that an institution contends with.¹⁵⁹ Denial of accreditation, say its detractors, is nearly impossible, compounded by too much secrecy regarding the review team’s report and the weaknesses of the institution under review.¹⁶⁰

There is, however, an alternative approach to the standard self-study process. The Academic Quality Improvement Project, or AQIP, is designed to allow college administrators to use numerical targets to determine success in reaching certain goals. AQIP began in 1999, with a \$1.5 million grant provided by the Pew Charitable Trusts to several regional accreditors. The money was provided to encourage the agencies to expand their standards, which previously focused heavily on standards such as endowment size. The goal is to create a greater emphasis on factors such as student learning. The literature suggests that this system is favored by administrators who desire quantifiable meaning and/or results from the self-study process. AQIP, unlike the peer-review system, mandates the achievement of action-project goals, but does not require site visits.¹⁶¹ Instead, regions that employ the AQIP system require institutions to submit

¹⁵⁹ Ben Gose, “A Radical Approach to Accreditation,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 49 no. 10 (11/1/2002): A25.

¹⁶⁰ Laurence Marcus, “Self –Study In Higher Education: The Path to Excellence,” *ERIC Digest* (1984).

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

a “results inventory” every seven years; institutions must also undergo a validation process based on that inventory. This system provides continuous analysis to the institution, as opposed to a ten-year review of overall operations.¹⁶²

Others (likely those who have struggled to meet accreditation standards), however, may argue that accreditation—or standardization in general—is not as easy as it may seem in theory. A review of accreditation review documents, self-study reports, and financial records indicate that it is difficult to operate a small, poor, private college in contemporary times.¹⁶³ Some small private colleges are saddled with overwhelming debt, are dependent on religious institutions for resources, and may be threatened with closure. In recent years, a distinctive majority of the colleges that have been placed on probation are private institutions, and most have enrollments under 1,000.¹⁶⁴

Advocates of accreditation reform posit that the far-reaching authority of the accreditation process potentially threatens the autonomy of individual institutions.¹⁶⁵ Even beyond the vast authority of the regional accrediting bodies, postsecondary educators must also consider the prospective implications of a stronger national presence in the evaluation (and accreditation) process. During the years 1993 to 1996, the federal government, higher education officials, and regional accrediting representatives worked to create a national agency on accrediting, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The creation of this agency stemmed in part from a growing

¹⁶² Beth McMurtrie, “Accreditors Revamp Policies to Stress Student Learning,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 46 no. 44 (7//2000): A29.

¹⁶³ Beth McMurtrie, “A College Emerges From Accrediting Limbo,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 48. no. 5 (9/28/2001): A41.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, A41.

¹⁶⁵ Thomas E. Dillon, “Coming After U,” *Policy Review* Issue 72 (Spring 1995):39.

hostility toward current accreditation standards, grievances from the higher education community, and a general lack of understanding of accreditation (by both the public and practitioners).¹⁶⁶

Although regional accreditors desire to maintain independent autonomy regarding issues of accreditation and accreditation reform, CHEA was established, and is charged with addressing a number of issues, including: a) conflicting expectations from various constituencies regarding what accreditation should and can do to promote quality in higher education; b) the potential need for increased federal presence in the process; and 3) the prospect of increased levels of governmental regulation in higher education.¹⁶⁷

Despite an effort (supported by accreditors and educational bureaucrats in Washington, DC) to establish a national accrediting body, critics continue to push principles of self-determination and mission development at the institutional level. Accrediting bodies have, in some instances, gone so far as to determine an institution's ideal racial diversity, have directed the re-structuring of a board of trustees, have mandated the re-structuring of an institution's curriculum (based on diversity), and other similar infringements. These—to those that oppose a national accrediting system in which regional accreditors would work for, and pay dues to, a national accrediting body—are examples of what can or will go awry with a centralized body with overextended and unwarranted authority over an institution's practices.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Harland G. Boland, "Creating CHEA: Building a New National Organization on Accrediting," *Journal of Higher Education* 70, issue 4 (1999): 357-388.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 357-388.

¹⁶⁸ Dillon, "Coming After U," *Policy Review* 72 (Spring, 1995): 39-43.

The cadres of dissatisfied educators and institutions have spawned responses that both accreditors and the federal government have had to contend with. New and newly-considered changes in accreditation policy reflect a growing disgruntlement with the imposition of non-academic standards on colleges/universities.¹⁶⁹ Thomas Aquinas College of California was reportedly the first institution to resist non-academic standards. Here, the ability or right of an institution to define its own purpose and procedure became potent issues and challenges between institution and accreditor. Aquinas, a Catholic-based institution offering only a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Education, faced criticism from the Western Association of Colleges and Schools (WASC) for what WASC considered to be a lack of diversity in its curriculum (based solely on a “Great Books” model). The College rejected a push by WASC to censure its curriculum according to external standards, and mobilized similar responses and support from other institutions in California—the California Institute of Technology and the University of Southern California amongst them. Aquinas was successful in its push to demonstrate its academic integrity and effectiveness through internally-derived standards, and was reaffirmed accreditation in 1992, at the close of a heated debate with WASC.¹⁷⁰

For their part, accrediting agencies are not completely unresponsive to the suggestions and admonishments of professionals in education. The federal government, in response to critics and growing dissatisfaction amongst some educators, is pushing regional accreditors to provide greater evidence of student achievement in their reviews of institutions. Around 2002, regional accreditors were scheduled to revamp various

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 39-43.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

policies, in response to complaints from educators that the accreditation review process was tedious, and did not yield usable results to the institutions. The new policies were intended to place greater emphasis on what a student learns and how he or she learns it.¹⁷¹

Finances and Fiscal Management

Colleges and universities, as a collective, are not money-generating entities. According to research, most small colleges, for example, are operating at a deficit in order to maintain a competitive edge with other institutions (and just to survive).¹⁷² This is poignantly true for Black institutions where administrators must ferret out new sources of revenue, and increase productivity, to ensure the institution's continued existence.¹⁷³ A limited amount of funds requires administrators to be creative in managing struggling institutions. Adjustments (e.g. hiring freezes, reduced salaries, and increased collections on student-debt) enable colleges to accommodate inadequate budgets.¹⁷⁴

Financial flexibility and resources in higher education are highly valued, and even private colleges rely heavily on government subsidy for a great percentage of their operating budgets. Recently, however, government support of higher education has dwindled. During the 1980s, there was a shift in the type of money provided by the government from grants to loans, increasing the burden of revenue generation,

¹⁷¹ Beth McMurtrie, "Accreditors Revamp Policies to Stress Student Learning," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 46 no. 44 (7/7/2000): A29.

¹⁷² Martin Van Der Werf, "Junk Bond Colleges," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49 no. 22 (2/7/2003): A21.

¹⁷³ Meggett Brown, "Bottom Line Goals," *Black Issues In Higher Education* 18 no. 20 (11/22/2001): 45.

¹⁷⁴ Van Der Werf, "Junk Bond Colleges," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49 no. 22, A21.

particularly for private institutions.¹⁷⁵ The outlook for private colleges has not necessarily improved since then. In 2003, for example, many private colleges nation-wide faced reductions in state government funding. Although officials at independent colleges have continuously argued that these institutions often provide services and programs not offered at state schools and are therefore an efficient investment of public money, states (themselves faced with limited funds) have at times been harsh and less-than-liberal while doling out resources. Not all states provide monetary support to private institutions. However, of those that did, some states in 2003 reduced the amount given to non-public institutions, while some did not give any money at all.¹⁷⁶

Given that the proverbial cup does not runneth over in higher education, college and university administrators are challenged to find the funding necessary to accomplish the tenets and goals as outlined in their respective missions. As a result, many institutions are using more of their endowment funds than has been the traditional norm. At one time, endowments were considered rainy-day funds. Now, however, many institutions use their endowment returns for up to 40% of their operating expenses.¹⁷⁷ Administrators recognize endowment funds as a valuable (direct source) resource.

Endowments, however, are not guaranteed, and are far from stable. Generally, private college endowments have a greater return than public institutions. However, large endowments tend to perform better than small endowments; smaller institutions tend to

¹⁷⁵ Edward St. John, "Prices, Productivity and Investment: Assessing Financial Strategies in Higher Education," *ERIC Digest* (1994).

¹⁷⁶ Sara Hebel, "Private Colleges Face Cuts In Public Dollars," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49 no. 47 (8/1/2003): A19.

¹⁷⁷ John L. Pulley, "Another Downer of a Year for College Endowments," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49 no. 20 (1/24/2003): A23.

invest more conservatively to protect their more limited holdings. Further, long-term investments are usually not an option for smaller institutions, which need to use monies more immediately for operating costs.¹⁷⁸ This is particularly significant for historically Black colleges and universities, given the size and stature of most of these institutions. Typically, a college may transfer about 4.5 to 5.5 percent of the fund's three-year average value to its operating budget each year.¹⁷⁹ Obviously, however, this strategy works better when an institution's endowment is sizeable enough to yield adequate funds.

The effects of under-funded budgets and diminishing funds can be seen and felt throughout an institution. Some colleges have had their bonds downgraded to "junk bond" status, due to suffering endowments and poor investments. AAA rating is assigned to the wealthiest colleges/universities, including five of the eight Ivy League institutions. There are also three categories of AA, three of A, and three of BBB; below BBB, a college is considered below investment grade, and usually does not return to investment grade. In some instances, institutions have defaulted on their bonds... and have been forced to close.¹⁸⁰

Those fiscally-challenged institutions institute a host of other strategies to attempt to operate within a certain budget (or lack thereof). In addition to salary caps, curbing travel, and postponing construction, some colleges and universities have shut down during academic breaks, and have switched to electronic student handbooks and other

¹⁷⁸ John L. Pulley, "The Rich Got Richer in 2000, Study of Enrollment Shows," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 47 no. 31 (4/13/2001): A39.

¹⁷⁹ Edward St. John, "Prices, Productivity, and Investment: Assessing Financial Strategies In Higher Education," *ERIC Digest* (1994).

¹⁸⁰ Martin Van Der Werf, "Junk Bond Colleges," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49 no. 22 (2/7/2003): A21.

documents to eliminate printing costs. Schools, in the interest of saving, have also eliminated some vehicles, reduced the number of light bulbs in a given area, lowered thermostats, and switched to vending machines with automatic shut-off! In short, there is no such thing as an insignificant saving.¹⁸¹

From the consumer's standpoint (the ever-present, ever-watchful public), fiscal matters often translate to an increase in the cost-of-attendance for the student. School officials cite the following as reasons for increases in tuition: federal policy (that mandates more revenue generation for grants); the shift by state governments of responsibility for paying for college away from government to students and parents; and incremental increases in educational expenditures.¹⁸² Public opinion, however (according to some), takes exception to the emphasis placed on the increase in educational expenditures. Data show that competition between institutions means spending more to recruit and maintain the best faculty members and to give faculty incentives such as reduced administrative duties, teaching loads, and advisement. Also, the ability of an institution to provide financial aid is augmented by the number of paying students the college or university enrolls. Still other institutions are reluctant to reduce costs, because the high cost of attendance is directly related to the perceived prestige that the college or university is awarded.¹⁸³

Thus, money (in addition to scholarship, it seems) is at the heart of a college's worth. Governmental and external reporting regulations monitor what an institution

¹⁸¹ Audrey Williams June, "6 Creative Ways Colleges Are Cutting Costs," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49 no. 15 (12/6/2002): A27.

¹⁸² Edward St. John, "Prices, Productivity, and Investment: Assessing Financial Strategies in Higher Education," *ERIC Digest* (1994).

¹⁸³ Erik Larson, "Why Colleges Cost Too Much," *Time* 149 no. 11 (March 17, 1997): 46-53.

spends, and where. Colleges and universities that accept external funding (and all do) are held responsible for how they use all money. There are clear demarcations between those colleges with money and those without, as well as those that manage money wisely, and those that do not. There are also a host of unspoken connections between an institution's financial well-being, and its worthiness as a vehicle for scholarship. Thus, fiscal health becomes an essential defining factor of what an institution represents.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Common perspective tends to consider historically Black colleges and universities as a collective. They have value and purpose—or not. They manage money well—or not. They uplift the community—or simply occupy a particular space in society. Educators recognize Black colleges as outgrowths of three primary founding organizations: American Missionary Association (AMA) colleges; Negro (religiously-sponsored/affiliated) colleges; and Industrial Philanthropic colleges.¹⁸⁴ There are now select researchers who attempt to impose even more stringent criteria used to categorize an institution as a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). To be considered an HBCU, an institution must:

- Have been established prior to 1964;
- Have a primary historical mission of educating Blacks;
- Have a principle current mission of educating Blacks;
- Be accredited or making reasonable progress toward accreditation.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ M. Christopher Brown II, Ronyelle Bertrand and Saran Donahoo, “The Changing Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Vistas on dual Missions, Desegregation, and Diversity,” in *Black Colleges: New Perspectives On Policy and Practice*, eds. M. Christopher Brown II and Kassie Freeman (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 4-10.

¹⁸⁵ Julian B. Roebuck and Komanduri Murty, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Their Place In American Higher Education* (Westport: Praeger, 1993), 3.

Historically, both AMA and Negro institutions provided liberal education.¹⁸⁶ Liberal arts colleges, generally, profess to develop the whole person, and develop habits of reflective thought, critical thinking, communication skills, appreciation of the arts and sciences, cultivate social values, and inspire lifetime goals.¹⁸⁷ Eventually, however, revenue considerations forced many schools to incorporate more comprehensive curricula into their missions.¹⁸⁸ Black institutions, like their White counterparts, have been largely dependent upon tuition and external funding for survival and growth. However, funding for these schools has been slow to materialize. The federal government has traditionally provided more money to White colleges than to HBCUs; the general welfare of the nation has often been prioritized over Black colleges. Thus, Black institutions have tried to fulfill their goals with less support. Caught in a counterproductive cycle, many HBCUs are denied much-sought-after aid because the institutions do not meet certain standards, and they fail to meet certain standards because they lack certain resources.¹⁸⁹

The practice of separate funding for Black and White colleges dates back to early days of public support for education. The first Morrill Act (1862) provided a federal endowment for land grant colleges, and only a limited number of states (Mississippi, Virginia, and South Carolina) allocated monies to Black institutions. It wasn't until 1890,

¹⁸⁶ Brown II, Betrand and Donahoo "The Changing Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Vistas on dual Missions, Desegregation, and Diversity," in *Black Colleges: New Perspectives On Policy and Practice*, 10.

¹⁸⁷ Micheal Delucchi, "Liberal Arts Colleges and the Myth of Uniqueness," *Journal of Higher Education* 68 no. 4 (July/August 1997): 415.

¹⁸⁸ Brown II, Betrand and Donahoo "The Changing Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Vistas on dual Missions, Desegregation, and Diversity," in *Black Colleges: New Perspectives On Policy and Practice*, 10.

¹⁸⁹ Daniel C. Thompson, *Private Black Colleges at the Crossroads* (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1973), 248.

with the passage of the Second Morrill Act that Congress officially designated specific funding for Black colleges.¹⁹⁰

In the twenty-first century, HBCUs occupy a peculiar position. The 1950s and 1960s (and the Civil Rights movement) served to highlight the role that historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) played in the development and progress of the Black race.¹⁹¹ Most Black colleges are located in financially poor communities, and are themselves able to identify with the some of the same financial and social challenges that the Black community contends with.¹⁹² Black colleges and universities evolved to a philosophically and morally stable position within post-secondary education. These colleges and universities were the primary source of Black higher education for many years. Theirs has been a history of struggle and conquest that has mirrored the story of the Black race.

Nevertheless, due to legal and social accomplishments made during the latter half of the twentieth century, the coveted educational opportunities once offered to Black students primarily via Black colleges and universities are now the norm at predominantly White institutions as well. During the 1970s, there was some concern that the trend of qualified Black students going to White schools would hurt the quality of Black

¹⁹⁰ Gil Kujovich, "Public Black Colleges: The Long History of Unequal Funding," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (Winter 1993/1994), 75.

¹⁹¹ GM Sawyer, "Black Colleges and Community Development," *Journal of Black Studies* 6. no. 1 (September 1975): 80-2.

¹⁹² Daniel C. Thompson, *Private Black Colleges At The Crossroads* (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1973), 25.

schools.¹⁹³ The influx of Black students on traditionally White campuses has resulted in increased studies on the ramifications and net worth of racial assimilation in an educational setting.¹⁹⁴ Thus, the Black college now faces an altered landscape, heightened competition from other institutions of higher learning, and an ethnic community whose challenges are more complex than racially-segregated schools.

Popular educational theories suggested that Black colleges and universities are threatened by the loss of identity, a direct result of competition with predominantly White institutions.¹⁹⁵ Even more, ethnic diversity on Black college campuses has also created some additional considerations in terms of how Black institutions are defined, and what (uniqueness) they offer, collectively. Scholars posit that transdemography has the ability to enrich the cultural context of Black campuses, but it may also eradicate the culture that HBCUs have come to be known for.¹⁹⁶

Some would argue, however, that there has always been a White presence in Black education, and that HBCUs have never been “monolithic, monocultural, or homogeneous.”¹⁹⁷ Historically, the vast majority of colleges established for Blacks were governed by White philanthropic organizations, and missionary societies. Of those that

¹⁹³Rodney Hartnett, “Differences in Selected Attitudes and College Orientations Between Black Students Attending Traditionally Negro and Traditionally White Institutions,” *Sociology of Education* 43 (Fall 1970): 420.

¹⁹⁴ Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini, *How College Affects Students* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991), 20, 644-45.

¹⁹⁵ Thompson, *Private Black Colleges At The Crossroads*, 5.

¹⁹⁶ Brown introduces the term transdemography to mean “shifts in the statistical composition of the student population within the corresponding institutions based solely on race.”; See M. Christopher Brown II, “Good Intentions: Collegiate Desegregation and Transdemographic Enrollments,” *The Review of Higher Education* 25:3 (2002), 263-54.

¹⁹⁷ M. Christopher Brown II, “Good Intentions: Collegiate Desegregation and Transdemographic Enrollments,” *The Review of Higher Education* 25:3 (2002): 267.

were controlled by Blacks, most were founded by the AME Church.¹⁹⁸ HBCUs—largely supported by White missionaries and the Black professional class that they produced—were largely infused (purposefully) with White Anglo-Saxon culture. There was a White paternalistic presence amongst those that benefited from these educational opportunities.¹⁹⁹

However, regardless of the arguable presence of White culture and ideology on Black educational institutions, Black colleges and universities have never achieved financial parity with predominantly White institutions as a whole. HBCUs have historically suffered from serious shortages of funds; administrators are underpaid, and faculty members and staff members spend a disproportionate amount of time on teaching.²⁰⁰ Researchers argue that there is a need for the federal government to take a more aggressive stance in providing financial assistance to HBCUs.²⁰¹ Almost every agency in the federal government has some relationship to higher education (i.e., the National Science Foundation, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Energy, all of which rely on higher education for research advancements). Yet, one researcher posits that there is no federal department that has direct autonomous responsibility for institutions of higher learning, despite the provision of (largely student-focused aid)

¹⁹⁸ Walter R. Allen and Joseph O. Jewell, “A Backward Glance Forward: Past, Present and Future Perspectives On Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” *The Review of Higher Education* 25:3 (2002): 244.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 246-247.

²⁰⁰ Paul Green, “Other Things Being Equal: Federal Aid and the Politics of Equal Opportunity For Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” in *Black Colleges: New Perspectives on Policy and Practice*, eds. M. Christopher Brown II and Kassie Freeman (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 65.

²⁰¹ Green, “Other Things Being Equal: Federal Aid and the Politics of Equal Opportunity For Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” in *Black Colleges: New Perspectives on Policy and Practice*, 82.

monies of the United States Department of Education.²⁰² State governments provide most of the support for public higher education, and there has been reluctance on the part of the federal government to tread on state autonomy as established by the Tenth Amendment.²⁰³ Further, the structure of federal aid to colleges/universities (such that financial assistance is primarily targeted directly toward the student as opposed to the institutions that serve them) may pose a threat to Black institutions that are disqualified from federal financial aid eligibility (due to high default rates); schools whose student bodies are heavily reliant on financial aid would face likely closure.²⁰⁴

Historically Black colleges and universities clearly have very vocal and very persistent supporters and detractors. Popular belief and rhetoric from supporters often links Black colleges to the communal uplift of the socio-ethnic group to which it is linked.²⁰⁵ Historically Black colleges and universities are traditionally tied to a mission that will teach students to both think and do. They have traditionally promoted universal access and have provided a curriculum that was designed to meet the needs of both the institution and the community. Sawyer was amongst those to chronicle the position (the purpose, perhaps?) of Black institutions to provide services beyond the scope of instigating scholarship and granting degrees. He describes the Black college as employing “an institutional trait... which accepts responsibility for requirements of the

²⁰² Ibid., 69.

²⁰³ Ibid., 69.

²⁰⁴ Green, “Other Things Being Equal: Federal Aid and the Politics of Equal Opportunity For Historically Black Colleges,” in *Black Colleges: New Perspectives on Policy and Practice*, 81.

²⁰⁵ Thompson, *Private Black Colleges At The Crossroads* (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1973), 5.

learner beyond those directly associated with the acquisition of abstract information.”²⁰⁶

This sentiment perhaps best describes the popular perspective that advocates of historically Black colleges and universities espouse.

However, outside of the cultural and communal connection of these institutions to Blacks, much of the current literature depicting the state of Black colleges illustrates that Black institutions are facing challenges and obstacles that threaten the continued survival of many of the schools barring radical change in practice and management. Research indicates that most HBCUs suffer from severely limited financial resources. Scarce resources (from both internal and external revenue sources) may affect the physical structure, caliber of faculty, student recruitment, and overall operations at these institutions.²⁰⁷

Still, despite the polarity of the opinion regarding the continued viability of historically Black post-secondary institutions, there are some valid considerations for the administrators at these institutions. Many colleges and universities (historically Black and predominantly White) have found that high administrative turnover and poor fiscal management are often preludes to the peril of the institution.²⁰⁸ Structurally, Black colleges and universities often differ from their White counterparts. Some argue that Black colleges have traditionally placed much higher value upon administrative roles

²⁰⁶ GM Sawyer, “Black Colleges and Community Development,” *Journal of Black Studies* 6 no. 1 (September 1975):81.

²⁰⁷ Ursula Wagener and Edgar Smith, “Maintaining a Competitive Edge,” *Change* 25 no. 1 (January/February 93): 40.

²⁰⁸ Martine Hammond, “Survival of Small Private Colleges,” *Journal of Higher Education* 55 no. 3 (May/June 1984): 382, 384, 386.

than they have upon teaching and creative scholarship.²⁰⁹ Others note that the demographic composition of the administrative hierarchy of Black schools is notably different from other schools. The board of trustees at a Black institution, for example, usually is comprised of far fewer top business executives than are predominantly White schools; yet, the power of governance and emphasis on Board authority is the relatively similar. Studies reveal no correlation between the size of a trustee board and the student population at that school. Trustees at Black colleges tend to be older, and few of them are White.²¹⁰

Typically, HBCUs don't get the kind of large donations that White schools get—with the exception of Cosby's gift of \$20 million to Spelman in the early 1990s.²¹¹ By contrast, many Black colleges operate with the expectation that churches will provide whatever resources necessary to ensure the survival of Black institutions. However, historical accounts indicate that White denominations have contributed more to White schools than have Black denominations.²¹²

Still, Black colleges and universities remain committed to their purpose, and are largely making efforts toward longevity and quality of service to students and to the community. Administrators at Black institutions recognize that the bottom line measurement of an institution's worth is the same (from the public and donor perspectives, presumably) from college to college, and Black schools can no longer

²⁰⁹ Thompson, *Private Black Colleges at the Crossroads*, 221.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 222-232.

²¹¹ Linda Megget Brown, "Bottom Line Goals," *Black Issues in Higher Education* 18 no. 20 (November 22, 2001): 45.

²¹² Thompson, *Private Black Colleges At The Crossroads*, 249-251.

afford to justify their existence based on heritage alone.²¹³ Black campuses are taking measures (i.e. revamping technology) to remain competitive with other schools, although many have found it difficult to obtain grants for the technological grants that enable White schools to systematically improve operations.²¹⁴ Further, while enrolling only 20% of the nation's Black students, these institutions produce more than 33% of the nation's Black graduates. Even more, nine out of ten of the most frequent schools sending Black students to graduate study were HBCUs.²¹⁵ Of the population of Blacks receiving doctorate degrees, many received their undergraduate education at an HBCU. That success is the expectation that students at many of these schools are held to.²¹⁶

Some Black colleges and universities that have experienced financial and enrollment hardships have learned to restructure their operations to ensure continued operation. Fisk University's President Ponder, for example, took steps to settle debts with creditors, during a period when the institution was experiencing low student enrollment, a high amount of debt, and low prestige. Ponder also mandated that no student who could not pay for service be allowed to enroll, and personally signed outgoing letters to prospective students. Alumni and alumnae were asked to increase giving, and corporations were solicited to renovate buildings.²¹⁷

²¹³ Brown, "Bottom Line Goals," *Black Issues in Higher Education* 18 no. 20: 44.

²¹⁴ Ernie Suggs, "HBCUs Getting Up To Speed On The Information Highway," *Black Issues in Higher Education* 14 no. 7 (May 29, 1997): 22.

²¹⁵ Ursula Wagener and Edgar Smith, "Maintaining a Competitive Edge," *Change* 25 no. 1 (January/February 1993): 40-49.

²¹⁶ Antoine Garibaldi, "Four Decades of Progress...And Decline: An Assessment of African-American Educational Attainment," *Journal of Negro Education* 66 no. 2 (1997): 117-118.

²¹⁷ Wagener and Smith, "Maintaining a Competitive Edge," *Change* 25 no. 1:40-49.

One scholar has raised the question, whether, in the struggle for survival, the basic integrity of private colleges and universities is threatened.²¹⁸ This concern is certainly relevant to many HBCUs, although not all are so vulnerable. Generally, although Black colleges and universities are considered collectively, they are positioned divergently on the spectrum of academic merit and financial security. Some continue to struggle fiscally into the twenty-first century. Other, selective, Black institutions have experienced increased enrollments over the last decade, along with some nationally-recognized administrators.²¹⁹ Some are competitive, and are vying to attract students that would be interested in majority schools such as Harvard University or the University of Pennsylvania. Some are attracting the attention of top corporate recruiters.²²⁰ The future is not bright at all other Black colleges. Schools such as Morris Brown College and Edward Waters College (both AME institutions) were both stripped of accreditation in the early 2000s.²²¹ However, in terms of historical mission and scope, HBCUs share a nobility of purpose, a target ethnicity, and the sentiment of many who support the idea that there ought to be an educational outlet for African-American students who desire degree attainment in a setting that will foster a sense of identity, support, and value that perhaps is not prevalent at majority institutions.

²¹⁸ Richard Anderson, "A Financial and Environmental Analysis of Strategic Policy Changes at Small Private Colleges," *Journal of Higher Education* 49 no. 1 (1978): 30-31.

²¹⁹ Wagener and Smith, "Maintaining a Competitive Edge," *Change* 25 no. 1: 40

²²⁰ Cheryl D. Fields, "Taking Care of Business," *Black Issues in Higher Education* 13 no. 21 (December 12, 1996): 12-17.

²²¹ Edward Waters College has since regained its accreditation (revoked due to alleged academic fraud), while Morris Brown College has not.

Religious Affiliation and Higher Education

There are approximately nine hundred self-described religion-affiliated campuses in the United States, enrolling more than two million students, and employing more than six hundred thousand faculty and staff members. These institutions have a collective operating budget of more than \$35 billion.²²² Private colleges, in particular, are likely to have some historical connection to a faith-based organization or movement. Further, faith-based educational philanthropy has been a deliberate effort, grounded in specific values and beliefs. As Watkins explains, “church-sponsored missionary society had always been interested in spiritual humanitarianism. By the time of Reconstruction, their views on education were well articulated and firm.”²²³

Research indicates that the role of religion in post-secondary education shifted during the 19th and 20th centuries, in response to social climates and expectations. An increased focus on science and technology as well as an increase in cultural pluralism partly influenced this shift. Additionally, the increased emphasis and oversight of educational and accrediting standards significantly affected the landscape of denominational colleges and universities.²²⁴

In contemporary times, however, from the evolution of higher education have emerged questions and considerations with regard to the role of religion in free intellectual pursuit. Modern religious-affiliated colleges “exist on a continuum, from the

²²² Katherine Tunheim and Gary McLean, “Competency Model for the Role of President of Religion-Affiliated Colleges,” EBSCOHOST, 877-884.

²²³ William H. Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), 14.

²²⁴ Anna Christine Coley, “Experiences of Religious Studies Faculty Members as Teachers and Scholars at a Former Baptist University in the South,” (Ph.D. diss., Georgia State University, 2004), 17.

barely affiliated to the ultra-orthodox.”²²⁵ At some institutions, the religious Convention may elect the college’s board members. Officials and representatives of the college are expected to promote faith in the college experience and to not tolerate dissention from the “absolute truth” of God, leaving little room to debate difficult issues.²²⁶

Of those that are stringent in their policies with regard to faith on campus, faculty and curriculum are subject to governance that is not found at secular institutions. Many of these institutions require faculty members to subscribe to statements of religious faith as a condition of employment, and to profess belief in the literal truth of the Bible. It is not uncommon for such colleges to place restrictions on academic freedom, citing the following as reasons:

- (these) institutions reflect the pluralism of our nation and contribute to civil society;
- complete academic freedom is an impossible and indeed unwanted goal;
- religious institutions with their restrictions play a special and better role in producing morally good citizens;
- (these) restrictions are not restrictions at all since faculty and students choose them voluntarily.²²⁷

However voluntary the affiliation of faculty and staff may be, some religious-affiliated colleges are opting-out of their connectivity to the Church. Shorter College in Georgia, for example has released itself from its affiliation with the Southern Baptist Convention, causing a backlash that includes the withholding of monies by the

²²⁵ Kenneth Wagner, “Faith Statements Do Restrict Academic Freedom: Most Defenses of Evangelical Colleges Miss the Point—Rigid Orthodoxy Does Not Go Well With the Quest for Knowledge,” *Academe* 92 no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 2006): 21-22.

²²⁶ Beth McMurtrie, “Religion and Politics,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49, no. 43 (July 2003): A20-A22.

²²⁷ Kenneth Wagner, “Faith Statements Do Restrict Academic Freedom: Most Defenses of Evangelical Colleges Miss the Point—Rigid Orthodoxy Does Not Go Well With the Quest For Knowledge,” *Academe* 92 no. 1 (January/February 2006): 21-22.

Convention—money that was previously slated for the college. Some students have also withdrawn.²²⁸

Shorter does not stand alone. This is a split that is becoming a common occurrence, as colleges split from religious boards and conventions. Much of the conflict between contemporary post-secondary institutions and their respective religious bodies is related to the appropriate or desired degree of control that the church should be entitled to exert regarding academic decision-making, teaching methods, curricular content, scholarly practices, student conduct, etc.²²⁹ To be fair, some religious educators assert that there is a synergy between academic freedom and a Christian academician's ordained purpose to explore and examine the world in which he/she lives.²³⁰ However, there also is a noted and recorded movement amongst some denominations (particularly within the Southern Baptist Convention) to "purify" the denominations colleges and universities, which were, they said, promoting liberal ideas and lifestyles.²³¹ As a result, Wake Forest University in North Carolina, Furman University in South Carolina, and Stetson University in Florida have all severed formal ties with their states' Baptist Conventions.²³²

The actions of these and other colleges have also prompted some board members at religious-affiliated colleges to assert that there is a need to develop standards of a

²²⁸ Beth McMurtrie, "Religion and Politics," *Chronicle of Higher Education* V 49, no. 43 (July 2003): A20-A22.

²²⁹ Anna Christine Coley, "Experiences of Religious Studies Faculty Members as Teachers and Scholars at a Former Baptist University in the South," (Ph.D. diss., Georgia State University, 2004), 18.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

²³² *Ibid.*, 26.

“Christian school.”²³³ Researchers have developed models designed to understand and promote the effective recruitment of employees of colleges with religious affiliation. One model cites spiritual calling, personal values, and professional roles as important considerations in the recruitment of personnel for a religious-affiliated college.²³⁴

In other cases, actions and mandates from external accrediting bodies have prompted responses from institutions regarding policies that govern faculty, curriculum and other issues. In 2004, the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) was placed on probation by SACS for employing two professors who hadn’t completed their doctorates. According to the college’s then newly-appointed president, the college’s fiscal health was good, and officials had been pleased with the process of a recent accreditation visiting team. However, despite its financial stability, the college operated under a policy that allowed it to hire professors at the ABD (All But Degree) status in a doctoral program. In response to the ruling by SACS, the college was forced to terminate the two professors and eliminate the policy from its faculty handbook.²³⁵

In another instance, Louisiana College, affiliated with the Southern Baptist movement, was placed on probation by SACS for undue influence of the Southern Baptist organization. All of the College’s board members are appointed by the Louisiana Baptist Convention, and professors had complained that the Board of Trustees required approval of class texts and faculty hiring procedures. A visiting committee from SACS determined that the College violated standards regarding academic freedom and board

²³³ Beth McMurtrie, “Religion and Politics,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* V 49, no. 43 (July 2003): A20-A22

²³⁴ Katherine Tunheim and Gary McLean, “Competency Model for the Role of President of Religion-Affiliated Colleges,” EBSCOHOST, 877-884.

²³⁵ “Theological Center Put on Probation,” *The Christian Century* 121 Issue 1 (January 13, 2004): 13.

governance. Subsequently, the College has acknowledged the “seriousness of accreditation standards” and has committed to meeting them.²³⁶

In sum, religious-affiliated institutions exist on a continuum from those with strict religious connections to those with nominal association only. Private colleges, in particular, are likely to have some religious affiliation. Contemporary religious-affiliated institutions face considerations regarding the role of religion in free intellectual pursuit. Some have had to contend with accrediting bodies that have raised questions about policies that govern faculty, curriculum and other issues. Trustee boards at some religious affiliated colleges may have to re-examine the relevance of religion within individual institutions, its applicability to policy and governance, and the ability of the college to meet the demands of the religious body while simultaneously satisfying accreditation standards and regulations.

Culture and Internal Constituencies

Culture—organizational culture—is perhaps one of the most intangible or least-documented topics in higher education research, and even less so with regard to policy and decision-making. Yet, it is at the center of the focus of this paper. Culture, as understood by sociologists, includes a people’s beliefs, values, customs, traditions, economy, etc. Scholars observe that cultures do change, but that change is incremental, and often unrecognized by those involved.²³⁷ Incremental change is intriguing, particularly while considering the process by which an institution that was once thriving

²³⁶ “Louisiana College Placed on Probation,” *The Christian Century* 122 Issue 1 (January 11, 2005): 15.

²³⁷ Carle M. Hunt, Kenneth Oosting, Robert Stevens, David Loudon, and R. Henry Migliore, *Strategic Planning For Private Higher Education* (New York: The Haworth Press, 1997), 71-72.

and growing could lose its accreditation, and much of the esteem that accompanies that standard.

Research suggests that change in an organization causes anxiety. If change is in fact necessary, it is the responsibility of the leaders to communicate that to constituencies. Individuals are more likely to cooperate if they have a sense of involvement in the decision-making that accompanies the changes. Organizations that navigate change successfully often have operational procedures in place that protect against mistakes made by individuals involved.²³⁸

From an operational standpoint, culture (and the ramifications of it) is worthy of consideration as well. Organizational culture tends to define what is possible, what is feasible. To understand an institution's culture, one must comprehend the core values and philosophy of the institution. An institution's culture details what the institution actually is in its daily thoughts and behaviors; it determines whether the particular mission can be accomplished.²³⁹ Within the context of this paper, the culture of Morris Brown College (undoubtedly a variety of ideologies and behaviors amongst the various internal groups), has likely influenced the operational procedures and decision-making process of the institution, and has in some sense contributed toward the present state of the college.

There seems to be little documentation of how organizational culture is created, communicated, or materialized. The literature mainly documents that it does exist, is dynamic, and has the ability to impact an organization's operations. Some have suggested that higher education as a whole espouses an exclusive culture, one that seeks to preserve

²³⁸ William Tierney, *Building the Responsive Campus* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 44-45.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 27, 35, 52

the privilege of the elite.²⁴⁰ Again, this is an interesting consideration, given that various facets of post-secondary education (e.g. HBCUs) are innately connected to providing access and opportunity where none exists. If in fact the notion of elitism in higher education is true (and persists), then there is indeed an oxymoronic relationship between HBCUs and the larger post-secondary network that may well affect the way these institutions are perceived, rated, and ultimately funded.

²⁴⁰ Leonard A. Valverde, *Leaders of Color in Higher Education* (New York: AltaMira Press, 2003), 3-11.

CHAPTER 4

MORRIS BROWN COLLEGE: AN OVERVIEW OF RECENT HISTORY

“Hail to Thee, Maker of Men,
Honor to Thee Once Again,
Sacred Truths of Firmest Ground
Hail to Thee, Dear Morris Brown.”

The Early Years

Much of what we know about Morris Brown College’s history is contained within a book entitled *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years*. The book, commissioned by former president Dr. Robert Threatt near the institution’s centennial anniversary (1981), chronicles dates, times, and persons that were instrumental in the decision-making and growth of the institution. It is a useful resource, particularly because much of the College’s archival history was burned during a campus fire in 1990. As such, primary historical information prior to 1990 is sketchy at best, much of it being owned by individuals (alumni and alumnae, former administrators, etc.) and very little of it housed at the College.

Following is a review of the College’s managerial and administrative history leading up to the time frame for this study. I draw much of the information regarding the early years directly from *The First Hundred Years*. Supplemental information is included from administrative documents (i.e. strategic plans, catalogues) to augment the book’s account. While having access to multiple sources of primary historical data would be

preferable, existing administrative documents, college photographs, yearbooks, etc. effectively corroborate the dates and information contained in the book. This section of my research summarizes portions of the College's recorded history that may help to inform what the College was leading up to the 1990s, the time frame for this study.

Ideological Context of the Institution

There was an exchange between a Morris Brown College student and an administrator that can prelude a description of the context of the College. The student wore a t-shirt with the College's emblem on the front, and below the emblem were the words "Morris Brown College. Our Struggle Is Our Strength." The administrator, at the time relatively new to the College, engaged the student in a conversation, and reasoned that perhaps the College's strength was not the "struggle," but maybe its strength was its *triumph* over adversity and disadvantage. However, during what turned out to be a rather lengthy exchange, the student persisted that, indeed, the struggle itself, the fight, the effort, was what the College was most proud of—and thus, it was printed on t-shirts, to be given to (and worn by) new incoming students during that academic year.

These two premises—struggle and adversity—appear throughout the College's internal documents, publications, presentations, and interactions with persons affiliated with the institution. Even the story of its conception—conveyed with some variety, depending on the audience and circumstance—contains threads of both struggle and adversity. According to Sewell and Troup (authors of the college's only self-commissioned history),

Indirectly, the founding of Morris Brown College in 1881 was a logical outgrowth of the abiding faith in the efficacy of education of those who established the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Morris Brown is deeply rooted in the soil of self-help and for a period of nearly one

hundred years has continued steadfastly its work of establishing race pride, building men and women for service, notwithstanding several periods of crisis.²⁴¹

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church's presence is intricately connected to the College, and is closely tied to the College's self-perception. The College in many ways mirrors the ideology of the AME Church.

In 1787 in the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, agitation was begun for the organization of Black Methodists into a society separate and apart from the control of White Methodists.... Blacks were removed from their regular seats in the congregation to seats placed around the wall.... We all went out of the church, in a body, and they were no more plagued with us in the church.... [AME supported colleges and universities] represented the major efforts of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, as a denomination, to provide educational opportunities primarily for Black people who at the time of the founding of these schools had limited access to institutions of higher learning.... Morris Brown College, as is generally known, is a product of the struggles and privations of the members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.²⁴²

The College uses this information (the self-identity, the historical connection to religious relief, racial advocacy, and self-reliance) to orientate new students (and sometimes employees) to the College. It is often referred to by the College, in terms of defining its existence. It is a depiction of how the College signifies itself.

One cannot discuss Morris Brown College—the philosophy behind the institution, what drives it, what it communicates about itself to others—without referencing the AME Church. The Church is a part of the fabric of the College. At times during this research, I've also attempted to reverse that line of thought, and have tried to understand what the

²⁴¹ George Sewell and Cornelius Troup, *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years* (Atlanta: privately printed, 1981), xi.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 3-8.

College means to Church. Does it hold the same significance? Can I speak of the AME Church without speaking of Morris Brown College and the other colleges and universities that it has established?

While I don't have a definitive answer about that, I have found that the Church specifically addresses its institutions of higher learning during official forums (e.g. the national Quadrennial General Session, the regional Annual Conferences), via specific committees such as the General Board Commission on Seminaries, Universities, Colleges, and Schools.²⁴³ During one particular conference (the 43rd Quadrennial Session, July 1988), the minutes regarding the Sixth Episcopal District (the State of Georgia) reflect,

Morris Brown College is of primary concern to the Lay Organization; Atlanta, Georgia has been referred to for years as the "The Mecca for the Education of Blacks." AME Lay persons play a significant role in funding our AME Church-related institutions.²⁴⁴

Some years later, a discussion of higher education ensued at the Quadrennial General Session (2004) that included a document on the history and contemporary foci of the Church. The Church says,

Thus, the African Methodist Episcopal Church has a long-standing commitment to quality higher education. In the Black Church tradition, we have been in the business longer than anyone, beginning in 1844 with... the purchase of Wilberforce University in 1863. Members of the AME Church take pride in both the past accomplishments and presumed future of our extant educational institutions. A crisis, the loss of accreditation at Morris Brown College, the withdrawal of federal, state, and United Negro College Fund resources, and no student loans, inspired bishops to launch a Summit on Higher Education in December 2003. The open-ended Summit

²⁴³ The Combined Minutes, Forty-Seventh Quadrennial Session of the General Conference, African Methodist Episcopal Church, (Indianapolis, 2004): 187. AME Church, Office of the Historiographer.

²⁴⁴ The Combined Minutes, Forty-Third Quadrennial Session of the General Conference, African Methodist Episcopal Church, (Fort Worth, 1988): 868. AME Church, Office of the Historiographer.

provided a forum for the AME Church to brainstorm about the future course of its ministry of education.²⁴⁵

One might say that the AME Church's mission includes the establishment and support of educational opportunities, and Morris Brown College's mission includes carrying forth the educational priorities of the AME Church. Though neither institution (the Church or the College) is solely purposed to sustain the other, they are connected in philosophy and in practice.

The Setting

In 1932 when the College became a member of the Atlanta University Center, it also moved to its present location, on thirty-two acres of land, near the downtown area.²⁴⁶ It purchased the land from Atlanta University, and sits on Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, formerly Hunter Street, bordering the Vine City Community. Charlayne Hunter-Gault describes mid-century Atlanta as

a sophisticated, cosmopolitan city with a sense of itself that was as strong in the Black as in the White community... Much of Black Atlanta's sense of itself emanated from its world-renowned institutions of higher education, also established in the 1800s: Spelman College for women, Morehouse men's college, Clark and Morris Brown Colleges, the Interdenominational Theological Center (formerly Gammon Theological Seminary) and Atlanta University.²⁴⁷

The campus is small, with the bulk of the academic buildings located on an elevated parcel of land. The buildings are modest, and at the center of campus is a brick gathering area (with a small brick staging structure, inlaid podium facing stone benches),

²⁴⁵ "The Combined Minutes, Forty-Seventh Quadrennial Session of the General Conference, African Methodist Episcopal Church." (Indianapolis, 2004): 259. AME Church, Office of the Historiographer.

²⁴⁶ Sewell and Troup, *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years*, 136.

²⁴⁷ Charlayne Hunter-Gault, *In My Place* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 72-73.

named Founders Plaza. Near Founders Plaza is a large commemorative rock (standing more than six feet tall), with a plaque and tribute to Edmund Asa Ware, the first President of Atlanta University.²⁴⁸ The tribute inscribed on the memorial for President Ware reads,

The Graduates of Atlanta University have brought this Boulder (sic) from the native town of President Ware in Massachusetts and placed it here on Georgia soil, over the spot where his earthly remains lie buried; In grateful memory of their former teacher and friend, and of the unselfish life he lived and the noble work he wrought; that they, their children and their children's children might be blessed.²⁴⁹

Forming a semi-circle surrounding Founders Plaza is the (un-named) Administration building, Griffin-Hightower Science and Technology Building, and Fountain Hall. Fountain Hall is a large building that has traditionally housed the College's Arts and Sciences programs. The building is a pale red brick, with a clock tower at the top. A picture of Fountain Hall's steeped clock tower has been the symbol used on most publications and the College's letterhead (with the exception of the official seal found on executive stationary). Inside Fountain Hall are classrooms, a chapel/auditorium (Viola Hill Auditorium), and an area named in honor of WEB DuBois, who taught in the building during the time it belonged to Atlanta University. Fountain Hall would be considered the "flagship" building on the campus, if there were one. It sits on the highest natural point within the Atlanta city limits, and can be seen on the horizon when heading west from downtown.

²⁴⁸ The bulk of Morris Brown's campus and the buildings on the elevated portion of land once belonged to Atlanta University. Morris Brown College acquired the property in 1932. On that land, Clark-Atlanta University still owns and occupies one building, which sits adjacent to Morris Brown's Administration Building.

²⁴⁹ Edmund Asa Ware memorial, Morris Brown College campus.

Figure 1, Fountain Hall



Figure 2, Founders Plaza



Scattered in front of the academic buildings and around Founders Plaza are individual “Greek plots.” Greek plots are cemented structures and seating areas, representing eight of the nine National Pan-Hellenic Council organizations (predominantly Black fraternities and sororities) as well as some professional music fraternal organizations. These areas are notable, particularly for their representation of a significant socialization mechanism for the College. Within the Morris Brown student body, and carried over into the alumni/ae body (and arguably the faculty body and the administration as well), there are pockets of identity, groups that facilitate relationships between the College, students, and alumni/alumnae. Groups provide a mechanism for information-sharing, and resource development for the College.

Fraternities, sororities, the Marching Wolverines (the Morris Brown College band), the Morris Brown College choir, athletes, the Student Government Association (SGA), and state clubs (i.e. California club) are some of the more visible and vocal groupings on campus. Students and alumni/alumnae are often referenced using a variation of the following: “[Joe], the [fraternal membership] and [a band member]”. If additional information is needed, one might add, “he’s from [what state] and a [academic] major.”

While an individual’s membership may overlap into multiple groupings, a person’s socialization, information-sharing, and advocacy are generally conducted through one of these sub-sets of the student body. Student involvement and alumni/alumnae giving are often channeled through these groups. Fund-raising, and internal relationships-building between the College and individuals are facilitated through current/former relationships between members of these groups. An understanding of the

Figure 3, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., plot, and Griffin-Hightower Science Center



manner in which the Morris Brown College identity and culture is communicated requires a clear understanding of the role that such groupings play in the informal communication structure at the college. As such, the presence of the “Greek plots”, located on the campus near the central gathering area (Founders Plaza) is pertinent, as one observes where and how ideas are shared and affinities are created at the College.

It would be difficult to describe the students and alumni/alumnae at Morris Brown College without referencing sororities and fraternities. Though perhaps representing only approximately 10-15% of the total student population during any given academic term, the student-leadership was largely comprised of members of Greek-letter organizations,

and those aspiring to become members. A passage painted on the cement near one sorority's plot states, "Many Seek; Few Are Chosen; Even Less Make It Through."²⁵⁰

Near Fountain Hall is a walking bridge that crosses Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive. On the other side of the bridge is a garden area, another large building, Gaines Hall (a dormitory named for one of the College's founders), and Furber Cottage (a classroom/administration building).²⁵¹ Six other buildings and Herndon Stadium (an ultra-modern structure amongst the staid older buildings) are all located within two blocks in either direction of the main campus.²⁵²

The rear of Morris Brown College borders the back of the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC), and ITC is neighbored on the west by Clark-Atlanta University. On the south side of Clark-Atlanta University sits Morehouse College (a part of whose campus is conjoined with Clark-Atlanta's) and a gated Spelman College. One block southwest of Spelman College sits the Morehouse School of Medicine. The proximity and positioning of Clark-Atlanta, Morehouse, and Spelman to each other creates connectivity between those campuses (and perhaps contributes to the relationship

²⁵⁰ This passage is found near the combined plot for the Zeta Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. and the Beta Chapter of the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. These organizations are the two oldest Greek-letter organizations within the Atlanta metropolitan area. Though perhaps painted in banter, this sentiment is generally shared by most members of the organizations. Though it is certainly debatable as to whether non-members regard members with the same esteem that the members of these organizations regard themselves, this perception of elitism is sometimes reflected in the interactions between fraternity and sorority members and those who are not. See Walter M. Kimbrough and Philo A. Hutcheson, "The Impact of Membership in Black Greek-Letter Organizations on Black Students' Involvement In Collegiate Activities and Their Development of Leadership Skills," *Journal of Negro Education* 67 no. 2 (1998): 96-105.

²⁵¹ Gaines Hall is named for Wesley John Gaines, the AME official credited with asking the "why can't we build a school for our own" question that led to the birth of Morris Brown College.

²⁵² Herndon Stadium is named for Alonzo Herndon, one of America's first black (self-made) millionaires and founder of Atlanta Life Insurance Company. Herndon financed the building of the stadium at Morris Brown College. The stadium was later demolished and rebuilt by the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games in 1996.

Figure 4, Herndon Stadium



between colleges). Morris Brown, physically, faces the northwest, is distanced further, and its campus is more autonomous than the other members of the Atlanta University Center.

A Checkered Centennial

The College's history contains periods of managerial and financial uncertainty. Though officially founded in 1881, Morris Brown College—named in honor of the second consecrated Bishop of the AME Church—first opened its doors in 1885, to one hundred and seven students and nine teachers, in Atlanta, Georgia. The College, philosophically defined by the Church, was dependent upon the Church's (largely unskilled, untrained, and economically unstable) populace for students and financial

support. Its student body, in large part, was comprised of “a large segment of underachieving students whose parents were loyal supporters of the Church.”²⁵³ By the early 1900s, the student body had increased to four hundred forty-five.²⁵⁴

The original campus of Morris Brown College was opened in 1885 on a small site near downtown Atlanta, at the intersection of Boulevard and Houston streets in northeast Atlanta. In 1894, a Theological Department was established at the College for the training of ministers. Six years later, the name of the department was changed to Turner Theological Seminary (in honor of the senior Bishop of the AME Church). In 1960, the Seminary became a separate entity from the College, academically, and physically²⁵⁵

The institution experienced both growth and financial challenges during its early years.

In 1913, MBC changed its status to a university and (by amendment to its charter) began to operate branch institutions- in Cuthbert, GA and Savannah, GA. However, these branches imposed a heavy burden on the school’s finances, which came primarily from the AME Church and small individual gifts. The College discontinued these branches in 1929 and restored its original name, Morris Brown College.²⁵⁶

The 1920s was a very difficult financial period for Morris Brown College. The institution, similar to trends nationwide during this time, suffered from economic strains. The College became indebted to its employees and creditors during that time (having difficulty paying both, and neither fully).²⁵⁷ Also during that decade significant

²⁵³ “The History of Morris Brown College,” Annual Legacy Awards Gala and Dance Bulletin (October, 2006).

²⁵⁴ Sewell and Troup, *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years*, 1981.

²⁵⁵ Morris Brown College Catalog 2000-2001, 10.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 10.

²⁵⁷ Sewell and Troup, *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years*, 67-68.

developments were taking place with regard to Black postsecondary educators in Atlanta. In 1928, a National Interracial Conference took place in Washington, DC, out of which an affiliation of the Black colleges in Atlanta took definite form. Those in attendance at this conference were representatives of the nation's major organizations concerned with the education of Negroes.

One of the topics for discussion was the future of the Negro institutions of higher learning in Atlanta. The colleges under consideration at the time were Atlanta University, Morehouse and Spelman.²⁵⁸ The Atlanta University Center (eventually encompassing the aforementioned colleges as well as Clark College, Morris Brown College, the Interdenominational Theological Center and Morehouse School of Medicine), was conceptualized at this meeting. Reportedly, the motivation behind a cooperative agreement between the colleges was financial in nature. A representative of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation said, "We're tired of giving out little dots of money first to one college, then to another, in Atlanta. There ought to be some way to bring them together."²⁵⁹

The initial institutions in attendance at the meeting did form a consortium, directed by a board of trustees, with interlocking memberships, and a Council of Presidents, with day-to-day functions under the office of an executive director. Each college, however, had its own board of trustees.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ Sewell and Troup, *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years*, 73-77.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 73-77.

²⁶⁰ Morris Brown College Catalog, 2000-2001, 14.

The year 1928 brought a change to Morris Brown as well. That was the year that Reverend W.A. Fountain, Sr. (former president of the College) was appointed Bishop of the AME Sixth district (positioning him for Board Chairmanship) and the Reverend W.A. Fountain, Jr. was appointed president of the College. Because of the dire financial conditions of the College at that time, items could not be purchased using the name Morris Brown College; to remedy this, for the first two years of the Fountain administration, the College was operated under the auspices of a corporation known as Fountain (D.W.H.), Harris, and Fountain Company.²⁶¹

In 1932, Morris Brown College became an official member of the Atlanta University Center.²⁶² In 1941 the College was first awarded accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.²⁶³ For the next several years, the College operated cooperatively within the administrative structure of the Atlanta University Center, in a manner that reportedly maintained individual autonomy at each institution. However, in 1962, the Atlanta University Center Board Chairman and the institutions' presidents met with representatives of the Ford Foundation to explore the possibility of greater co-operation than had been attained (in terms of curriculum, administration, and development). This led to the development of a "Plan of Reorganization" to serve as a vehicle for greater collaborative efforts.²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Sewell and Troup, *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years*, 71-72.

²⁶² Morris Brown College Catalog, 1991-1993, 7.

²⁶³ Administrative Record for the Appeals Hearing of Morris Brown College," Vol. I (2003). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

²⁶⁴ Sewell and Troup, *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years*, 137.

The development of the Plan of Reorganization was perhaps a turning point for Morris Brown College. Morris Brown College officials contested the plan, on the basis that 1) the directives from the Ford Foundation was in reality a merger disguised as a Reorganization Plan; 2) that the Foundation would not reveal the terms (or amount) of the forthcoming grants until each institution signed away its rights; 3) and that officials from the Foundation had discussed a desire on the part of local businessmen to merge the colleges in the Center.²⁶⁵

Against the advice of the Bishops' Council of the AME Church, Morris Brown's administration rejected the Reorganization Plan, wrote an individual appeal for support to the Ford Foundation, and withdrew from the Center—prompting a series of unfavorable events. The College received notice that it would have to secure independent funding for services previously provided by the Center, and independently instruct all of its students. SACS indicated that the College's accreditation was contingent upon the use of the AUC Library and other facilities, and that its withdrawal from the AUC would further reduce the College's effectiveness in areas in which it was already weak (i.e. resources and faculty). Eventually, the Morris Brown College Board of Trustees dissented from the decisions and recommendations made by the College's administration and the Board hired a new president.²⁶⁶

In 1984, Morris Brown College would hire its first non-AME and non-ministerial president. Until that time, the majority of the presidents had been ministers, and all had

²⁶⁵ Sewell and Troup, *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years*, 137-142.

²⁶⁶ Sewell and Troup, *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years*, 139-45; Appendix A of this dissertation contains a chronology of the Morris Brown College presidency. The College has appointed a new executive leader (principal or president) twenty times since its founding. Three of the presidents have served two separate terms, and at least one has served as both president and board chairman.

been affiliated with the AME Church. However, the process for identifying and selecting a president—via a formal search committee—had been made more stringent, and Dr. Calvert Smith was appointed.²⁶⁷ One administrator notes that Dr. Smith had read information regarding the AME Church extensively prior to his appointment as president, had familiarized himself with the Church and its colleges, and would present himself in such a manner that it would be difficult to discern that he were not in fact a member.²⁶⁸

If one were to fast-forward to the year 2000, one would see Morris Brown College as an institution that has a student body of 2270 (91% were federal financial aid recipients), with a projected enrollment of 2500-2600 (with anticipated 94% federal financial aid usage).²⁶⁹ The College would change noticeably (in terms of the size of its student body, relationships between the executive leadership of the College, the faculty, staff and students, etc.) during the years represented in this study. During the latter part of the 1990s, in particular, the size of student body increased significantly.

The college that began as an outgrowth of one Protestant denomination's vision for educational uplift and independent progress for Negroes had become an institution that enrolled Black and non-Black students, accepted and used public monies, and was in the process of compiling data to support its re-affirmation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools—a regional accrediting body. Just two and a half years later, the

²⁶⁷ Agatha Grendon, Morris Brown College administrator and faculty member, interview by author, 3 May, 2007.

²⁶⁸ Cassidy Lawson, Morris Brown College administrator and alumna, interview by author 2 May , 2007.

²⁶⁹ Response to Recommendation 6; Table 6A, Morris Brown College First Follow Up Report to the Reaffirmation Committee, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (September 15, 2000). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

Figure 5: Recent Accreditation Chronology

Date	Activity
1881	The College was founded
(December) 1941	Commission awards initial accreditation to Morris Brown College
(December) 1989	Commission re-affirms accreditation and requests First Follow-Up Report
(June) 1990	Commission reviews First Follow-Up Report and requests Second Follow-Up Report
(June) 1991	Commission reviews Second Follow-Up Report and requests a Third Follow-Up Report
(June) 1992	Commission reviews Third Follow-Up Report and requests a Fourth Follow-Up Report
(June) 1993	Commission reviews Fourth Follow-Up Report and Special Committee Report, places the institution on Warning, and requests a Fifth Follow-Up Report
(December) 1993	Commission reviews Fifth Follow-Up Report and Special Committee Report, places the institution on Probation, requests a Sixth Follow-Up Report, and authorizes a Special Committee visit
(June) 1994	Commission reviews Sixth Follow-Up Report and Special Committee Report, continues the institution on Probation, requests a Seventh Follow-Up Report, and authorizes a Special Committee visit
(December) 1994	Commission reviews Seventh Follow-Up Report and Special Committee Report, removes the institution from Probation, and requests a report of financial aid
(June) 1995	Commission reviews report on financial aid and does not require any additional reporting
(December) 1999	Commission denies re-affirmation, places institution on Warning, requests a report, and authorizes a Special Committee visit
(December) 2000	Commission reviews First Follow-Up Report and Special Committee Report, reaffirms accreditation, removes the institution from Warning, places the institution on Notice, and requests a Second Follow-Up Report
(June) 2001	Commission reviews Second Follow-Up Report, removes the institution from Notice, and requests a Third Follow-Up Report
(December) 2001	Commission reviews Third Follow-Up Report, places the institution on Probation for good cause, authorizes a Special Committee visit, and requests a Fourth Follow-Up Report
(December) 2002	Commission reviews Fourth Follow-Up Report and Special Committee Report and votes to remove the college from membership
(March) 2003	Commission rejects the college's appeal, finalizing the loss of accreditation

College lost its accreditation, rendering it ineligible to receive public funding, a major resource for the vast majority of its student population.

Thus, an account of Morris Brown College might be best understood as one story line, two thematic threads. On the one hand, it is an institution with a charismatic history to share (which it did often) and a purpose which included uplift and social parity, when much of society said such progress wasn't warranted. On the other hand, the College has consistently encountered sanctions and recommendations from an external regional accrediting body, purposed with holding the institution accountable for its usage of public funds. Ideologically, the College had begun its operations against the grain of popular opinion. Financially, however, its existence in contemporary society is very dependent on public monies—and is therefore subject to public accountability.

A Period of Re-Organization: 1989-1994

For Morris Brown College, the years 1989 to 1994 can be called a period of self-assessment. It was a time in which administrators (as well as alumni/alumnae and students) would examine the existence of the College within the larger context of higher education, and consider the College's future toward the end of the twentieth century, and beyond. The senior administration perceived this time as a period of growth for the College—it added academic programs, increased student services, and developed more community-outreach activities.

Internal energy and esteem were on the up-swing—employees, alumni and alumnae and students acknowledged a growing discontent with areas of managerial weakness, but were supportive of the mission and purpose of the institution. The College community welcomed and valued the College's historical significance, and its “by Blacks

for Blacks” principles. It was a “child of the AME Church” and proud of it.²⁷⁰ The most recent visit from SACS (in 1989) yielded a positive report and subsequent Reaffirmation.²⁷¹ The College’s self-study and accreditation visit also unmasked a growing cumulative debt at the institution—one that warranted the College being placed on Advanced Monitoring, and requiring the institution to submit yearly Follow-Up Reports to SACS from 1989 until 1994.²⁷²

Yet, there was a progressive mood amongst the Morris Brown faculty, staff, students and alumni/alumnae—a coming to terms.²⁷³ Administrators felt (and were assured by external entities) that, while there were still mounting financial weaknesses to contend with, its recent and current efforts to strengthen its operating procedures were increasing the College’s accountability and overall ability to function appropriately. In January of 1990, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools wrote to the President:

...your institution has satisfactorily completed the Institutional Self-Study Program and... its accreditation was reaffirmed by the Commission on Colleges at its meeting on December 11, 1989. We congratulate you, your faculty, and staff on this attainment... Your institution is requested to submit a First Follow-Up Report by May 1990, addressing the institution’s progress in reducing its cumulative deficit... Please be very specific in your response and provide supporting documentation wherever appropriate.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ Frederick Livingston, Morris Brown College administrator and faculty member, interview by author, 29 January, 2007.

²⁷¹ Administrative Record for the Appeal of Accreditation, Tab G. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

²⁷² Cassidy Lawson, interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

²⁷³ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 29 January, 2007.

²⁷⁴ Letter of January 1, 1990 from James Rodgers to Calvert Smith Announcing Commission Action to Reaffirm Accreditation and Requesting a First Follow Up Report. Administrative Record for the Appeals Hearing of Morris Brown College Volume I. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

Between then and June 1995, the College would submit seven Follow-Up reports to the Commission on Colleges (COC), in an effort to maintain its accreditation and remove on-going sanctions.²⁷⁵

In some ways, the late 1980s and early 1990s were the beginnings of the College's efforts to reconcile its internally-perceived worth as an institution of higher education with how it represented itself and was perceived by the external community and stakeholders. For example, during that period, administrators at the College recognized the need to re-examine the College's open-admissions policies. Researchers have recorded that by 1970, post-desegregation in schools, over 80% of American colleges had adopted open admissions or some form of special admissions policies for Black students. There has, subsequently, been a push to re-examine admissions policies.²⁷⁶ By the 1990s, open-admissions policies at four-year institutions during this period were carrying a stigma, and Morris Brown administrators considered these policies a contributing factor to some negative opinions about the college, from the general public.²⁷⁷

Further, the College's student body was increasing (from 1989 until 2003 the student population almost doubled, from approximately 1,500 to 2,800 students), and so too were the grade-point-averages and standardized test scores of its incoming classes. Thus, the College modified its admissions policies from open-admissions to liberal-

²⁷⁵ Administrative Record for the Appeals Hearing of Morris Brown College Vol. I, Tabs G,H, I, J, K, L, M, and N. Morris Brown College. Office of Accreditation Compliance.

²⁷⁶ Michael T. Nettles, A. Robert Thoeny, and Erica Gosman, "Comparative and Predictive Analyses of Black and White Students' College Achievement and Experiences," *The Journal of Higher Education*, 57 no. 3 (May-June, 1986): 291.

²⁷⁷ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 29 January, 2007.

admissions.²⁷⁸ The goal was to maintain its ability to serve the under-served, while improving its image as an institution of rigorous academic standards.

The faculty and staff used language that suggested that the College began to expand its expectations of what the institution should be, what it should do, and how it should operate. Some planning documents intimate that the College began to assert greater control of its resources, intellectual property, and identity. It seems that the College was realizing the need for authority over its identity, its image, and its future. For example, in 1991, the College took legal steps to register trademarks associated with the College. Effective November 6, 1991, the College registered the following trademarks with the State of Georgia:

- The words Morris Brown College;
- The words Morris Brown College plus a design consisting of the school's seal;
- The words Morris Brown College Wolverines;
- The words Morris Brown College plus a design consisting of the Wolverine;
- The words Morris Brown College plus a design consisting of a clock tower.²⁷⁹

Though perhaps symbolic, the registering of these trademarks seems indicative of the climate of the College at this time. There was a shift, a movement toward more stringent policies and planning exercises. Upper-level administrators were candid with mid-level managers about what was expected of them as the College moved forward. Managerial correspondence suggested that the College had recently implemented a SACS-mandated Institutional Effectiveness program (an outgrowth of the College self-study program) that would:

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Memorandum to the President Regarding Registered Trademarks. Submitted by the Vice President for Development. November 8, 1991..Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

- Measure institutional effectiveness in every unit;
- Allow supervisors to measure the effectiveness of each employee toward helping units to realize their goals;
- Enhance the management skills of senior and mid-level managers to the point that they can successfully implement an institutional effectiveness program, and;
- Significantly improve the operating procedures of the Financial Aid Office.²⁸⁰

The employees at the College seemingly pushed for greater efficiency at the College, and expressed support of the institution's principles, its purpose. In addition to addressing managerial-accountability issues, faculty members and administrators created initiatives that avowed the College's commitment to academic pursuit and social uplift. One example is the establishment of the WEB DuBois Center, to "promote scholarship and encourage research" amongst faculty and students.²⁸¹

Still, there was a sense that some of the College's progress was the result of employees' efforts to succeed, despite having to contend with unusual odds and challenges. There, again, is a sense that the College was more valued and respected internally than externally. There was an urgency, an impression that despite a firm grounding in respectable principles, there was a need for the institution to shore up its efforts. Some of its weakened state could be attributed to a lack of attention to administrative detail, while other conditions resulted from unexpected circumstances. Administrative records note,

²⁸⁰ Leadership and Organizational Development Grant Proposal and Outline. Submitted to LOD Director, UNCF. October 31, 1991. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

²⁸¹ Memorandum Regarding WEB DuBois Center. Submitted to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, from the Faculty, Social Science Department. November 12, 1991. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

...this year is more significant because against many odds, including a major campus fire, the College made significant accomplishments because her mission was undergirded by sound principles of planning, policy formulation, and program implementation.²⁸²

The fire eradicated the College's Administration Building, destroyed the bulk of its archives, and damaged many administrative records. It was perhaps even more ill-timed because the Fiscal Office was located in the Administration Building, and the fire occurred in the midst of a financial audit process.²⁸³ A senior administrator reports, however, that Mr. Charles Moore, the Chief Financial Officer for the College (and an alumnus), salvaged the financial records and the audit process continued.²⁸⁴

Senior level administrators and student-services personnel (i.e. Admissions, Financial Aid, and Student Accounts) were moved to other buildings as well as mobile units. The President's Office was relocated to a suite within the John H. Lewis Athletic Complex (named in honor of a former president of the College), and other administrators were dispersed throughout the campus. Despite the adjustments, the fire reportedly had little effect on the morale and momentum amongst the College's employees.²⁸⁵ The College would not construct another Administration Building until 1996.

In terms of accountability, there were both internal and external issues to reconcile. In 1989, audit statements revealed a cumulative deficit of \$3.9 million. During the Fall of

²⁸² Institutional Effectiveness Annual Report of Morris Brown College Academic Year 1988-90; Management Council binder #1 (2-26-90 to 5-23-91). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

²⁸³ Clara Boston, Morris Brown College administrator, interview by author, 24 April, 2007.

²⁸⁴ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 3 May, 2007.

²⁸⁵ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 27 February, 2007.

1992, that deficit grew to \$5 million.²⁸⁶ In response, two events happened: 1) there was an administrative change when the Board of Trustees hired Dr. Herman Smith, who implemented an aggressive fund-raising campaign, and 2) College administrators took steps to improve its internal control mechanisms and management.²⁸⁷

The board and the campus considered Herman Smith a “turnaround” President, whose primary job was to alleviate the College of its debt. His mission was to get the College in a financially solvent state. According to Cassidy Lawson, the board commissioned Dr. Smith to bring money into the College (a task he’d completed successfully at other institutions). Both the board of trustees and SACS understood of his purpose, and he was not intended to be a long-term president. In order for him to be effective, Herman Smith would hold the title of President. This would allow him to gain an audience with the persons and organizations that possessed significant resources to share. He was clearly focused, however, on stabilizing the College’s finances. During his tenure, the College also initiated a presidential search that would eventually result in the hiring of Dr. Samuel D. Jolley. There was a period of overlap, during which Herman Smith and Samuel Jolley worked together toward the reduction of debt at the College and balancing its budget.²⁸⁸

Together, Smith and Jolley successfully petitioned the board of trustees to declare a ‘state of crisis’ at the College. This was a strategic move to gain the support of major donors. Board policy prevents anyone other than the board of trustees from declaring a

²⁸⁶ Morris Brown College Comprehensive Self-Study Report (Draft). Managerial Notes of Previous Administrators December 11, 1998. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

²⁸⁷ No single document in the administrative records connects these two occurrences as a unified effort to increase the College’s effectiveness, but they happen simultaneously during the beginning of the final decade of the twentieth century.

²⁸⁸ Cassidy Lawson, interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

state of crisis for the institution. The tactic—while originating with the two chief-administrators—had to be approved by the board. With the help of external organizations such as the Coca Cola Foundation and the Lily P. Whitehead Foundation, the College eradicated the cumulative deficit by the middle of the decade.²⁸⁹ The AME Church was also a significant contributor, increasing the amount of its financial support of the College during this time.²⁹⁰

This was an encouraging time for the staff at the College. It seemed as if some persons in the larger community were beginning to value Morris Brown the way the MBC family did. During the early 2000s, I recall staff members recollecting instances during the mid-1990s when individuals would come into the College and donate modest sums of money toward the reduction of the College's debt. According to one tale, an elderly woman came into the Division of Institutional Advancement with a bag of some "under the mattress" cash, money that she'd been saving for something special.

Staff members enacted procedures to improve the College's operating structure. They upgraded technology to meet administrative needs (i.e. the development and implementation of MIS applications to increase productivity in the areas of finance, NDSL loans, and housing); developed an institutional effectiveness model and compliance measures; and developed monthly Staff Seminars as a part of professional development.²⁹¹ Officials at the College understood that there was a need to adjust the

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 18 May, 2007.

²⁹¹ Institutional Effectiveness Annual Report of Morris Brown College Academic Year 1988-90. Management Council binder #1 (2-26-90 to 5-23-91). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

College's method of planning and documentation to reflect the changing expectations of SACS.

The primary concern was [the] coordination of the standards of SACS, which related to specific program areas. The fiscal management needed to be put into play.... Now, because we were actually entering this new wave of Institutional Effectiveness, we had the opportunity to be one of the schools early on in the process. So, as a part of the accreditation piece, we wrote our plan as to what we would do to measure our effectiveness. So we established outcome measures.... But, we established what we *would* do; so it was a very projective type of piece. So, we had seven years to collect baseline data, to measure successes—to measure student learning, to measure operational efficiency; to measure according to the guidelines—because again these were the new guidelines, and put into place a series of processes and operations to determine whether or not we were accomplishing these goals. So we were at the cutting edge, in the sense of this was the new wave of accountability, and we were going in at that point to establishing a criteria as to what we were going to do.²⁹²

Managers and planning officials recognized and addressed weaknesses and issues within the professional body of the College. For example, records note that

- The College, in general, adopted [an institutional effectiveness model] as one of a series of strategic steps designed to assure accountable leadership, results-oriented activities and goal-driven outcomes;
- Divisions differed in planning styles, implementation of activities and evaluation practices
- Staff turnover, unfilled positions, and variable skill levels of managers affected the extent to which goal setting, implementation, and monitoring took place.²⁹³

The College's administration began methodical, unit-by-unit analyses and planning exercises. Student Affairs, Finance, Academic Affairs, and Development/Alumni Affairs and others each used SACS recommendations as a basis for their planning processes.

²⁹² Clara Boston, interview by author, 24 April, 2007.

²⁹³ Institutional Effectiveness Annual Report of Morris Brown College Academic Year 1988-90. Management Council binder #1 (2-26-90 to 5-23-91). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

Student Affairs, for example, designed a plan to address areas in need of programmatic improvement that were identified by internal as well as external constituents. The SACS recommendations, reports from the Office of Institutional Research, and the unit's own evaluation mechanisms served as sources of information to assist with the assessment and planning. Following are some of the recommendations from SACS that informed this process:

- Study staff selection patterns. Determine the pulls and pushes within the different units. Is there anything that can be done to make the positions as competitive as found elsewhere so as to retain good workers?;
- Continue to review the operations of the Financial Aid Office. Assess the needs of the students and staff to insure maximum benefits are provided to the student;
- Evaluate the operations of Financial Aid during Registration. Make recommendations as to how to better serve a “student without personal resources”;
- Institutionalize the plan to require freshmen to attend hall meetings, assemblies, and orientations.²⁹⁴

Some of the staff's efforts to increase internal effectiveness likely stemmed from their recognition of the impact of students' concerns and reaction to the level and quality of service offered at the institution. A survey administered by the American College Testing Service in 1990 offered some poignant information to the College—the College did some things very well, but areas in need of improvement had the potential to severely handicap the college in coming years.²⁹⁵ According to the survey, students were highly satisfied

²⁹⁴ Institutional Effectiveness Annual Report of Morris Brown College, Academic Year 1988-90. Management Council Binder #1 (2-26-90 to 5-23-91). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

²⁹⁵ Interestingly, while the contents and results of this study are included in the managerial planning notes, the survey instrument was administered to only thirty-two students. This, of course, is only a fragment of the total student population—and is not statistically representative of the total student population. However, as the survey results appear in Institutional Effectiveness records, it seems appropriate to make note of its use as a planning instrument by the College's administrators. My own experiences at the College confirm that these results are generally indicative of the climate of student sentiment enrolled at the College during this time, and the years following.

with the student-development thrusts of the College, listing the following as

commendable services:

- personal counseling services (67.5%)
- career planning services (67.4)
- recreational and intramural programs and services (61%)
- library facilities and services (66.5%)
- cultural programs (52%)
- honors program (44.4%).

In contrast, students were particularly dissatisfied with basic administrative services and functions. Amongst those areas listed in need of great improvement were:

- financial aid (49.8%)
- residence hall services and programs (50.6%)
- food services (62.1%)
- registration procedures (57.8%)
- billing and fee procedures (40.6%).²⁹⁶

The survey also accommodated comments from students. The comments run the gamut, and students were candid about their experiences at the College. Some examples are:

- My Freshman “O” [Freshman Orientation] Instructor has been a very excellent person. I have learned a lot from him. I think all instructors should be hard working teachers, this will cause students to study more.
- So far, I have enjoyed my stay at Morris Brown. The only problem that I have is the fact that they do not have a deferred payment plan. I find that highly ridiculous! Every college has a deferred payment plan, not every student can pull out \$2,500 on registration day.
- This institution is very unorganized and should conduct routine checkups on their budget to see where the money is going.
- The college is very unorganized! I have run into problems with the cashier, registrar (I do not have a transcript on file—ridiculous!) Also the cafeteria service

²⁹⁶ Report of the Student Opinion Survey administered by the American College Testing Service; (December 1990); Management Council binder #1 (2-26-90 to 5-23-91). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

is pathetic—I no longer eat there...also if the dormitory was in better shape electrically, many problems would be resolved.

- This is a lovely school but it could be a little bit better. Construction needs working on.
- As a student I am constantly harassed by the status of my Financial Aid. Too many times has someone totally messed up my Financial Aid form, so that I cannot pre-register... due to the fact that some ELSE messed up MY forms. This is the biggest complaint I have. Second is the living condition(s)...
- I enjoy the qualities of the school support.
- Get organized!²⁹⁷

Senior administrators felt that some of the discontent expressed by students likely originated from conversations with some disgruntled faculty and staff members.²⁹⁸ I have observed that it is common for students and employees to candidly discuss the state of the college's finances, administrative changes, and other details relevant to the college's total operation. When the morale of employees was festive, so too were students, and when the employees were worried or dissatisfied, students often vocalized discontent as well.

Inasmuch as there was a need to increase administrative efficiency, the College maintained a student-services program that reflected the College's history and values. Student development initiatives emphasized the institution's tradition as an institution of social uplift. New students in the early 1990s were orientated to the College for approximately two weeks prior to the start of class. Programs included: a Morris Brown College Heritage seminar (presented by the National Alumni Association), Worship Service and Freshmen Induction at Big Bethel AME Church (in whose basement the

²⁹⁷ Report of the Student Opinion Survey administered by the American College Testing Service; (December 1990); Management Council binder #1 (2-26-90 to 5-23-91). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

²⁹⁸ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 29 January, 2007.

College was founded), a visit to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center, a Morris Brown College Historical Jeopardy Game, etc.²⁹⁹

Morris Brown College was growing, both in terms of ideas and the size of its operations and physical campus. Within the spectrum of HBCUs, the College was maintaining a competitive edge with its counterparts. During its 1989 campaign, the UNCF had forty-two member institutions. Morris Brown College received \$839,311, the sixth largest amount for the year (following Tuskegee University, Spelman College, Morehouse College, Bethune-Cookman College and Jarvis Christian College).³⁰⁰ Its donations far exceeded amounts listed for other AME colleges (\$681,956, \$639,889, and \$562,765, for Edward Waters College, Wilberforce University, and Paul Quinn College respectively). In 1990, Morris Brown received \$889,339 and in 1991 it received \$913,503; though its donations increased, it maintained its position relative to the institutions that received more in 1989, and was still the highest recipient amongst AME institutions.³⁰¹

Despite relative success with UNCF campaigning, Morris Brown College was realizing the need to increase internal accountability and control processes in

²⁹⁹ Fall 1990 New Student Orientation Program. Management Council Binder #1 (2-26-90 to 5-23-91). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³⁰⁰ Clark Atlanta University was formed in 1989 from Clark College and Atlanta University; however, the UNCF figures listed in the table for 1989, 1990 and 1991 list donations for Clark Atlanta University and a separate figure for Atlanta University. The combined figures for CAU and Atlanta University in 1989 would equal an amount greater than the donation to Morris Brown College. In following years, the amount listed for CAU alone is greater than the amount for Morris Brown College.

³⁰¹ Morris Brown College, Administrative Records, United Negro College Fund, *Assistance to Member Institutions Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 1989*; United Negro College Fund, *Assistance to Member Institutions, Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 1990*; United Negro College Fund, *Assistance to Member Institutions, Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 1991*. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

order to find favor with more stringent assessors, such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Along with the need to address student-concerns and overall satisfaction, there was also the looming need for external accountability. Even more, external accountability meant an increase in internal accountability and control.

Morris Brown's Institutional Effectiveness program served as the driving force for the implementation of the Long Range Plan in the various units of the College. Planning records indicate that the College's overall effectiveness was hampered by factors such as isolated and fragmented departmental goals, immeasurable goals, and a complicated budget management process.³⁰² The Self-Study was organized according to the College's organizational chart. The leadership team for the project consisted of

1. The Board of Trustees,
2. The President,
3. The Director of Self-Study/Chair of Steering Committee,
4. The Editor {of the report}
5. The Steering Committee,
6. Six Principal Committees corresponding to the six sections in the SACS Criteria Manual,
7. Twenty-six subcommittees corresponding to the twenty-six subsections in the SACS Criteria Manual,
8. Four Evaluation Teams.³⁰³

Perhaps it was a combination of student-response and the on-going quest for full approval from SACS that steered the College into this phase of assessment-and-

³⁰² Morris Brown College Self-Study Report Draft, December 11, 1998, in. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³⁰³ Morris Brown College Self-Study Report Draft, December 11, 1998, ii. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

improvement, resulting in administrative changes, modifications in operating procedures, and budgetary control. Perhaps it was simply a growing awareness of the competitive nature of the market. Drake Davenport, a senior officer with the Morris Brown College National Alumni Association, suggests that the College was facing the challenge of surviving in a “shrinking market” and that the competition amongst colleges was great.³⁰⁴ Administrators acknowledged a desire to become “a serious competitor in the education market place and to assure continued growth in the future,” and offered the following suggestions as a part of the five- year effort to realize this goal:

- A well-designed national marketing and development program for the College;
- A significant increase in the retention rates of students;
- The establishment of an assessment system to measure institutional; effectiveness in terms of employer satisfaction, graduate school success and career satisfaction with skill preparation;
- The assessment of program effectiveness and efficiency using budget and outcome variable analysis;
- Reduction of debt and implications of Student Aid Audit Exposure
- Recruitment of faculty who can assist the institution in meeting the financial challenge of the College;
- Increase networking with business, community, governmental and inter-college relationships.³⁰⁵

Along with a tightening of internal control, the administration faced the need to address “extension” organizations (alumni/ae support clubs) that affected audit findings and the overall financial standing of the institution. Morris Brown College has an active National Alumni Association—the official mechanism through which alumni/alumnae

³⁰⁴ Drake Davenport, Morris Brown College alumnus, interview by author, 26 January , 2007

³⁰⁵ Institutional Effectiveness Annual Report of Morris Brown College Academic Year 1988-90. Management Council Binder #1 (2-26-90 to 5-23-91). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

interacted with and supported the institution.³⁰⁶ The Morris Brown College National Alumni Association (MBCNAA or NAA) is comprised of local chapters, organized within regional structures, governed by the elections of local, regional, and national officers. Because the NAA is the primary recognized fundraising arm of the alumni/alumnae body, its members' perspectives were carefully considered by the institution. Though generally considered unpretentious, the organization has been known to lobby for certain initiatives considered of import to alumni/alumnae.³⁰⁷

Other auxiliary organizations, are: the TAY Club (an athletic booster organization), the MBC Athletic Foundation, the MBC Band Foundation, Women For Morris Brown College (founded by former first-lady Helen Threatt during the 1970s) and various alumni/ae-organizations of Greek-letter affiliations (i.e. Deltas for Morris Brown College, AKA for MBC).³⁰⁸ These groups cater to smaller, more specific groups of graduates. However, as with student organizations and affiliations, there is often an overlap in membership.

³⁰⁶ The College and the National Alumni Association both recognize a "graduate" as any person having received a degree from the College. However, for the purpose of participating in alumni activities, an "alumnus" or "alumna" may be considered any person that has attended the institution, and has been inducted into the Morris Brown College family during a "Rites of Passage" ceremony, or a similar event, usually conducted during Freshmen Orientation week.

³⁰⁷ Clara Boston, interview by author, 24 April, 2007.

³⁰⁸ Alumni/ae organizations at Morris Brown College are the crux of alumni/ae support for the institution. Most of the College's financial, publicity, and student-recruitment assistance is channeled through one of more of these organizations. Very little is accomplished between the College and its alumni/ae except through these groups, and the membership in these entities often overlap. During this time period, there was a growing acknowledgement (and concern) that the overwhelming majority of the alumni active in these organizations were individuals of an aging population. Graduates of the 1940s, 50s 60s, 70s and a few from the 1980s were present and involved in initiatives to support the College. Even at the close of the 1990s there was a noticeable shift, in that younger alumni/ae and soon-to-be-graduates were seemingly disconnected from these organizations, or they somehow had not developed an interest in participating. Those that supported the College with vigor were growing older—yet the organizations themselves remained essential to the College in terms of connecting with and motivating alumni/ae to uphold the institution.

An externally-administered audit of the College during 1991 determined that there were volunteer alumni/alumnae organizations that conducted various activities (i.e. fund raising, selling products and services, social and entertainment functions, recruitment of students) on behalf of the College, using the “Morris Brown College” name. The auditors posited that these organizations presented financial, reputational, and control concerns to the College—because it might appear to the public that these associations and their activities are officially sponsored or controlled by Morris Brown. This, said the auditors:

- Creates confusion among donors as to whether their donations are received by the official institution or some loosely-affiliated organization
- Creates problems with alcohol liability in connection with social and entertainment events
- Creates legal and income tax liability complications, and
- Creates confusion with the various foundations and/or sponsoring organizations³⁰⁹

The relationship between some of the auxiliary organizations and the College’s administration has been strained at times. The College has had no real administrative control over the infrastructure or fiscal management of these groups. Administrators have contended with the need to establish a mechanism to regulate and monitor the collection of funds, though the organizations do contribute notable sums of money to the College (amounts which increase during crisis situations). Amongst the staff, there was sometimes the perception that some of the organizations (large contributors, such as the

³⁰⁹ Memorandum Regarding Audit and Financial Statements. From an External Consulting Firm to President Calvert Smith. Management Council November 21, 1991. Morris Brown College, Office of Fiscal Affairs.

Morris Brown College Athletic Association) were as powerful as the president in terms of their influence on the thoughts and decisions of the board of trustees.³¹⁰

The auditors suggested that the College and the board of trustees should investigate the College's relationship with these organizations, and plan to better control and oversee activities (to restrict the use of the College's name). They further suggested that the College should consider bringing the organizations under the direct control of Morris Brown College.³¹¹

Alumni and alumnae shared the desire for more synergy between Morris Brown and its alumni/alumnae as well. According to Mr. Davenport, during the 1990s, the National Alumni Association expended a lot of energy trying to fit within the structure of the College, and concentrated its efforts on making sure that the College was solvent financially. The Association's primary focus was fundraising, but also contributed to the College's student recruitment efforts as well. Chapters and regions across the country worked with civic organizations, AME Churches, and churches of other denominations to raise money and awareness for Morris Brown.³¹² The College's Office of Alumni Affairs also utilized these organizations to reach philanthropists, prospective students, and media outlets that were inaccessible to College's staff on a daily basis.

Administrators made a conscious effort to increase the student body, and improve graduation rates. At a Management Council meeting in 1990, faculty members and

³¹⁰ Clara Boston, interview by author, 24 April, 2007.

³¹¹ Memorandum Regarding Audit and Financial Statements. From an External Consulting Firm to President Calvert Smith. Management Council November 21, 1991. Morris Brown College, Office of Fiscal Affairs.

³¹² Drake Davenport, interview by author, 26 January, 2007.

administrators discussed priorities for the educational programs of the College during the decade. Some of the items discussed were:

- To increase the size of the graduating class from 100 to 300 by 1995, while maintaining an enrollment of 1800 students.³¹³
- To build a continuing education program with an enrollment of 300 students during the evenings and weekends by 1995.
- To ensure that 60 percent of the students starting in the basic skills program will complete their major programs within six years.
- To develop programs at the department level that will ensure that seventy-five percent of the students accepted in each major program will graduate in four years.
- To ensure that fifty percent of the graduating class will gain entry to graduate and professional schools by 1995.³¹⁴

In 1993, there was evidence of a turnaround in financial circumstances.

The College experienced a period of progress. Although the College was placed on six-month probation with SACS in December 1993, by June of 1994, SACS lifted the probationary status and the College was granted full membership.³¹⁵

The Morris Brown College community was very encouraged with where the College was headed.

A Period of Development and Cautious Optimism: 1994-1999

In Self-Study planning documents, Morris Brown College administrators refer to the years 1994-1997 as the Recovery Period. The College was emerging from a tense

³¹³ Precise information regarding the relationship between the increase in enrollment and the increase in graduation was not available. However, the size of the student body nearly doubled during the time period covered by this study. Additionally, by 1999, the number of graduates had increased to 276. See Morris Brown College 1999 Commencement Program.

³¹⁴ Minutes from a Management Council Meeting. June 6, 1990. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³¹⁵ Morris Brown College Self-Study Report Draft, December 11, 1998, p. xiii. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

period of administrative tightening of budgets, as well as increased appeal to the alumni/ae body and philanthropic community in Atlanta. Administrative documents acknowledge that preceding years had been financially troubling for the College, despite administrators' efforts to grow the College.³¹⁶ The recently identified cumulative deficit had become a very real threat to the College's existence, and the elimination of that debt was central to the College's ability to exist and grow over the next several years.

However, by 1994, the College had apparently reached a moment of what seemed to be stability—of finances, in terms of employee confidence in the institution, and in its standing within the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. During the early months of that year, SACS was still monitoring the College annually, as it had been since the 1989 re-accreditation review. By mid-year, fundraising efforts to create financial solvency for the institution had materialized well. The College submitted a Sixth-Year Progress Report in June of 1994 and met with the accrediting body.³¹⁷ By 1995, the institution was fully re-affirmed with SACS.

The Sixth-Year Report that the College submitted to SACS addressed specific recommendations that had been submitted by the SACS committee during the October 1993 visit to the campus. The Sixth-Year Report, similar to verbal accounts from my study's participants who worked at the College, indicates that the climate of the College during this time reflects very deliberate planning and implementation of events. There seems to be some consensus that the academic unit and student services activities within

³¹⁶ Morris Brown College Comprehensive Self-Study Report Draft. December 11, 1998. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

the College were of quality, and appropriate to the mission and scope of the institution.

Thus, much of the administrative efforts focused on areas such as:

- Planning (Condition of Eligibility: that the institution has an appropriate plan, a functioning plan, and evaluation process...);
- Financial Base and Audit (Condition of Eligibility: the institution has established an adequate financial base and has available an audited financial statement...);
- Financial Aid Audit (Condition of Eligibility: that all financial aid funds are audited in compliance with all federal and state requirements...);
- Budget (Condition of Eligibility: that the institution must prepare an appropriately detailed annual budget whose preparation and execution is preceded by sound educational planning.);
- Budgetary Control (Condition of Eligibility: that a system of budgetary controls be established and implemented on a continuing basis;
- Facilities Master Plan (Condition of Eligibility: that the institution maintain a current written Physical Facilities Master Plan which provides for the orderly future development of the institution with respect to educational, financial, and student needs...).³¹⁸

Interestingly, the nature of the recommendations from SACS coincided well with the intent of administrators to strengthen the College's internal processes to make it more competitive and viable leading into the upcoming century. That is, one can only speculate whether these particular areas of weakness (i.e. planning, budgetary controls, facilities planning) would have surfaced as areas of priority for the board of trustees and administrators without the coercion provided by SACS mandates; however, the directives provided by the accreditation agency were aligned, in theory and practice, with what the College community desired during this time... a sustainable and vibrant College, with the ability to grow and compete in a market where student-choice was increasingly obvious.

³¹⁸ Morris Brown College Sixth-Year Report; Submitted to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. April 18, 1994: 10-28. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

The Sixth-Year Report to SACS heavily emphasized the College's commitment to more strategic and substantive planning exercises, assessment of departments across all areas of the College, goal-setting, and strategic forecasting.³¹⁹ It indicated,

Since the October 1993 report, Morris Brown College has made a concerted effort to systematically respond to each recommendation as noted in the Report from the Special Committee. In the area of planning, the College has directed her efforts in three major areas in order to insure that the instructional and support programs at the College are effective and of quality. The primary goals are directed at finalizing the 1994 Strategic Planning Process; fully implementing the Department Assessment Plan (DAP); and updating the MBC Long Range Plan to include the integration of the Facilities Development Plan with instructional and student needs that are supported by fiscal responsibility and accountability.³²⁰

The Report also indicated that the College had a then-current operating surplus—a result of fund raising, increased enrollment, and working within the budget.³²¹ The College had resolved its outstanding debt, in large part due to contributions from philanthropic organizations (i.e. the Coca Cola Foundation and the Whitehead Foundation), as well as smaller donations from what now seemed to be a caring and supportive public.³²² The College was “pressing forward between ’94 and ’98... pressing forward in terms of academic programs and pressing forward in terms of financial standing.”³²³ In 1994, the College reported an operating surplus of approximately \$2.2

³¹⁹ Morris Brown College. Sixth-Year Report. Submitted to Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. April 18, 1994. 11-12. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³²⁰ Morris Brown College Sixth-Year Report. Submitted to Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. April 18, 1994:10. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³²¹ Morris Brown College Sixth-Year Report. Submitted to Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. April 18, 1994: 13. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³²² Cassidy Lawson, interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

³²³ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 29 January, 2007.

million. Administrators indicated that budget projections and spending allowances were based on actual student enrollment, with adjustments in spending allowances made based upon available funds. Additionally, the College reported “liquidating prior fiscal year [obligations]” in excess of \$1 million.³²⁴

Apparently, the College’s administrative team was successfully able to convey the similarity between the College’s internal improvement efforts and the expectations of the Visiting Committee. The report contained details regarding the College’s Institutional Effectiveness Model and planning processes, debt-reduction and budget-enhancements (a result of financial fund-raising), independent audit activities by a local firm, etc.³²⁵ During the next several months the College’s continuance on probationary status and the increased activity between the College and SACS were signs that the College was in fact making progress towards meeting the requirements of the accreditation body. In this case, more activity meant more progress.

Over the next year, accreditation-related activities reflected the institution’s increased ability to move beyond the financial challenges that previously plagued the College, and maintain feasible and practical processes. Between June of 1994 and June of 1995, the accreditation committee would:

- review the Sixth Follow-Up Report and Special Committee Report, continue the institution on Probation, request a Seventh Follow-Up Report, and authorize a Special Committee visit (June, 1994);
- review the Seventh Follow-Up Report and Special Committee Report, remove the institution from Probation, and request a report on financial aid (December 1994); and

³²⁴ Morris Brown College. Sixth-Year Report. Submitted to Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. April 18, 1994, 18. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³²⁵ Morris Brown College Sixth-Year Report; Submitted to Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. April 18, 1994, 10-18. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

- review the report on financial aid and did not require any additional reporting (June, 1995).³²⁶

The College had also acquired a new team of executive leadership—there was a new president, a fresh face. President Samuel Jolley officially assumed the presidency in October of 1993. His arrival at the College marked the beginning of what the College community perceived as a period of progress. The environment at the institution was ripe for this sort of change, and it appeared that this was an organization (of current employees and students as well as “extended” alumni/ae family members) that placed importance and confidence in the office of President.³²⁷

The position of president at Morris Brown College was a very public office.³²⁸ Employees, the majority of students, alumni/ae, friends of the college, and a good portion of the public are often intimately familiar with who the president is, how he (and eventually she) is perceived and received by the faculty, staff, students, alumni/ae and the scrutiny of the public, and how the president is faring amidst challenges. In this case, the Morris Brown College family was very ready for some stability—it was tired of change, tired of public speculation regarding the College’s future. Employees and students valued

³²⁶ Morris Brown College Administrative Record for the Appeals Hearing; Binder I. Tabs M, N, O. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³²⁷ I spend considerable time during this section describing the impact and impression of the current president on the College. During the years of this study, successes and crises are often connected—in verbal accounts, and somewhat within written pieces—to the person(s) occupying executive leadership positions at the College. Significant weight is attributed to who is in office, as well as the disposition of the board of trustees. The “state of the college” was considered a contingency of the effectiveness of the current president, or sometimes lack thereof. At the very least, the nature of the president’s relationship with his/her constituencies reflected what the “feeling” of the MBC family was, where the College’s priorities lay.

³²⁸ This has been the nature of the Office of President and the board of trustees throughout the College’s history. Employees, alumni/ae and students often argue the effectiveness of the president and the chair of the board, using first names in their stories, and with an air of familiarity with the sense of ownership and reciprocity that is perhaps unfamiliar to larger institutions.

the president as both an active leader to direct the College's functions, and a symbolic chief to represent the College to external (often critical, probing, and quizzical) observers.

The College adjusted comfortably to the administration of Dr. Jolley, and his personal and professional backgrounds seemed to fit well within the purpose and perspective of Morris Brown College. College documents and public relations documents contained biographies for the president that portrayed Dr. Jolley as a native of Georgia, whose family had modest means but a wealth of ambition and solid values. Like many presidents before him, Dr. Jolley was an active member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. As an undergraduate, he was educated (and eventually worked) at Fort Valley State College (now Fort Valley State University), Georgia's premier land-grant institution for Blacks, and a contender with Morris Brown in the sports arena.³²⁹ Thus to the College, he both understood the boot-strap successes that Morris Brown strongly identified with, and was able to relate to historical and current charge of Black institutions of higher education.

In terms of employee trust, Dr. Jolley gelled well with the existing administrative team at the College. He was received as the right person for the College, particularly during this period of re-building trust, structure, and security. Although he'd had no prior presidential experience, he was perceived as a "good guy" with "no bad record... no history behind him." People trusted him, because he had not arrived from "some other college doing the wrong thing."³³⁰

³²⁹ "Office of the President," in *Focusing on the Dream, While Looking Forward to the New Millennium*, Brownite Yearbook 1998, 163.

³³⁰ Cassidy Lawson, interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

One of the most pressing priorities for the Jolley administration was to position and enable the College to carry forth the fund-raising initiatives begun by Dr. Herman Smith.³³¹ With the support of the Board of Trustees, the College had garnered the financial backing of persons inside and external to the institution, toward a collective effort to ensure the College's continued existence. Getting the necessary support for drastic action from the board of trustees, however, was no small feat. Many of the persons that held seats on the board were seasoned members, and had been there for a number of years.³³² As such, they were seemingly reluctant to declare a state of crisis, cautious about the damage to the College's reputation that such a move might incur. Dr. Smith and Dr. Jolley worked to change the collective opinion of the board, and the tactic worked.³³³

Internal operations during the mid-decade period for Morris Brown were spent in pursuit of a more sure-footed relationship with SACS, strengthening the College's position and partnership within the academic community of the Atlanta University Center, and improving the College's infrastructure and campus assets. In terms of accreditation-related activities however, some senior staff persons felt that not all of the faculty and staff were as committed to the processes as a committed cadre of people. Says one,

³³¹ Although most documents credit Dr. Jolley with bringing the College through its financial crisis, the campaign and strategies were developed and begun by Dr. Smith. Dr. Jolley was successful ensuring the continuity of the campaign, and the College would eventually eliminate its debt. Cassidy Lawson, interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

³³² Cassidy Lawson suggests that the by-laws of the board limit the term of board members, but these by-laws were not strictly adhered to. Cassidy Lawson., interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

³³³ Cassidy Lawson, interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

I think it was from varying postures, an uneven reaction. There was an effort underway to establish a unified approach to this new process. So there were traditional committees. There were study groups, and there were things in terms of organization that were very efficient and effective. But what I saw missing was that you did not get a buy-in and you didn't get full participation. So, ultimately, you had a small handful of folk writing a document, even though there was input.³³⁴

At the same time, persons who were perhaps considered a part of the College's committed core accepted responsibility for the College in both formal and informal positions. Roles overlapped at the College—with individuals stepping outside of their own functional areas to assist wherever there was a need.

You remember that Morris Brown sign on the left hand side? It bothered me that the grass was not around the sign. And there were weeds, and that sign did not have flowers and you could see...scorched earth. And it just looked like there was a need. So, I personally would get straw and I had a friend who would drive a truck and they would bring flowers and... we planted the flowers, and folk couldn't believe that that was something that I would do. But, because you love Morris Brown, it wasn't something that you would go and tell folk.³³⁵

At some (perhaps surface) level, the College's activities during this period mirrored the activities of some neighboring institutions. Other institutions within the Atlanta University Center were making noticeable efforts to expand, and sought financial strength and increased prestige. Leading into the 1990s, Clark College had merged with Atlanta University, and the new Clark-Atlanta University was gaining momentum in terms of public perception and the size of its student body. Spelman College had recently appointed its first female president (Dr. Johnetta Cole is noted for the enormous amount of financial success, prestige, and awareness she garnered for Spelman). I have observed

³³⁴ Clara Boston, interview by author, 24 April, 2007.

³³⁵ Clara Boston, interview by author, 24 April, 2007

that, generally, the Atlanta University Center schools appeared to be more aggressive about positioning themselves individually—though one could argue that there was little interest in moving the institutions collectively toward a greater position of influence in the academic community. Each institution was responsible for its own success—or the effort to obtain any measure of it.

The location of the colleges in Atlanta, and their collective affinity with the Atlanta University Center did, however, create opportunities for the individual colleges to lobby for donations and assistance from public funds and private organizations—enabling institutions in some way to benefit from the overall favor that institutions garnered from some supporters during this era. Leading up to the 1996 Olympic games, for example, Morris Brown College participated in negotiations with the Atlanta Committee for Olympic Games (ACOG), and was one of several colleges (predominantly White institutions as well as historically Black colleges throughout the area) to benefit from new construction and structural renovations. These additions to the campuses are visible and outfitted for use years later, and are still considered a coup for the College.

As a result of the Olympics, Morris Brown received additional funding that may have otherwise been unobtainable. The College received a new football stadium, with an estimated worth of \$22 million.³³⁶ In addition to its usage as an athletic facility, the new Herndon Stadium would enable the college to bolster select academic areas as well. According to reports to SACS regarding structural progress during the era, the facility would provide areas for broadcasting that would support the College's curriculum in

³³⁶ Morris Brown College Bulletin, Special Edition. Fall 1997.

broadcast communications.³³⁷ Additionally, ACOG provided renovations and upgrades to dormitory infrastructures (including the installation of air conditioning and conversion of the Middleton Complex to natural gas utilities), upgrades to the John H. Lewis Athletic complex, and improved landscaping throughout the campus.³³⁸

Along with private monies donated by the ACOG planning committee, officials at Morris Brown also petitioned for innovative government grants that garnered attention for the College. Morris Brown received the first historic restoration grant from the Department of Interior (a total of \$ 7 million) for the research, restoration, and preservation of historic buildings on historically Black college campuses.³³⁹ To qualify for the grant, designated appointees were required to research the original integrity (i.e. structure, color) of the building, and re-construct it to its original state, as best possible.³⁴⁰ Achieving this not only provided the College with needed residential space for a growing student body, but served as a confirmation for the administration and staff that the College was capable of realizing its goal of expansion and development, leading into the upcoming century.

³³⁷ Morris Brown College. Sixth-Year Report. Submitted to Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. April 18, 1994, 28. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³³⁸ Morris Brown College. Sixth-Year Report. Submitted to Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. April 18, 1994, 28. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance; and Shelton Wesley, Morris Brown College administrator, interview by author, 17 March, 2007.

³³⁹ Gaines Hall was the first building constructed for Atlanta University (from whom Morris Brown College obtained the land). The original building, North Hall, was built in 1869 (with an additional building located on the campus named South Hall). Officials learned that it was built on the highest hill in the City of Atlanta, on granite. Researchers discovered that the original structure was a practice-site for Blacks and newly-freed slaves who were learning trade skills. They were able to determine that the internal layers of brick and mortar were noticeably crooked in some places—an indication of someone learning. The outer structure, it seemed, was finished by a master craftsman. Interview with Shelton Wesley, March 17, 2007.

³⁴⁰ Over seventy other colleges applied for this grant. Morris Brown College received the first. Shelton Wesley, interview by author, 17 March, 2007.

The bulk of the activity at the College between 1995 and 1997 was focused on obtaining and strategically utilizing external support. Administrators and staff spent significant time cultivating relationships with would-be and confirmed supporters. The College and the board of trustees were focused on campus revitalization—an energy that fit easily into the Olympic-preparatory climate of the Atlanta area during this time.³⁴¹

However, even as magnanimous as the coup was, these acquisitions were a smaller progression than what the College had established as benchmarks and goals for the mid-decade period. A Facilities Master Plan, developed in 1990, projected that by 1995 the College would have acquired additional properties (including buildings and land adjacent to the campus owned by other organizations and educational institutions), demolished some current housing facilities, and constructed new facilities such as an Information and Visitor Center and new residence halls.³⁴² In reality, according the Sixth- Year Report submitted to SACS in 1994, these extensive acquisitions and renovations were not feasible during this time, a fact that made the improvements sponsored by the Olympic games all the more significant.³⁴³

Both the AME Church and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools had noticeable influence on the College during this time, though perhaps to varying degrees. The Church, in some instances, would be the barometer for ethical and moral behavior. Morris Brown College was an institution of the Church—that is, it was Church-founded, and remained in many ways Church-defined. My exploration of administrative

³⁴¹ Interview with Shelton Wesley, 17 March , 2007.

³⁴² Morris Brown College. Sixth-Year Report. Submitted to Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. April 18, 1994, 28. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³⁴³ Morris Brown College Sixth-Year Report. Submitted to Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. April 18, 1994, 28. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

documents yielded nothing that indicated that the AME Church officially “governed” the College during these years—but it certainly helped to determine its character.³⁴⁴

For example, around 1997, Morris Brown College enlisted the assistance of members of various alumni/ae support organizations to execute a car raffle to raise funds to support some of the College’s efforts. The process would be controlled by the College, and alumni and alumnae would assist in the selling of tickets. According to administrative documents, during conversations regarding the logistics and processes of the raffle, there was some considerable discussion regarding the perception of a Church-affiliated institution promoting a raffle (despite the fact that the National Alumni Association had held two automobile raffles during the past five years with reportedly no negative ramifications).

Eventually, College administrators planned the raffle with more of a focus on legal requirements, as opposed to potential backlash from the Church.³⁴⁵ However, the fact that conversations regarding the feasibility of such a venture would include considerations of religious perspectives is indicative of the strong presence of the Church (or at the very least its ideology) on the College.

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools would have an impact on the College. However, former staff members have indicated that there was a noticeable relaxing amongst the staff in general during this time, perhaps in response to the

³⁴⁴ Data collected from participants indicate that, generally, the influence of the AME Church is manifested through the board of trustees, which was mostly comprised of AME members.

³⁴⁵ Memorandum Regarding Automobile Raffle; To: The Director of Development; From: The Director of Alumni Affairs. July 23, 1997. In Administrative Council Notebook.

College's recent re-affirmation.³⁴⁶ This was common for the College between periods of re-accreditation preparation:

There was progressive period between 1989 and 1992 and between 1994 and 1997; they were similar type periods. One was the 1989 coming out of the re-affirmation successfully and going through 1992. What happened in Dec. '92 was a down time, in which the audit revealed financial troubles. [In] 1992 to 1994 [we were] trying to resolve those financial issues. And it was resolved in 1994. So what you have between 1994 and 1997, there were no real questionable issues coming from the accrediting body. And then comes the opportunity for re-affirmation in 1999, in which you probably will begin to see more information.³⁴⁷

By the mid1990s, the College was generally in a comfortable place in terms of its relationship with its students (the student body continued to grow); with its employees (who welcomed stable leadership and a showing of public support); with its alumni and alumnae (who had turned out in historic record-breaking numbers during the debt-reduction campaign); with the AME Church (it continued its support of the College, and the College continued to acknowledge its ideology); and with SACS (with whom it had achieved full accreditation in 1994). However, although the College had gained full accreditation, there were still issues of concern to the College toward the end of the decade.

The more pressing concerns were: a) recent administrative turnover, and b) administrative practices that (if un-addressed) could jeopardize the College's newly-established financial solvency. The fundraising efforts and financial progress had slowed since the time that Dr. Jolley had arrived.³⁴⁸ Without much apparent preamble, President

³⁴⁶ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 13 March, 2007.

³⁴⁷ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 13 March, 2007.

³⁴⁸ Drake Davenport, interview by author, 26 January, 2007.

Jolley resigned from his position as President in 1998. Of the administrative documents that I've reviewed, nothing indicates that he or other administrators anticipated that he would tender his resignation.³⁴⁹ He would, however, remain closely associated with the College as a condition of his next position as Chief Executive Officer of the Atlanta University Center, Inc. (the not-for-profit governing body that managed the collaborative functions of the colleges within the AUC, such as the shared library facilities).

Jolley's departure occurred during a time when the College was experiencing some positive momentum—on the heels of its re-accredited status, financial support, and a public that was seemingly in favor of the College's continued existence within the post-secondary arena in Atlanta. However, administrators needed to make some adjustments in some of the College's managerial functions. An Audit Report submitted by independent auditors in 1998 revealed that there were

Certain matters involving the internal control over compliance and its operation that [the auditors] consider to be reportable conditions. Reportable conditions involve matters coming to [the auditors'] attention relating to significant deficiencies in the design or operation of the internal control over compliance that, in [the auditors'] judgment, could adversely affect the College's ability to administer a major federal program in accordance with applicable requirements of laws, regulations, contracts and grants.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ There may be administrative documents (e.g. board of trustee minutes) that I have not been privy to that provide greater detail regarding the resignation of President Jolley. Generally, however, printed data and interview participants describe this period in the College's history as perhaps the most stable (of the 14 year span of this particular research project). It certainly was not without its challenges, but the College had made some notable accomplishments toward addressing the financial and administrative threats to its immediate future. The years following, however, would again expose some weaknesses in the College's managerial structure that—coupled with errant decisions—would ultimately cripple the College.

³⁵⁰ The Wesley Peachtree Group. Independent Auditor's Report, Fiscal Year 1999. Morris Brown College FY 2001 Budget Development Plan, Appendix G. (2001): 7. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

The auditors noted that the College had made progress toward the correction of some of the issues noted in previous audit reports, but that steps were necessary to ensure continued financial stability. An Audit Report was submitted to the College in June of 1998.³⁵¹ The College was scheduled to host a SACS Visiting Committee in 1999, for its ten-year Re-affirmation process. The College had survived a mid-decade crisis. It had gained a president, and lost him. It was financially solvent, but with some practices and processes that could undermine its recent successes.

The interim between Dr. Jolley's departure and the hiring of the next president was significant for three reasons. First, the College's administration was shifting yet again; but there was reason to be optimistic about what the next few years would bring. The College had survived a financial crisis. The incoming president would lead a college that was reportedly in a much more stable place than it had been for recent predecessors. Second, the upcoming re-accreditation visit from SACS was imminent. The Visiting Team's review was scheduled to take place in 1999. It was important for the College to demonstrate that it had continued to correct and reinforce the administrative processes that were weak areas in prior visits (e.g. planning and evaluation, budgetary controls).

Third, the College was heavily dependent upon the work and knowledge of administrators and faculty that had remained at the College through multiple presidential administrations. During this time, the College would rely heavily on the skills of experienced administrators and faculty members that had been involved in previous SACS reviews. Their priority was to prepare the College for the upcoming SACS visit in 1999, and ease the transition between the College and its new administration.

³⁵¹ I will further discuss some of the findings and recommendations submitted by the Visiting Team in the next section of the dissertation.

I recall that the 1997-98 academic term was overflowing with anticipation. There was the perception that the Morris Brown of the future would not be the institution that it had been in the past. There was a growing awareness of the complexity of the College's existence. The College remained ideologically committed to the tenets of the AME Church that birthed it and had been its longest supporter. Yet the future of institution was contingent upon its ability to maintain SACS approval (signaling the College's good-standing in the eyes of its peers and many funding sources as well). Moreover, competition amongst colleges and universities (for students, money, and prestige) was intense. The next period in the College's history would challenge many of its relationships—with its own constituents, with SACS, and within the network of post-secondary institutions.

The College at a Crossroads: 1998-2003

Some might call the next few years a turning point in the history of the College. One might say that these years simply siphoned out many of the issues that had lain (some quietly and some not-so-quietly) beneath the surface of the College's managerial sheath for many years. The College had long contended with challenges that resulted from changes in administration—including inconsistencies with how the College approached actualizing its vision, shifting in foci.³⁵²

It is somewhat difficult to describe the state of the College during this time. In some respects, the College had grown and was postured to become a greater, more

³⁵² Cassidy Lawson, interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

competitive and more recognized institution than it had been in years prior. At the same time, it was also vulnerable—having undergone annual monitoring from SACS for most of the preceding ten-year accreditation cycle, having an audit that identified considerable weaknesses in the College’s fiscal internal controls mechanisms, having yet another presidential turnover, and facing a new accreditation review cycle. A mishandling of any of these contextual variables could damage the institution’s viability.

From 1998 to 2003, the College would have two presidents, and two interim presidents. Prior to the arrival of Dr. Dolores Cross, Dr. Gloria Anderson would serve as interim president. Dr. Anderson held an endowed chair position in the Chemistry Department, and had also previously served as interim president during an earlier transition at the College. The uncertain nature of the Office of President during this time would be a major factor in the College’s inability to navigate the circumstances leading up to its loss of accreditation. Faculty members and administrators posit that the combined discontinuity and disjointed policies of the presidencies during these years ultimately crippled the College. Says one former faculty member and senior administrator, “anybody knows that the former president [Dr. Dolores E. Cross] led us to where we were, but we were ultimately responsible for losing our accreditation because of later administrators.”³⁵³ Further, there appears to be a very distinctive eroding of trust during this period between administrators during this period and the faculty and staff members employed at the College.³⁵⁴

³⁵³ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 3 May, 2007.

³⁵⁴ Conversations with participants, as well as the intonation of some executive correspondence and public relations documents indicate that this was a very sensitive time at the College, and that there was some dissonance within the College community.

Most of this study's participants would agree that the events of these five years would have a greater impact on the College than any other single period in its history. Administrators during this period published reports that suggested that the College was in a position to learn from (and move beyond) many of the crises that had plagued the institution in the past. It was a new day for the College.

The values of self-reliance, ingenuity and perseverance have guided Morris Brown through three difficult periods in its history. In the late 1920s Morris Brown College was bankrupt.... But rather than close its doors (1928) the institution rallied.... In 1972 Morris Brown weathered another crisis, when the Institution's leadership feared that the conditions of a major foundation grant would have destroyed much of the College's cherished autonomy.... More recently, Morris Brown College rallied (1992) to discharge \$8 million in debt.³⁵⁵

The thematic message from the Cross administration (to the students, alumni/ae, faculty and staff) was that Morris Brown College would now be better than it had been before. The administration suggested that lessons learned from past crises were the basis by which the College was prepared to move forward, unencumbered.

Today's campus leaders value the lessons provided by the courageous examples of the founders and leaders over the years.... More than ever, the College leadership is committed to learn from the past—in order to determine what can be done differently to ensure the College's viability in the present and future.³⁵⁶

In retrospect, the Cross administration has become synonymous with crisis and the vulnerability of the College. In some respects, these years would serve as a capstone to the College's recent history. The institution had moved through a period of intense

³⁵⁵ Morris Brown College, "The Core Values and Attributes in Morris Brown's History," *2000 and Beyond: What Does It Take To Endure?* (Spring 2000): 4.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

exposure to public scrutiny and critique from accreditors and lenders, during the mid-to-late 1990s, to a period in which it might comfortably look forward to a more stable and productive near future.

Because the College had been financially vulnerable during recent years, coupled with the heightened awareness of the tenuous status of its accreditation, it was very important that the next president of the College establish stability, project an image of integrity and academic rigor, and create a collective sense of accountability and ownership of improvement processes. Although few said it candidly (as I detail later in this section), the internal morale needed boosting. The Morris Brown family needed reassurance that the College (its students, its academic programs, its marketability, etc.) was valuable in a way that others external to the institution (i.e. SACS, other institutions, the discerning public) could recognize.

The end of the century was near, and persons at the College generally felt it was time to galvanize their energies and resources to correct and eliminate weak points in the College's managerial history, strengthen its public image, and vie more effectively for resources and students actively sought by other institutions. During the interim between presidents, staff members worked to put into place procedures and policies to improve the College's fiscal management and reporting processes. The board identified staff and faculty members who had been employed at the College through several presidential administrations to ready the college's policies, processes, and documentation for the College's upcoming accreditation review, during the Spring semester of 1999. Says one senior staff person,

Let me tell you something. I had done the budget for the year Fall '98 (Fiscal Year '99, beginning July 1, 1998) when the new President came in.

I had done the budget and the budget had a surplus. The Board wouldn't even talk to me about a budget unless it was balanced.³⁵⁷

It was in some ways a moment of reckoning for the College. It could either continue to marginally meet standards and expectations (by SACS, and the public) and exist on the periphery of an increasingly-competitive market, or it could exemplify the attributes that alumni/ae and employees boasted about. It could re-define itself in the eyes of a very critical public, or prolong its endeavor to maintain internal morale and prove itself. The College was at a crossroads.

The board of trustees worked to secure a president that would: eradicate the College's financial inconsistencies (an on-going pesky thorn for the institution); increase the visibility and (external) credibility of the College's academic programs and faculty; and accelerate the College's efforts to become a competitive institution. The board sought to hire a president that would move the College forward. Its final candidate was considered

a high profile president, having served as president at a distinguished university. It probably was the feeling of the Board of Trustees that this person knew what she was doing, and would represent the College well in terms of decisions.³⁵⁸

Dr. Dolores E. Cross, the College's first female president, was hired in 1998, just prior to an upcoming visit from a SACS review team in 1999.³⁵⁹ Ultimately, the Board's

³⁵⁷ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 27 February, 2007.

³⁵⁸ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 13 March, 2007.

³⁵⁹ Morris Brown College Office of Public Relations, "Morris Brown College Names New President," *2000 and Beyond: What Does it Take To Endure*. (Spring 2000), 5.

handling of the hiring and supervision of Dr. Cross would prove to be problematic for the institution.

The Board, upon the arrival of the new president in November of 1998, granted the new president privileges that had not been provided previously to past presidents. That president was able to make financial decisions at a higher level, amount, without Board approval. So that opened up the avenue for the president to make decisions about employing and other decisions and things of that sort, because in essence she had negotiated that.³⁶⁰

Dr. Cross did not assume office very smoothly. Although she was scheduled to take office on January 1, 1999, she opted to start in October of 1998 instead. The first twelve months of her tenure at the College would expose tensions between the existing employees and the Cross administrative team. The problems with that administration were many. One of the first, however, was a seeming lack of disregard for existing faculty and staff members—and the work that had previously been done toward preparing the College's fiscal processes for SACS to review. Administrators posit that some of the early decisions made by Dr. Cross compromised the balanced budget that had been previously established.

Now, what happened was, the new president came in and hired all those people, and hired them at much higher salaries than the College had been paying. For example, the College paid the Chief Executive Vice President \$154,000. And I know that because at the last board meeting I attended, the new president invited me to come... she was telling them that was what she wanted to pay him. And they got mad. They didn't want to pay him that, but she got mad... and they caved in.... And so, the College should not have been out of money in the Fall 1998, but because of the way the new president spent money, they may have been out.³⁶¹

³⁶⁰ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 13 March, 2007.

³⁶¹ Interview with Agatha Grendon, February 27, 2007.

According to the Cross administration, it had received some specific charges from the board of trustees, requiring decisions that would not increase her popularity with the existing administrative or faculty bodies. The administration's self-published statement of its purpose included:

- Reorganization
- Self-Study
- Development
- Enrollment
- Quality of Life
- And Communication³⁶²

These things are not inconsistent with what any incoming administration might be charged with accomplishing. However, the Cross administration was very aggressive in re-directing the College, re-assessing the caliber of the academic units, re-organizing the staff, and overhauling the College's public image. In fact, publicity and marketing may well have been the strong suits of the Cross administration. It was well-equipped at spinning images, attracting attention for the organization, and pushing the College as a newly-re-developed machine. Following the recent financial and accreditation crises during the mid-1990s, this was not a bad approach. Public awareness was increasingly impressive, evidenced by increased activity within the Admissions Office and other units throughout the campus.³⁶³ Retrospectively, however, Dr. Cross's lack of candor with the

³⁶² Morris Brown College, "The Transition Team, 2000 and Beyond: What Does It Take To Endure?" (Spring 2000), 6.

³⁶³ As an employee within the Office of Admissions during this time, I recall having an increase in individuals and groups requesting campus tours, a surge in freshmen and transfer applications, being very well-received during visits to high schools and other educational institutions for recruitment events, etc. There was an excitement amongst the student body as well. In some ways, students felt less pressured to prove themselves worthy participants in post-secondary education, as they enrolled in classes at other Atlanta University Center schools (via the Center's cross-registration process). While persons affiliated with the College felt that we had had bragging rights regarding auxiliary programs like the Morris Brown College band, it seemed that we were now postured to increase the community's awareness of our

board, employees, alumni and alumnae, students, and ultimately the public regarding the College's financial status and other important issues eroded many crucial relationships that would affect her ability to function as president at the College.³⁶⁴

Dr. Cross established a Transition Team, of persons selected by her, to include an Executive Vice President, Dean of the College, Dean of Faculty, Vice President of Institutional Advancement, Dean of Enrollment Management, and others.³⁶⁵ The Cross administration's initial interaction with the faculty and staff at the College had a decidedly patronizing air.³⁶⁶ The senior staff included some individuals who had been in key positions at the College prior to the current administration, and a significant number of individuals that were new arrivals. One new administrator, a woman in the ethnic minority at the College (and seemingly unfamiliar with Black colleges), intimated that the Cross administration's goal was to change the culture of the institution. Says Agatha Grendon,

Actually, they came down, the small group that she brought in, came down with the idea—at least we got the idea—I wasn't the only one, that they were going to come here to this southern Black college and [were] going to teach these people how to run a college. And I mean people, faculty and staff who were there, got that impression. It wasn't just me. It was condescending.³⁶⁷

academic programs and student-achievements as well. It felt, in many ways, like the College was on the verge of receiving its due.

³⁶⁴ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 29 January, 2007.

³⁶⁵ "Morris Brown College Response to the Report of the Re-Affirmation Committee." Morris Brown College Administrative Records for the Appeal of Accreditation. July 1999. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³⁶⁶ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 3 May, 2007.

³⁶⁷ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 3 May, 2007.

Others may have felt that the intent of the new administration was commendable, but that Dr. Cross and her team were out of synchronization with the pulse of the College. She would need to find a balance between working decisively toward stabilizing the College (as she was no doubt hired to do) and dismissing the specificities that define the College—its identity.

Yes, there was a desire to change the culture and that could have meant their misunderstanding of what the Black culture is. I think that where they were taking us was, to some extent, a good move, but there was not a balance in terms of the Black culture and then the quick expansion into what we're calling corporate America. We were already in corporate America, but we were in corporate America as a people of color. I think they were moving to a point of a colorless society. And that's a good thing, but I think they were moving too fast. I think there were steps in between that should have been taken, and you cannot do that over a six month period... it's culture and all of that. And you cannot walk away from that. No matter how high one moves on the corporate ladder, they cannot move too far away from their foundation, which would be their roots.³⁶⁸

Interestingly, the Cross administration posited that it would approach the “process of change” within the College through “trust and teamwork.”³⁶⁹ However, many existing employees felt that the new executive team achieved the exact opposite. The faculty and staff often felt alienated from decisions, planning, and the implementation of processes that they had previously been involved in. Key staff members who had been involved in SACS preparations were no longer privy to the process. Further, the Cross administration would dis-empower persons who were responsible for putting together the initial documents, and—in a few short months—elect to re-create much of the accreditation documentation without consulting anyone outside of her executive team.

³⁶⁸ Interview with Frederick Livingston, May 18, 2007.

³⁶⁹ Morris Brown College, “The Transition Team, 2000 and Beyond: What Does It Take To Endure?” (Spring 2000), 6.

We had a self-study report that was completed but we got into problems with SACS because the new president immediately started to change things. She started with her transition team, even before she was supposed to start working.... You don't want to change anything if you have studied yourself and you have done a report, and you are ready for [the] SACS committee chairman... to come in and review it. I think that is what got us in trouble to begin with.... And those of us who knew what the problem was couldn't say anything, because we were not a part of the loop anymore.³⁷⁰

The Cross administration poignantly presented to the rest of the College and to the public that the College was approaching a new era, had a new face, a new managerial structure. Through extensive print releases to the public, the administration announced,

The November 1998 arrival of Dr. Dolores E. Cross at the Morris Brown College campus was a signal event in our history. Dr. Cross became the first female president of this historic institution.... Her first order of business was a comprehensive, critical assessment of the College's strengths and weaknesses. This resulted in a sweeping reorganization of faculty, staff and administration.³⁷¹

"Sweeping reorganization," it would turn out, would very accurately describe the internal culture of the College during upcoming months. The administration strategically presented the need for the College to distance itself from ideas and practices that had previously characterized the institution (save for its ideological founding as an institution for Black uplift), and adopt new strategies that would improve its "fiscal strength and academic integrity."³⁷² This was perhaps exacerbated by an impression of elitism created by the Cross administration, very early after her arrival. For example, during 1999, Dr.

³⁷⁰ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 27 February, 2007.

³⁷¹ "Morris Brown College Names New President," *2000 and Beyond: What Does It Take To Endure?* Spring 2000, 5.

³⁷² Morris Brown College, Comprehensive Strategic Plan. First Follow-Up Report to the Reaffirmation Committee. Appendix A. September 15, 2000. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

Cross would offer select employees an all-expense paid retreat to Guadalajara, Mexico—during the same period in which she and her Transition team asserted that the College’s financial picture was unclear.³⁷³ The administration asserted, internally and to external bodies of interest, that

the circumstances of institutional effectiveness and adequacy of resources brought the realization that change was necessary and inevitable...” [and Dr. Cross would] “...create a coherent, student-centered institution... [and establish a] consensus for renewal in the Morris Brown community and provide the impetus for repositioning the College in the educational marketplace of the new Millennium.”³⁷⁴

The president and her cabinet introduced the Learning Tree to Morris Brown College, a Vision that reportedly “put students first by creating and maintaining pre-college programs from elementary through high school; ensuring student retention and success through college; and creating relationships with research universities and corporations to provide graduate school pipelines and career opportunities following graduation.”³⁷⁵ An accomplished marathoner, Dr. Cross also likened the breadth of work that Morris Brown would require to the races in which she had run. She often said Morris Brown would “go the distance” to accomplish the goals it had set for itself. This, too, became a theme with which the College’s public image would come to be associated. The new Morris Brown College was intricately connected to both the “Learning Tree” and “Going the Distance” philosophies, and these themes were uniquely tied to Dr. Cross.

³⁷³ Morris Brown College Executive Council Minutes (February 23, 1999). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³⁷⁴ Morris Brown College, Comprehensive Strategic Plan. First Follow-Up Report to the Reaffirmation Committee. (September 15, 2000), Appendix A. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³⁷⁵ Morris Brown College Catalog, 2000-2001, 12.

In my Founder's Day speech a few months after beginning at Morris Brown, I spoke of going the distance. "As a distance runner, I have experienced the exhilaration of being in the fray, buoyed by the proper training and have established a base, and proceeding with the confidence that comes from being in tune with my body. You must pump your arms, breathe evenly, begin the race strong, maintain a pace, move ahead and remain focused on what you must achieve," I told the audience. I spoke as well of the college being at a crossroads, one not much different from my own. "This is a defining moment. Those of us who love the college must act decisively and we must act now! I can provide the leadership, and I am willing to go the distance. But can we get there? Can we achieve our goal?" "Consider your power," I said. "The race is just beginning. We're in it, doing our personal best, rooted in our beliefs. I ask you to go the distance."³⁷⁶

The Learning Tree philosophy was a thematic thread in both internal and external conversations with the Cross administration. It was the justification that the administration presented to support its decisions regarding academic policies, fiscal decisions, alumni/ae solicitations, and student services. President Cross said to alumni/ae:

[The] Learning Tree vision is the vehicle we have chosen to represent the teaching-learning process at Morris Brown College. This three-point, unified model of a Pre-College, and After-College experience provides the conceptual base for all of our actions and planning for the future.... In keeping with the "we" tradition at Morris Brown College, it is my wish to personally invite you to become a part of "growing" the College and taking it to its next level of distinction. And as soon as you do, I know that you too, will join me in proclaiming with heart and soul, "I'm so glad that I'm at Morris Brown!"³⁷⁷

From the outside looking in, the College had a new leader, a new look, a new vision. Internally, however, the college community was not the new seamlessly-operating

³⁷⁶ Dolores E. Cross, *Breaking Through The Wall: A Marathoner's Story*, (Chicago: Third World Press, 2000), 233.

³⁷⁷ "President's Intro," *2000 and Beyond: What Does It Take To Endure* (Spring 2000), 2; In this way, Dr. Cross was very deliberate with capturing the sentimentalities of an institution with an alumni body that prided itself on its historical religious connections. "I'm So Glad I'm at Morris Brown" is a song, derivative from a common Religious tune with the words "I'm So Glad Jesus Lifted Me" often sung during various assemblies and athletic events at the College.

institution that the Cross administration was portraying it to be. A senior administrator (who had held key positions prior to and during the Cross administration) suggests that Dr. Cross introduced and implemented an academic philosophy and managerial infrastructure without giving herself an opportunity to fully learn the context and intricacies of the College with whom she was now working—her decisions were perceived as hasty, without the benefit of fully knowing the institution.³⁷⁸

Amongst the decisions that Dr. Cross made that raised questions from the College community was the swift re-organization of the faculty. During the Fall of 1998 (the semester that Dr. Cross arrived in Atlanta, albeit prior to her official start date), she and her incoming cabinet began an assessment of current faculty members, replacing the existing process of faculty tenure and promotion with new criteria and processes.³⁷⁹ The faculty members took great exception to the quick questioning of their credentials, and administrators and faculty members alike questioned the wisdom of this move on the eve of a SACS accreditation visit.³⁸⁰ Dr. Susan Lourenco, Special Assistant to the President, developed a question and answer packet for the faculty, explaining the process and the position of the faculty during the process, and requested professional portfolios of each member of the faculty. Dr. Lourenco first assessed the portfolios and then transferred them to Academic Affairs.³⁸¹ Dr. Cross reported that the previous process of faculty evaluations allowed decisions regarding tenure and promotion to be delivered to faculty

³⁷⁸ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 29 January, 2007.

³⁷⁹ Morris Brown College Executive Council Minutes (January 12, 1999). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³⁸⁰ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 27 February, 2007.

³⁸¹ Morris Brown College, Executive Council Minutes (February 23, 1999). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

by December 20th of an academic year. In a report to the Board of Trustees, she acknowledged that, through the inclusion of an at-will clause in the wording of faculty contracts, she was able to make decisions regarding the release of faculty regardless of the December 20th allotted timeframe. She posited that in the future, it would be good for faculty morale if the administration would remove the at-will clause—but expressed that it was proving useful at this time in her re-structuring efforts.³⁸²

She further reported that, given the upcoming visit by SACS, no decisions would be made prior to March of 1999. She also cautioned that a satisfactory assessment of a faculty member's portfolio was not an indication that the person should become relaxed.³⁸³

What the president did was, first of all she asked the staff to submit something, maybe a resume. Then she asked the faculty to submit portfolio binders. And the truth is there wasn't much thought being put into it. The faculty was told to submit their portfolio binders, and there wasn't a lot of thought given to what should be in the binders. And the faculty was given an impression that they wanted them to submit them so that the president could get an idea of who was there, etc. But the administration used the portfolio binders differently. First of all, they did not have a lot of time to put the portfolio together. We were told, or they were told, because I didn't get one (a letter), shortly before Christmas (1998) that they should prepare the portfolio binders and turn them in January (1999). So they didn't have a lot of time to put them together, and they were not given a lot of information of what should be in them. And so some people just threw the portfolios together. And besides they were told that they weren't going to be evaluated on them. However, the administration turned right around and evaluated them, including evaluation on the research they had been doing, attendance at professional meetings, etc. And that should not have been done. And the faculty got really upset because they got letters indicating that people would be fired because they weren't a good match for the new administration.³⁸⁴

³⁸² Morris Brown College Personnel Committee Report, (April 8, 1999). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³⁸³ Morris Brown College Executive Council Minutes, (January 12, 1999). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³⁸⁴ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 27 February, 2007.

The faculty assumed a collective stance to renounce what it felt were rash decisions by the new administration. The Morris Brown community (perhaps with the exception of the board of trustees) was reluctant to adopt the re-facing of the College's operating structure. During Academic Council, the faculty passed a formal vote of "no confidence" regarding Dr. Cross, to express its concerns that she was incapable of providing the leadership that the College needed to survive and move forward.³⁸⁵

The campus body's general reticence toward the Cross administration became public knowledge, as the faculty and others formally positioned themselves in opposition to Dr. Cross' treatment of employees, her lack of knowledge of Morris Brown's history and needs, and her general apathy toward established procedures and values at the institution. As a result, the board of trustees initiated a public relations effort to thwart growing criticisms of Dr. Cross, re-affirm its confidence in the decision to hire her, and applaud her qualifications as an administrator. Some of the verbiage used to curb external skepticism regarding Dr. Cross included:

[To Mr. Steve Strahler, *Crain's Chicago Business*, April 19, 1999; this is a publication in Dr. Cross's previous home city]:

We were in the process of preparing... correspondence to the AAUP when we discovered your article regarding Dr. Dolores E. Cross. It appears that your article attempted to portray Dr. Cross in a negative light. You were unsuccessful. The Trustees are quite delighted that Dr. Cross chose to return to a leadership position in a college environment, especially since she selected Morris Brown College. The changes occurring at Morris Brown are positive. We are taking steps necessary to move the College forward.... We are deeply troubled by the incorrect information contained in your article. The College has never operated without accreditation. We expect immediate retraction of this false statement.

³⁸⁵ Academic Council is the official meeting of the entire faculty body at the college.

[To Mr. Jonathan Knight, Associate Secretary The American Association of University Professors, April 19, 1999.]:

We have received your correspondence to Dr. Dolores Cross regarding the AAUP's decision to create an ad hoc committee to review the college's faculty evaluation process. We are shocked by your decision and believe it completely lacks merit. The College's process, maintained by the Board of Trustees, required the President to review all personnel in order to create a more effective and efficient organization. We always anticipated and communicated to all employees, including faculty, that termination could result from this process.... We are deeply concerned that the AAUP seems to be an active participant in the campaign being lodged against Dr. Cross and Morris Brown College. We simply ... cannot permit any organization, including you, to undermine the College's efforts by presenting false information about the College.... The AAUP's actions... have enormous negative implications for the College and are contributing to the creation of an intolerable environment.

[To Mr. Malcolm G. Scully, Editor, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 15, 1999.]:

Dr. Dolores E. Cross was hired with the charge to both reduce the number of administrators and to assess staff and faculty performance across all areas and departments. She moved with thoughtful deliberation and resolve to create a transition team... made up of faculty, staff, administrative, alumni/ae and student representation. The recently announced terminations, retirements, and probationary assignments of some 35% of the full-time faculty at Morris Brown College is a result of one of the most extensive reviews of our educational services to the College's student body in the 118-year history of the institution. Lost in the uproar of the transition team subcommittee's recommendations for dismissal is the more important revelation that there are so many top-flight faculty members who will be remaining to carry Morris Brown College into the twenty-first century.³⁸⁶

Although this was certainly a strong show of support from the board of trustees, some believed that Dr. Cross had been directly responsible for writing these editorial comments on behalf of the Trustees and identifying which publications should receive the

³⁸⁶ Board of Trustees Letters of Support for Dolores Cross (April, 1999). Administrative Record for the Appeals Hearing of Morris Brown College. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

notices.³⁸⁷ Shortly thereafter, Dr. Cross thanked the Board for its formal vote of support, and reported that the College was in a uniquely-challenging position in that it was simultaneously handling:

- a major reorganization (including realigning academic departments);
- A budget process (by a qualified person, but one without full knowledge of the institution's fiscal history), and;
- A SACS re-accreditation process.³⁸⁸

She also announced that the College's approach to faculty grievances included offering all dismissed faculty severance packages, and a two-day career re-direction seminar. However, individual faculty members would only be permitted these parting benefits upon agreeing to a waiver that released the College from any law suits.³⁸⁹

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly how the Cross administration and the faculty body came to terms with their differences (if in fact it ever did) to reach a point of functionality. Neither written documents nor research participants for this study specify any particular moment or act that achieved this. There was, however, an effort to involve other senior faculty and staff members in the reconciliation process for some faculty grievances.

During the summer the administration had a committee to re-evaluate the portfolios of those people who had complained because they were being terminated. I was chair of that committee.... Well, we finally got the administration to change, to reduce the number of points that were awarded for research and professional meetings and such. But you have to

³⁸⁷ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 29 January, 2007.

³⁸⁸ Minutes of the Full Board of Trustees. April 21, 1999. Administrative Record for the Appeals Hearing of Morris Brown College. Morris Brown College Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³⁸⁹ Personnel Committee Report. Board of Trustees Minutes, April 8, 1999. Administrative Record for the Appeals Hearing of Morris Brown College. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

understand, when you are at a school like Morris Brown where there is not a lot of research money for people to do research, and to go to professional meetings, etc. You can't hold them responsible for that. But they did. However, we were able to interview the people whose portfolios were questioned. We recommended that everyone should be reinstated except one or two. They were not being fired because of promotion and tenure guidelines. They were evaluated based on the portfolio binders, but the administration should not have done that.³⁹⁰

At one point, the fight was very open, having gained the attention of the local and state-wide news media, and effectively airing many of the College's problems in a very public manner. Via a memorandum released in May to the campus community, Dr. Cross spoke of some progress that her team had made since arrival ("we are making progress toward the creation of a stronger undergraduate institution") and indicated that she would present a new budget to the board in June that would show an increase in faculty salaries.³⁹¹ However, even when outward tensions subsided, there was still an air of mistrust between the general employee body and the Cross administration.

That was the beginning of the problem. First, according to the newspaper in Atlanta and the television, the faculty was incompetent based on the administration... I'm not sure if they said it that way, but that is the way it came out.³⁹²

In addition to the turbulent transition into leadership, the Cross administration is also noted for having acted on two major initiatives that would become financial burdens to the already struggling institution. First, Dr. Cross presented to the board the need for the College to focus on financial issues raised by SACS, the need for a more effective

³⁹⁰ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 27 February, 2007.

³⁹¹ Memorandum, To Faculty, Students, Staff, Administrators, Alumni/Alumnae From Dolores E. Cross, Regarding The End of Academic Year Report (May 11, 1999). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³⁹² Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 27 February, 2007.

accounting system; the need to extend the allotted time for paying an active loan with a financier; and the need to monitor the amount of tuition discounts given to students annually. Even so, she also entertained recommendations from Board members who suggested that the College should position itself to advance to a Division I-AA athletic program.³⁹³ I recall there being some lengthy conversations about the College's ability to maintain a Division I intercollegiate athletic program. Individual members of the board of trustees and individuals at the College seemed divided on the issue. Some members of the board—and some heavy-contributing alumni and alumnae (some affiliated with the Morris Brown College Athletic Foundation) worked closely with Dr. Cross to present data that would support the benefits of moving to Division I.

a board member (Mr. Gary Holmes) reported that the Athletic Committee was seeking authorization to explore the possibility of the football team gaining Division I-AA status. The Committee is then expected to report back to the Board about the pros and cons of pursuing a changed status of the football team. He envisioned that a changed status would result in increased revenue for the college and better attendance at the games because of the teams that the college would then be playing. Another team member asked why the college would only be pursuing a changed status in one sport. Mr. Holmes responded that pursuing the endeavor for all sports would result in prohibitive costs that the college cannot now absorb.³⁹⁴

Eventually, the College would successfully petition membership into the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) and its football and basketball teams would compete as Division I teams. The move created a renewed excitement amongst the alumni/ae and within the student body—it was a symbol of an improvement in the

³⁹³ Finance Committee Report. Board of Trustees Minutes (April 19, 1999); and Athletic Committee Report. Board of Trustees Minutes (April 19, 1999). Morris Brown College Administrative Records for the Appeal of Accreditation. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

³⁹⁴ Minutes of the Full Board of Trustees (April 21, 1999). Morris Brown College Administrative Records for the Appeal of Accreditation. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

College's status as a competitive player—figuratively and somewhat literally. Others understood that the move was as much about public relations as it was about sports.³⁹⁵

The second initiative that is often attributed to Dr. Cross' administration is the Morris Brown College student laptop requirement. In the spring of 2000, Dr. Cross announced that each student enrolling at Morris Brown College would receive a free laptop computer, giving both the College and its students a competitive edge in an increasingly technical society. She announced the decision to the campus body during an open forum and during a meeting of the National Alumni Association. The laptop initiative, reportedly a first for a historically Black college and rare for any college nationwide, would enable (and require) each student to own a laptop, and also required faculty members to integrate the use of the laptops into the curriculum. The initiative was broadly publicized—the College hosted Laptop Media Day in September of 2000—and the event received national coverage by BET as well as local coverage by ABC, CBS, and NBC affiliates.³⁹⁶

Dr. Cross presented the initiative as an academic-based strategy, to enhance learning and pedagogical methodology. However, faculty members perceived the initiative in varying ways.³⁹⁷ Says one faculty member, “Definitely we needed the laptops, but I don’t think it was thought through well, in terms of how they would be paid

³⁹⁵ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 18 May, 2007.

³⁹⁶ “Morris Brown College Maintains SACS Accreditation,” *MBC Times* (Fall/Winter 2000-2001).

³⁹⁷ Although the laptop program was purportedly an effort to enhance classroom learning, I did not get the impression that faculty were involved in the creation of implementation of this strategy.

for.”³⁹⁸ Others weren’t convinced that a laptop mandate would be useful in every program.

Later that year, with much less fanfare and communication than before, Dr. Cross retracted the initial information that she’d provided regarding the laptops, and stated instead that the laptops (while still a requirement) would not be free, but would be sold to students (built within the fee structure) at a discounted price (made possible through negotiations with Toshiba).³⁹⁹ However, because the institution was already contending with overly-discounted tuition for a large percentage of the student population and weak collection policies for monies owed by students, the College assumed much of the debt that was incurred by pre-purchasing the laptops.

Both the Division I athletic decision and the laptop program were financially burdensome to the College, at a time when the Cross administration acknowledged (to the board of trustees) that the College was facing uncertain financial stability and lacked sufficient knowledge of the full financial context of the College, its budget, and its operating expenses.⁴⁰⁰

[These] had a significant negative impact on the budget because...if you are going to incur costs, you are going to be spending dollars that are probably needed in other areas. And therefore, with the laptop initiative, [and] with [the move to] Division I, it means more costs to those areas, but probably taking away resources that would have been available to the academic program and to others. I think it started a ripple effect that led to the financial picture of the College going down and therefore resulting in the loss of accreditation. And here we are four years later, feeling the

³⁹⁸ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 18 May, 2007.

³⁹⁹ “Morris Brown College Sets Pace For 21st Century,” Morris Brown College Alumni Newsletter 1, Issue 1 (Fall/Winter 2000).

⁴⁰⁰ Finance Committee Report. Board of Trustees Minutes (April 19, 1999); and Athletic Committee Report. Board of Trustees Minutes (April 19, 1999). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

effects of it—loss of financial aid, loss of the ability to apply for federal program grants, and things of that sort. So it has significantly negatively affected us.⁴⁰¹

The most notable mistake of the Cross administration, however, was its hasty decisions to revamp the College's vision, as well as its academic and fiscal operations without fully understanding the institution. This resulted in shoddy handling of the SACS review. Administrators who had worked on preparing the SACS documents prior to Dr. Cross's arrival felt strongly that the College was well-positioned to receive SACS and provide the requisite documentation to support its status as accreditation-worthy. Instead of familiarizing herself with the College's existing academic plan, fiscal management procedures, and strategic planning structure, Dr. Cross attempted a very quick overhaul of the faculty, an extensive review of the staff, and a total revision of the Self-Study documents that would be presented to SACS.

So what we had was an administration that was moving forward on a fast pace, and at the time of the February 1999 accreditation visit, the accreditation committee was confused. On the one hand, it received answers to questions from faculty and staff that already existed that were conflicting with the answers that were given by the new administrators. That led to a committee, an accreditation committee that was confused about what Morris Brown was all about. That led to a number of recommendations, approximately 65 or 67 or so recommendations. The committee left confused. And not only was the committee confused, but the faculty and staff were confused. This was the first evidence—not the financial part—it was that confusing part...the hasty changes... that led to the first questioning of the College with reference to its accreditation.⁴⁰²

Amongst the recommendations made by the SACS Visiting Team, there were sanctions regarding the vulnerable state of the College's finances. The Visiting Team

⁴⁰¹ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 18 May, 2007.

⁴⁰² Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 29 January, 2007.

Report indicated that an “analysis of the recent financial history and current state of the programs of Morris Brown College shows that the college appears to have adequate financial resources to support its purposes and programs.”⁴⁰³ The College had a reported endowment of approximately \$11 million and audit figures from the immediate past three years showed an increase in surplus dollars from operating expenses. However, the Visiting Team also noted some conditions that posed significant threat to the College’s financial base, including:

- The discounting of tuition by up to 42% for student scholarships and Fellowships.
- Action by the Federal Department of Education which placed the College on “reimbursement” status in the Financial Aid Program, which could result in the College having to return significant dollars to the Federal government.
- The “reimbursement” status of Financial Aid dollars had significantly slowed ready cash flow, and the College had had to establish a \$9 million line of credit to meet immediate expenses, prior to drawing down Financial Aid monies.⁴⁰⁴

The SACS Visiting Team Report was supported by recent financial Audit Reports, in which an independent consultant described, “significant deficiencies in the design or the operation of the internal control structure that [in the opinion of the auditors] could adversely affect the College’s ability to record, process, summarize, and report financial data.”⁴⁰⁵ The Audit Report suggested that a number of the College’s control issues were recurrent problems, previously identified in earlier years, and recommended a number of corrective action mechanisms, including:

⁴⁰³ Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Visiting Team Report to Morris Brown College (1999). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

⁴⁰⁴ Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Visiting Team Report to Morris Brown College (1999). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

⁴⁰⁵ “Independent Audit Report,” Morris Brown College Administrative Records for the Appeals Hearing of Morris Brown College. (1998). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

- Reduction of employee turnover, and increased staff training on electronic data systems (BANNER)
- Increasing Student Account collections (in nineteen ninety-eight, there was approximately \$4,900,000 uncollectable from former students)
- Performing complete bank reconciliations
- Improving supporting documentation for cash disbursement.⁴⁰⁶

The result of the accreditation visit was a list of recommendations that was far more extensive than the pre-Cross administration and faculty had expected. It was a frustrating time, particularly for the individuals who had prepared the documentation and strategies that Dr. Cross had elected not to use.

We didn't have but one problem with 1998 Self-Study. And that is, that for whatever reason, the College had not collected the data that we needed for institutional effectiveness. I remember talking to some people that served as Chairs on SACS committees and I said to them we have not collected the Institutional Effectiveness data that we should have. It was nobody's fault. We can't go back and do that. And that's the only problem that we have. My feeling was that we should tell the Committee this and we should have in place a plan to go forward. And one former SACS Chairman said to me, you are absolutely right. That is what you should do, you should tell them. He said that's what another Black college did. But you see, from the time the Committee Chairman got there, all that had changed, the players had changed. And those of us who knew what the problem was couldn't say anything, because we were not a part of the loop anymore.⁴⁰⁷

After the first visit by a SACS visiting team, the Cross administration more actively involved persons at the College who could contribute information and documentation toward addressing SACS' recommendations. Frank White, Chief Financial Officer, asserted that the SACS requirements needed broad-based input from

⁴⁰⁶ "Independent Audit Report," Morris Brown College Administrative Records for the Appeals Hearing of Morris Brown College (1998). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

⁴⁰⁷ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 27 February, 2007.

across the campus (particularly in the construction of the Preliminary Master Plan).⁴⁰⁸

The College worked hard to correct the recommendations presented during the previous SACS visit, and by the Fall of 2000 had succeeded in resolving 56 of the 68 recommendations. On December 5, SACS announced that the College's accreditation had been reaffirmed.⁴⁰⁹ However, as with the previous process, there would be follow-up procedures.

Dr. Cross's tenure ended with the same discord that characterized much of her term as president. At the time that she tendered her resignation, she had lost the confidence of many persons within the College as well as the board of trustees. While she had some loyal supporters that remained employed at the College (and undoubtedly supporters on the board as well), her integrity (in the eyes of many who worked with her) had waned. Some suggest that the board of trustees was never fully apprised of many of the College's challenges during that time, and many facts were not fully disclosed until serious damage had been done to the College, financially and in other areas.⁴¹⁰ Similarly, the faculty and staff felt ill-informed about key processes at the College, particularly related to the College's status with accreditation.

But, we didn't really get any real information on Morris Brown or SACS or anything like that. They told us as little as possible. I remember asking for a response and finally they gave us something that didn't make any sense. And I didn't even know where it fit in. So I guess the administration held much of the information close to itself. Now, when Dr. Cross left in February of 2002, there was no hint. We didn't know what... we knew that SACS was coming back, and we knew that there were the two problems. One was we didn't have an Accounting professor [with a

⁴⁰⁸ Morris Brown College, Master Plan Committee Meeting Minutes (April 26, 1999). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

⁴⁰⁹ "Morris Brown College Maintains SACS Accreditation," MBC Times (Fall/Winter Issue 2000-2001).

⁴¹⁰ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 29 January 2007.

terminal degree in accounting], and we were offering a degree in Accounting. And SACS required that you have to have at least 25% faculty with PhD's when you are offering a degree. We knew that, and we knew there was a financial problem, but we didn't know what it was. Nobody had any idea that we would lose our accreditation. In my opinion, I really think that we should not have lost our accreditation.⁴¹¹

Dr. Cross had also alienated students and members of the alumni/ae body. Toward the end of her term in office, students had begun to organize uprisings to publicize their discontent with the administration's handling of key functions—particularly student financial aid. The Cross administration tried damage control techniques—holding town hall meetings to allow students to air grievances. However, many faculty and staff members seemingly sided with students in their opinions about the president—if not outwardly, then by a show of silence.

Ok, the students were upset. The faculty was upset. The staff was upset. But nobody would have thought we were going to lose our accreditation. It's just because of all the things. The students were saying that Cross had used their money and even some students said that she had stolen their money. Now that's not my word. You may have been at that meeting. Students were very, very, very upset. Faculty was upset. And the staff was upset, pretty much about the same thing, of what was going on. But nobody ever had any idea that we would lose our accreditation.⁴¹²

The National Alumni Association remained engaged with the College, and was an active supporter of programs at the institution. However, many alumni and alumnae sensed that they were never fully able to grasp what was going at the institution; in essence, it seemed that they were kept in the dark about a lot of things. Says an officer of the National Alumni Association,

⁴¹¹ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 3 May, 2007.

⁴¹² Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 3 May, 2007.

[President Cross] was all smokes and mirrors, and just didn't have a lot of substance, I think. Just tried to dazzle people with... stuff, that wasn't fact...that weren't reality. And it never amounted to anything.⁴¹³

Interestingly, “smoke and mirrors” was the term that Dr. Cross’s Chief Financial Officer used to describe the College’s financial picture during one meeting of the Board of Trustees.⁴¹⁴ It seems that both the College and the Cross administration perceived a lack of candor on the part of the other, at times; certainly, however, the two (Cross and Morris Brown College) never fully gelled as a unified entity.

Following the Cross administration in the Spring of 2002, the board of trustees appointed Dr. Reginald Lindsey as Interim President. Dr. Lindsey had previously served as both a faculty member and an administrator at the College. This was his first stint in the President’s Office. An unassuming man, he was nevertheless able to offer the Morris Brown community a sense that there was much less covert activity being taken place amongst the upper ranks at the College, as compared to Dr. Cross’s administration. He is described as an extremely hardworking man, but one who was “somewhat disconnected from the faculty and staff”; some of decisions regarding the College’s finances were made without the consultation of others on campus.⁴¹⁵ Some of the decisions led to the College spending much of its endowment, negatively affecting the overall financial health of the institution.

Dr. Lindsey took office for a very brief time, and the board of trustees was conducting an active search for a permanent president. Time was particularly of essence,

⁴¹³ Drake Davenport, interview by author, 26 January, 2007.

⁴¹⁴ Minutes of the Fall Board of Trustees, (April 21, 1999). Morris Brown College Administrative Record for the Appeal of Accreditation. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

⁴¹⁵ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 18 May, 2007.

because the College was scheduled to host a SACS committee during the Fall of 2002, to follow-up on the College's progress in addressing previous recommendations. The College had reason to be optimistic; there were only three remaining issues that needed to be addressed:

- The need for a full-time doctorate level Department Chair for the Accounting Department
- Assurance of complete installation, compliance, and implementation of the BANNER System
- Assurance of the financial stability of the College and effective financial administrative systems and management.⁴¹⁶

Dr. Charles Taylor was appointed the next president, and would assume office that fall. Dr. Taylor, an educational consultant, had initially been approached by the Search Committee to assist the College with its presidential search. However, his experience in higher education (particularly his former role as president of Wilberforce University—albeit several years ago) made him an attractive candidate for the presidential position.

The events of the next several months would be both shocking and disheartening to the Morris Brown College community. Dr. Taylor's initial assessment of the state of the College was that there were serious things to contend with, but that—of the three recommendations still left unaddressed—only the third (financial stability) would prove cumbersome.

MBC has some very serious short and long term issues which demand our attention. Restoring the functionality and integrity of our Student Financial Aid programs and our fiscal infrastructure must be top priority not only to meet the Southern Association requirements, but also because little else can be fixed until these issues are resolved.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ “Morris Brown College National Alumni Association Newsletter” (August 2002): 1.

⁴¹⁷ “Morris Brown College National Alumni Association Newsletter”(October 2002): 2.

There was likely some tension involved in Dr. Taylor's transition into the College as well—although he did not bring an entourage with him as Dr. Cross did, or impose immediate changes to the College's employee infrastructure. However, Dr. Taylor himself expressed some concern regarding the College's employee base.

While there are many who are committed to the success of MBC, there are some among us who impede her progress. Some have not had the opportunities to become thoroughly equipped with their roles at MBC. Still others have the requisite knowledge and skill for superior performance, but for a variety of reasons choose not to perform in a way that benefits Morris Brown College. We must not allow this unfortunate situation to continue. I am committed to doing everything I can to assist those who are committed to our success but need support to do better. I am equally committed to enforcing the consequences for those students, faculty, staff and administrators who are unwilling to abide by the standards of the College. MBC has a long and distinguished history of surviving and succeeding in the face of a myriad of challenges. And with God's blessings, we shall survive and succeed in the midst of our current challenges. We have a number of vacancies in the administrative team at the present time and I do anticipate that some organizational restructuring will be required in the future.⁴¹⁸

The Morris Brown College family received Dr. Taylor with a general feeling of cooperation. I think most at the College recognized that this period in the College's history would be intolerant of dissent. However, the campus community's unwillingness to evoke further discord with a new administration (on the heels of the debacle of the Cross administration) may not have worked to the benefit of the institution at this particular time.

The College brought in the next President, which was Dr. Taylor. Dr. Taylor came in probably on the latter end of his career, and connected with the same administration—the interim administration that had already been in place—with the same thoughts and therefore did not help the situation of addressing the financial piece. So, his tenure was very very short. And it was at that point that—it was during his time that the College

⁴¹⁸ "Morris Brown College National Alumni Association Newsletter" (October 2002): 2.

was to prepare itself for the last round of proving itself as an accredited body to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. His time was lost time. It did not contribute to addressing the problem situation. And therefore we had six to eight months of sit down and do nothing. So, beyond the Cross era, beyond the Cross era, as little as it is talked about, one very well could say that the sitting down of Dr. Taylor may have been the breaking point that caused the loss of accreditation.⁴¹⁹

The College would host a SACS visiting team in the fall. The results of the visit were shocking. While the campus fully expected the team to review the three outstanding recommendations that were previously handed down, the SACS team came and left with a host of other recommendations that the College had not expected, and were unprepared to immediately answer.

It was the decision of the Committee to recommend the removal of Morris Brown College from membership with the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools for failure to demonstrate good cause for continued accreditation and for failure to comply with the following sections of the Criteria for Accreditation.... The recommendation of the Committee on Criteria and Reports was subsequently upheld by the Commission on Colleges at its meeting on December 9, 2002.⁴²⁰

The campus was in shock. The decisions made by the SACS committee were unexpected and debilitating. The campus administration called a Town Hall meeting, and students, faculty members, staff members, and alumni and alumnae gathered in the John H. Lewis Gymnasium to hear the news. The day is etched clearly in my memory for, unlike other campus assemblies, the gym was quiet. The time, the setting, the expressions of fear and need on people's faces reminded me of one other time—a Town Hall meeting

⁴¹⁹ Frederick Livingston, interview by author 18 May, 2007.

⁴²⁰ "Letter from James T. Rodgers, Executive Director of the Commission on Colleges, to Dr. Charles Taylor, President, Morris Brown College, Regarding Action Taken By The Commission on Colleges on December 9, 2002" (December 17, 2002). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

in which the campus administration provided information and advice regarding the terrorist activities on the morning of September 11, 2001. It was just like then.

People crept in, took their seat, and waited expectedly. I suspect that word had made its way away around campus, and most already knew that what we feared had actually happened—but we were hoping to hear differently. The news was delivered solemnly, without fanfare, without preamble, and without much information about what would happen next.

The meeting took place at the close of a semester, and over the next few days there was a flurry of activity, as students scrambled to secure transcripts and documentation to submit to transferring institutions. Some colleges (notably Fisk University and Howard University) extended transfer admissions deadlines to accommodate Morris Brown students, in light of the circumstances. Further, because of the uniqueness of the situation, Dr. Taylor offered temporary amnesty to all students with outstanding balances, to allow them to request and receive transcripts despite owing money to the College.

The letter of accreditation denial also contained procedures for appeal of the decision. Although a formality, this offered some modicum of hope to the ailing college. The College opted to appeal the Committee's decisions. In the meantime, it also prepared for the possibility that it would lose the appeal, and thus took measures to protect the students who remained enrolled at the institution, hoping for a successful outcome to the appeal process. As such, the College implemented an accelerated academic program (for the first time in its history), and classes were offered during normal operating hours, evenings, and weekends. Courses were designed such that the semester would end in

March—near what would have been mid-term. This would ensure that all credits earned by students would be accredited—the College would remain accredited during the appeals process.

On campus, it was a time of uncertainty and fear. However, there was also a feeling of solidarity—a sense of commitment. Students understood that faculty and staff members were assuming extra hours in order to allow them to complete an accelerated program. Faculty and staff members understood the sacrifice that students were making by remaining at the institution during this process—when many others had left, and questioned their ability to stay.

Over the next few months, administrators, faculty members, legal council, alumni and alumnae supporters, and others would work feverishly to put together a campaign to demonstrate to SACS that the decision to withdraw the College's accreditation was unjust. The College took the position that SACS had violated its own review procedures, and had unfairly revoked the institution's accreditation. Contained in the letter were assertions that 1) that the Commission failed to follow its procedures and that this failure was significant in leading to the decision to remove the College from COC membership; and 2) that the Commission's decision was arbitrary, unreasonable, and inconsistent with the Criteria for Accreditation and the Commission's policies, therefore that the Commission's actions should be reversed and the College's membership continued.⁴²¹

The letter extensively described what the College felt were egregious actions made by the committee, including reneging on a previous notification from the Commission on January 11, 2002 that the College would have “continued accreditation

⁴²¹ “Letter from Charles Taylor to James Rodgers Regarding Morris Brown College's Notice of Appeal.” January 6, 2003. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

for good cause” (a decision rendered at the December 2001 meeting of SACS) and that the accreditation would be extended for a maximum of one year following a two-year monitoring period. Further, the Commission had also stated that decision to remove the College’s accreditation was also supported by information the Commission had received from the Southeast Case Management Division, United States Department of Education, subsequent to the SACS special Committee visit and prior to November 22, 2002.⁴²²

This was a special concern because at this time the College had not received any information regarding the nature and content of the report, rendering it unable to openly respond to either the U.S. Department of Education or SACS. Months later, the College would learn that Dr. Dolores E. Cross and Mr. Parvesh Singh (the Director of Financial Aid during the Cross administration) would be indicted on federal charges related to the mishandling of financial aid funds. This indictment, however, would be of little use to the College. The appeal for revocation of the decision to repeal the College’s accreditation was unsuccessful. Morris Brown College had lost its accreditation—a first in the College’s history.

⁴²² Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

DATA RESULTS

“To Her Precepts Praise Accord,
To Them May We E’er Be Bound”

Introduction

Qualitative research looks for meaning in human action and context. The goal is often to understand (as opposed to the predictive/explanatory role of quantitative research).⁴²³ It seeks to recognize how people construct meaning—of their world and their experiences. It looks at individual parts, and how they work together to form a whole.⁴²⁴ This project presented an opportunity for unique research. It is about relationships—between persons and institutions. It is about the life pattern of Morris Brown College, and some behavioral patterns that may inform decisions therein. It is about expectations and decisions—and the contingencies that govern inter-institutional affairs.

Qualitative research is constructed using thick description, experiential understanding, and multiple realities (different perspectives of different people). Causal relationships emerge from data, by examining occurrences in context of the case/subject

⁴²³ Maxine Greene, “A Philosopher Looks at Qualitative Research,” in *Complementary Methods for Research in Education*, ed. Richard M. Jaeger (Washington: American Educational Research Association, 1997), 189-206.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

of the study.⁴²⁵ This research examined the participants, government, and culture of a complex organization. I use the word complex because there are factions within this study that are either in an associative relationship with the College, or are in an interactive relationship with the College. I define persons that are associated with the College as: the board of trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and alumni and alumnae. Interactive groups include the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, as well as other bodies, such as the Atlanta University Center, Inc., the United Negro College Fund, and others. However, the scope of this study was limited to an in-depth consideration of only the AME Church and SACS. I acknowledge, however, that this is only a partial depiction of the College's relationship with outside bodies.

The study revealed that the above-mentioned relationships are further complicated by over-lapping group-compositions. The most noticeable (and perhaps the most significant) overlap occurs between the board of trustees and the AME Church. Although there is no official document that dictates this, the Morris Brown College Board of Trustees has historically been heavily comprised of officers/ministers of the AME Church (including the Bishop of the Sixth Episcopal District, the region in which Morris Brown College is located). With the exception of a very brief period, which occurred just after the time period covered by this study, the Bishop of the Sixth District has maintained chairmanship of the Board. As such, the AME Church has had a large and continuous presence at the College, even beyond its associative relationship as a founding

⁴²⁵ Robert Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1995), 37-43.

body and a financial contributor.⁴²⁶ Other overlaps exist in that alumni and alumnae are significantly represented in the faculty and staff; some alumni/ae sit on the board as well. Also, some faculty, staff, and students are AME (though not a majority). Little or no overlap occurs between SACS and the College—beyond collegial relationships with persons at other institutions.

Following is a compilation of the information that has emerged from written and verbal accounts of participants' experiences, in affiliation with the College during the years 1989 to 2003. This section examines data in relation to theoretical frameworks and discussions presented in Chapter 2. The data in this section are placed into thematic groups, in accordance with their relevance to prior-developed theory. This section attempts to go beyond *what* happened during this time period, and understand the *relationship* between persons involved, events, and outcomes.

The perspectives that are represented within this Results section are as multi-faceted as these over-lapping relationships. Persons associated or interactive with the College may have experiences with Morris Brown College that are varied, depending on the nature and timing of the person's relationship with the institution.⁴²⁷ In order to understand and document the relationship between the College, the Church, and SACS, I reviewed administrative documents (e.g. strategic plans, accreditation reports, Executive Council minutes), correspondence (e.g. letters to and from SACS), and publications (e.g. newsletters, yearbooks). I also interviewed former and current administrators and staff

⁴²⁶ In 2007, the College sent an email notice out to its alumni, through the Director of Alumni Affairs, Todd Blackburn, reporting that it had taken measures to diversity its Board of Trustees, to include more corporate and community-affiliated persons.

⁴²⁷ All of the interview participants for this study are currently (or have been) in an associative relationship with the College. However, printed publications and various correspondences were used to give voice to interactive entities such as SACS and the AME Church.

members, faculty members, and alumni/ae. I allowed the written documents and interview responses to build the story. The constructs of this study emerged from the data. Patterns were identified using a bottom-up approach.

Because the Morris Brown story is seemingly enigmatic, I have chosen to present the data categorically—as they pertain to individual thematic threads. Although fractured, presenting the data in this manner helps to distinguish patterns in the responses—as opposed to focusing on the intriguing and often provocative occurrences in the life and happenings of the institution. My objective in this chapter was to look beyond what was happening, and capture the mechanics involved in the interaction and transactions of persons and groups involved.

However, even as I separate the data by categorical construct, this paper is an ethnographic case study. I selected this scholarly method because it considers context and relational positions. In considering the information presented in this chapter, it is also important to consider the context of the College, as described in the previous chapter. The printed data sources that I have used were written within the context of what was happening at the College. The interview participants provide responses based upon their respective experiences within this context. As such, the constructs are embedded in the story, and can be separated from the Morris Brown College story only in theory—for the purpose of in-depth analysis.

After the data were coded, categorized, and sorted, five major themes emerged during the data analysis process of this study: Administration, Board of Trustees, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), AME Church (AME), and Internal Context. “Administration” refers to any reference to the presidency, the

executive leadership, and policies and practices specific to a president's administration, etc. However, most of the references to Administration refer specifically to a particular president. "Board of Trustees" refers to any information regarding the structure, constitution, policies, actions, perception, or philosophy of the Morris Brown College governing board. "The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools" refers to the SACS accreditation process, policies, structural body, and any representation of the accreditation (peer) review procedures designed by SACS. The "AME Church" refers to the connectional church, values associated with the Church, the philosophy of the Church (specifically as it pertains to the founding and support of a college), financial and other support from the Church, and any representation of the Church in relation to its interactive role with the College.⁴²⁸ "Internal Context" is an umbrella code that encompasses any reference to the College's culture, norms, traditions, values, priorities, needs, processes, events, and other contextual descriptions. Each theme is discussed individually below. As with the themes, some considerable overlap may occur between the presentation of one section and another.

Administration

Administration, as defined by this study, refers primarily to the presidency of the institution. The role of the president (and his or her senior executives) surfaced repeatedly throughout this study—in printed documents and during conversations with participants. During the years covered by this study, Morris Brown College had four presidents, and three interim presidents. The presidents (Dr. Calvert Smith, Dr. Samuel D. Jolley, Jr., Dr.

⁴²⁸ The "Connectional Church" refers to the formal organization of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. While individual AME churches operate independently, each church is also a component of the general body of the denomination, sharing a mission, purpose, doctrine, and organizational policies.

Dolores E. Cross, and Dr. Charles Taylor) were all hired from outside of the College.

With the exception of one interim president (Dr. Herman Smith, who held office between Dr. Calvert Smith and Dr. Samuel Jolley, Jr. in the early 1990s), each of the interim presidents (to include Dr. Gloria Anderson, Dr. Reginald Lindsey) was appointed from within the College.

The sub-codes that frequently appeared in conversations and within printed documents in conjunction with Administration are:

- Administration, agenda (referring to the perception that a particular president had an agenda or priority that was not necessarily shared by the campus community);
- Alienation, staff (referring to the perception that the staff felt at odds with the president or executive leadership);
- Administration, transition (referring to the appointment of a new president);
- Administration, troubled transition (referring to a lack of synergy or understanding between a new president and the campus community);
- Administration, critical of faculty/staff (referring to a lack of valuing or open critique of the faculty/staff);
- Administration, disconnected from campus body (referring to the president or Executive leadership being disengaged from the campus community);
- Administration, out of pace with College (referring to the president having different priorities, values, or perspectives from the campus community);
- Administration, hindering accreditation efforts (referring to the perception that a president had a negative impact on the College's re-accreditation process);
- Academic programs, strength (the assertion that the most valued commodity at Morris Brown was its academic program);
- Growth, at the College;
- Financial hardships (referring to severe budgetary or fiscal shortcomings at the College);
- Endurance, through crisis;
- Accreditation, corrections made (referring to any progress in the re-accreditation process);
- Stagnation, regression (referring to periods at the College in which there was a lack of progress toward established goals);
- Internal perception, negative (referring to the general negative perception of the college or its administration by internal constituencies);
- External perception, positive (referring to the general positive perception of the College or its administration by external bodies).

Data collected from print and human sources suggest these characteristics about the administrations, collectively, during this period:

- Internal constituents within the College perceived the president as having a significant impact on the overall success or failure of the institution. Presidents were either associated with growth and reform or stagnation and regression;
- The Office of President was transitory. Administrative turnover was high at the College during this time. Each incoming president brought changes to the institution. The nature of the president's transition into office varied greatly in process and outcome.
- The president's relationship with board of trustees, the faculty, staff, and alumni/ae affected both internal and external perceptions of the College.

The literature suggests that presidents who are recognized as successful usually preside over schools that are both larger and wealthier. Successful presidents are presidents at successful schools. Factors that are indicative of success include fiscal status, educational programs, growth, quiet (campus atmosphere), quality of faculty, quality of students, respect of faculty, respect of students, respect of community, etc.⁴²⁹ At Morris Brown College during this time, a new president was appointed to the College in response to specific priorities or crises (usually financial or accreditation related) of the College. The institution defined the success or failure of an administrator similarly to the factors suggested by the literature. However, while the assessment and perception of individual presidents vary greatly, the overall status of the institution varied very little during this time. This suggests that, at least internally, the success of a particular president was assessed differently than research suggests. At Morris Brown, a president was successful based on what he or she did within the context and challenges that the

⁴²⁹ Michael D. Cohen, and James G. March, *Leadership and Ambiguity* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974), 43.

College was facing at the time—not the general health and viability of the institution as a whole.

Participants associated specific presidents with particular stages at the institution.

Agatha Grendon, a former administrator and faculty member, asserted:

You see, we have to have a... you've got at least three periods there. You see, what happens in Black colleges is that every time there is a change in the president's office, there is a change in the focus of the College... not so much the mission, but in what the college does. In '89, Calvert Smith was still there. And he was still continuing what we started in '84 when he came in... And his emphasis was on the science, business, computer science and hospitality. And the next person that came in did not necessarily continue that. I'm not sure if there was a real focus for the next period, but in general, the mission was about the sciences. We put in place a remedial program.... to help students who needed help. That continued all the way up to '03 with some difference in the way things were done.⁴³⁰

Frederick Livingston, who also held various positions of significant rank at the institution (as did many people at Morris Brown), indicated that the College's relationship with external bodies (i.e. the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) was reflective of who the president was during that time.

Quite frequently the [Cross] administration moved outside of the pace of the college. The administration in late 1998 sought an early approval from the Board to move sometimes without consulting, and therefore it led to decisions that were made sometimes without the Board's knowledge. It was hasty movement. Part of that hasty movement created a problem with the '99 accreditation. The hasty movement... the administrators came in November 1998 and that caused changes in policies with the college... to some extent, changes in the nature of the administration... and that required mandated changes in terms of accreditation documents that would be presented to the accrediting committee in '99; because there were hasty decisions, the college did not have time to adjust to those decisions. The administrators were clear on the direction that they were going but the college was not clear.⁴³¹

⁴³⁰ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 27 February, 2007.

⁴³¹ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 29 January 29, 2007.

Many colleges and universities have found that high administrative turnover and poor fiscal management are often preludes to difficult periods for an institution.⁴³² One common factor that underscored participants' descriptions of administrators was change—there were many changes in administration, and each new president brought changes (positive or negative) to the institution. Internal constituencies (e.g. trustees, faculty members, staff members, students, and alumni/ae) expressed hope and expectation that an incoming administrator would advance the College's cause, specifically with regard to financial stability and accreditation.

The literature suggests that organizational re-design relies on leadership at various levels; individuals alone cannot transform an organization, although leadership can help to create and stimulate an environment for change.⁴³³ Participants in this study placed a greater emphasis on the willingness of the individual president to effect change in a way that was inclusive of the persons and practices that were already in place. Individual administrators differed in their approach to understanding the institution, and to establishing productive working relationships with existing faculty and staff members. Cassidy Lawson suggested that a collaborative managerial approach between Interim President Herman Smith and incoming President Samuel Jolley not only eased the transition from one to the other, but enabled the college to actualize some of its financial and accreditation-related goals during that time.

It does help in this particular situation because you had one mission, one

⁴³² Martine Hammond, "Survival of Small Private Colleges," *Journal of Higher Education* 55, No. 3 (May/June 1984): 382-386.

⁴³³ William Tierney, *Building the Responsive Campus* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1999), 48.

goal, and the Board and the Southern Association came to an agreement as to who would be that turnaround person, and they knew the purpose of him [Herman Smith] being there. They knew it would not be a long-term situation. A presidential search was going on all at the same time. His contract included a period of time until a president was found. That was the stipulation when he first walked in the door.... His main goal was fundraising. But he only does it in the role of president, wherever he goes. And he's done it at several different colleges. Dr. Jolley just happened to be strong enough to carry it—which was rare because Dr. Jolley had never been a president before. He was almost like that good guy.... clean, no bad record... there was no history behind him. There was no [history whereas], he was at some other college doing the wrong thing. He was clean and clear. So that is what made his first presidency so successful... but the fundraising side of it came from Herman B. Smith. All the money to get the college to where it needed to be, and out of debt, and having a positive environment came through that.⁴³⁴

Similarly, Agatha Grendon suggested that the Cross administration was handicapped in that the president and new appointees did little to understand or appreciate the College as it existed prior to Cross's arrival.

Condescending. That's the word I would not have remembered, but that's a good word. Actually, I wrote a poem, and I don't know where it is, but it talked about that. "Carpetbaggers." Actually, they came down, the small group that she brought in, came down with the idea—at least we got the idea—I wasn't the only one, that they were going to come here to this southern Black college and [they were] going to teach these people how to run a college. And I mean people, faculty and staff who were there got that impression. It wasn't just me... so it was condescending. That's why she did the...she had them look at the staff, faculty all of us. She wanted to find out whether we were a good match for the College, and that sort of stuff. But the idea... we had was that they came from the North, and they were going to teach these people how to run a college. At least that was the idea that I had and everybody else had.

Researchers have found that the college presidency is a reactive position. The president is concerned with the concerns and interests of others—the trustees, faculty,

⁴³⁴ Cassidy Lawson, interview by author 22 January, 2007/

community leaders, and students.⁴³⁵ However, during the most critical time in the College's history with SACS, the faculty and staff at the College felt alienated from the administration, leading to a disconnect and discontinuation in the accreditation-preparation process. Grendon goes on to say:

So, based on what I knew about Morris Brown, I don't think it had any more problems than any other Black college. Morris Brown had people who knew how to deal with SACS. And the Cross administration apparently didn't. And they threw all of us who knew anything about SACS out of the loop. And they apparently didn't know how to deal with SACS. And when Chairman of the SACS committee came in December 1998 I was invited to the meeting. The SACS committee Chairman spoke, and after he finished, I asked him if he had had any experience with the North Central Association, and he said yes... He basically said that SACS was much harder to get through, and [expressed] the fact that there were so many things that you had to do. I thought that the new president would start asking questions. That was really the reason I asked. And so I said that I raised that question because Chicago State was in the North Central Association. [Dr. Cross was previously President of Chicago State University.] And I caught myself, and said my undergraduate school is in the North Central Association too. But I wanted her to know that she was dealing with something totally different than at Chicago State. [The North Central Association] didn't have the regulations that SACS had. Anyway, she didn't ask him. I don't think she asked a single question. And that was the beginning of the end. If she had known, she wouldn't have started any of that transition stuff until after the committee left in March 1999. Then, she could have done anything she wanted to do. But she started after we had completed the self study report. And that was the beginning of the end. You don't tell the whole world that your faculty is not qualified and then wonder why they were asking.⁴³⁶

Research suggests that change in an organization causes anxiety. If change is in fact necessary, it is the responsibility of the leaders to communicate that to constituencies. Individuals are more likely to cooperate if they have a sense of

⁴³⁵ Michael D. Cohen, and James G. March, *Leadership and Ambiguity* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974), 1.

⁴³⁶ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 27 February, 2007.

involvement in the decision-making that accompanies the changes. Organizations that navigate change successfully often have operational procedures in place that protect against mistakes made by individuals involved.⁴³⁷ As opposed to finding a supportive and attentive audience with incoming administrations, it seems that Morris Brown College's permanent staff perceived themselves as the stabilizing force that sustained the College between administrators. Interim presidents, mid-level managers, and long-time front-line staffers were perceived to foster continuity at the College to the extent allowed by the new president. These persons were responsible for interim communication with SACS and other bodies, and maintained the functionality of the institution during the times that the presidency was vacant. Says Clara Boston, a former administrator:

You had your formal leaders at the institution and you had your informal leaders. And during that transition from Dr. Calvert Smith to the [interim president] Dr. Smith I saw that there was some level of stress, especially with following through with selected initiatives to insure efficiency, outcomes, and effectiveness of delivery in some areas. I did not see a systematic approach underway for awhile. Some positive things continue to occur but things seemed uneven. Now, it wasn't uneven when we had certain types of requirements, e.g. Title III, and it was stipulated in program plans. I have always found the instructors to be true warriors for learning. Instructors always taught their classes with the highest level of commitment and quality. They cared. Staff were the soul of the college. People like Dr. Anderson were the glue that made things work. It was that which you could not see that made the difference.⁴³⁸

Rather than attributing the success or failure of an institution squarely in the lap of its leadership (its president), Cohen and March suggest that management and problem-solving at an institution may be likened to what they describe as a garbage-can model of decision-making. In accordance with this model, an organization (e.g. a college or

⁴³⁷ William Teirney, *Building the Responsive Campus* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 44-5.

⁴³⁸ Clara Boston, interview by author, 24 April, 2007.

university) is considered a collection of solutions looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision-situations in which they may be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer, and an outcome or interpretation of several relatively independent streams in an organization.⁴³⁹

This theory would aptly describe the context of Morris Brown College during some periods. Throughout the 1989 to 2003 period, there were clearly identifiable problems, and clearly identifiable contingencies with varying solutions. There was one instance in which an incoming administrator had developed a theory regarding governance in higher education prior to her arrival at Morris Brown College. This in itself is likely not uncommon. However, the administrator entered Morris Brown during a very sensitive period, just prior to a SACS committee visit, and published the prior-developed theory as the College's internal philosophy and approach to education—an isolated document that was not supported by any existing documents that had been prepared by the existing staff for the pending visit from the SACS team. According to the minutes of the Executive Council meeting of January 12, 1999:

The “Learning Tree” is a document that states the vision of the college and 15,000 copies have been printed and will be distributed to alumni, students, faculty, staff, and corporate associates. Dr. Cross sees herself as its author and actually began the process 7 years ago at Chicago State University when looking at the 3-point model.⁴⁴⁰

Participants often expressed the idea that the Cross administration had an isolated agenda that existed independently of the perspectives and values of the other individuals

⁴³⁹ Michael D. Cohen, and James G. March, *Leadership and Ambiguity* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974), 81-89.

⁴⁴⁰ Executive Council Minutes, January 12, 1999. Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

at the College. Although the College's faculty and staff had developed and distributed self-study and planning documents for SACS, the Cross administration was reportedly distributing a completely new document with two weeks of the date on which she officially took office.

No one administrator can be credited with the College's progress during the progressive portions of the study-period, and no one administrator can be blamed for the College's complete loss of accreditation. Clara Boston offers this description of self-study and accreditation activities during the early 1990s:

I think [we approached accreditation] from varying postures, an uneven reaction. There was an effort underway to establish a unified approach to this new process. So there were the traditional committees. There were study groups, and there were things in terms of organization [al] activity and processes that were very efficient and effectiveness. But what I saw missing was that you did not get a buy-in by some staff and therefore you didn't get the full participation. So ultimately, you had a small handful of folk writing a document, even though there was input—but I mean actually conceptualize, writing it and participating in it, and so it was basically drilled down, as opposed to everyone understanding it. And then, at the same time, and I'm not exactly sure at what point these factors came into play. The academic division was the strongest—and is the part that drives the institution in terms of success. And I remember that through the years we had a good academic reputation in many key areas. But, there was uneven support of some of these academic personnel. So there was turmoil and/or turnover in the ranks of academic leadership. As a department head, I noticed that one could request certain things, but—timetables oftentimes did not mean anything to some folks. The expectations were not consistent across the board.⁴⁴¹

The inconsistency in terms of broad participation in the accreditation-preparation process that was expressed by this participant is supported by data retrieved from administrative records as well. One document, a grant proposal to obtain funds to support the College's planning and evaluation, indicates:

⁴⁴¹ Clara Boston, interview by author, 24 April, 2007.

[Morris Brown College] has been involved in on-going review and assessment activities since 1984 when President Smith commenced the Strategic Planning Process at the College. Subsequently, the College has undergone extensive review during the Self Study and periodically at various divisions. However, because this assessment has been sporadic, this new support will permit campus-wide assessment through the development of formal plans. Formal plans allow an institution, among other things, to avoid wasting financial revenues and staff time.⁴⁴²

Presidents have a significant role at Morris Brown College. Context (i.e. financial crisis, pending accreditation review) drives both the appointment of new Presidents, the initial actions of those Presidents, and the reactions of the existing faculty and staff. Unlike institutions whose infrastructure safeguards processes, the interpersonal skills of the individual who is appointed to the presidency at Morris Brown College seems to have a profound impact on what happens next. Administrators like Clara Boston recognized this.

I think [there are] multiple theories. I think that there's the theory of co-optation. If you have an operation, and all your processes and your policies and everything in place, you basically could have...no leader at all, and your operations are going to continue because they are at that level of efficiency. So the person does not make it, they just fit. They fit a role and that role has already been defined. It is operationalized, it's marketed. It's a creative entity. It's like, you don't need to have the president of Harvard. You don't need to know who that person is but when you have certain things like reputation, etc, and you have all the things around it in place, and I think that's one of the weaknesses we have, you don't have to be the smartest person. Efficiencies and all of that of someone's success are based on those people you surround yourself with. So that's where your success comes in. What you had [at Morris Brown] was the lack of structure that afforded efficiency, effectiveness, and impact along the areas that were necessary. And so the organization was based on the personalities of the entities. The only thing that I saw that was consistent was that you had a Bishop and so the personality of the Bishop dictated a lot of what happened in terms of the filtering down of operations.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴² "Office of Institutional Research, Leadership and Organizational Development Grant Proposal and Outline" (October 31, 1991). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

⁴⁴³ Clara Boston, interview by author, 24 April, 2007.

Presidents who approached leadership by soliciting input and participation from existing faculty and staff members were better received, and were seemingly more successful at reform. It is also clear that the campus was generally unresponsive to administrative ideology that was developed outside of the context of the institution. Further, administrative changes clearly impacted the College's relationship with SACS. Because the College was in an on-going effort to improve its relationship with SACS during this period, it was important for an incoming president to present the institution in a way that demonstrated consistent progress, clarity of process, and effective internal evaluation and assessment. However, it seems that the overhaul of processes without inclusion from previous contributors to the process was not beneficial to the institution. In contrast, the participants did not suggest that the College's relationship with the AME Church was in any way impacted by the change in administrations.

In sum, the office of president has a very significant role at Morris Brown, not unlike other institutions. The president's ability to mobilize the expertise and energies of the faculty and staff at the College toward goals is important. This ability is even more important during periods where decisive and quick action is needed (as was the case during the transition from one president to the next, during this study). The president at Morris Brown set the tone for what happened throughout the College. However, there are also other leaders, other staff persons and faculty members that play important roles in maintaining continuity and consistency of process within the College, particularly during transitory times.

Board of Trustees

The Morris Brown College Board of Trustees is pivotal to any discussion of the College's existence and operation—its authority and influence are intricately inter-woven within the context of the College. The sub-codes that frequently appeared in conversations and within printed documents in conjunction with Administration are:

- Board, AME (referring to the significant relationship between members of the board of trustees and the AME Church);
- Board, operating structure (referring to the governing authority of the board of trustees);
- Board, interference with college operations (referring to the perception that the board was overly-involved in the day-to-day operations of the College);
- Administration/Board miscommunication (referring to a lack of open communication, or secrecy, between the president and the board);
- Financial hardship (referring to severe budgetary or fiscal shortcomings at the College);
- AME, implied relationship (referring to the influence of the AME Church on the College, perhaps in intangible or non-definitive ways).

Data collected from print and human subjects suggest these things about the board of trustees during this period:

- The board and the AME Church were largely considered synonymously;
- Internal constituencies perceived that the board exceeded its authority in the operation of the College;
- Internal constituents perceived some inability of the Board to keep fully abreast of the activities of the president;
- There were perceived inconsistencies in board policies and procedures regarding things such as the constitution of the board, its governance of presidents, etc. This has prompted some concern from internal and external constituencies.

The Morris Brown College Board of Trustees is the senior governing authority for the College. It is responsible for the search process and hiring of a president and the president reports directly to the board. The board is responsible for approving policies

and procedures. Though administrations may change with some frequency, there is continuity on the board—the most notable exception being the periodic assignment of a new Bishop to the Sixth District, a decision made within the AME Church.

In conversations with participants, the board of trustees has often been perceived as synonymous with the AME Church—participants would reference both the board and the Church interchangeably in conversations regarding the board. While the entire board of trustees is not comprised of members of the Church, the Church has had significant representation there. Frederick Livingston explains the relationship between the board of trustees and the AME Church:

In terms of Morris Brown College and the AME Church, as I said [the college was] founded by the AME Church.... For the years of this study, The Bishop of the Sixth Episcopal District of the AME Church was the chair of the board of trustees. There were many AME ministers/ pastors that were members of the board. So, to a large extent, from a governing point of view, there was a large representation from the Church. It was not the Church that was governing it, but there were members of the Church that governed during that period. And there were members of the board that were non-AME. The Church provided a significant amount of financial support to the college.⁴⁴⁴

However, not all AME members of the board were ministers or pastors. There was also professional representation from persons who were also AME. Says Cassidy Lawson:

The College and the AME Church [are] joined at the hip. The Church of course is the founder of the college. But I believe that that relationship has been strained. The make-up of the board and its administration has been predominantly AME. The percentage of AME on the board has always been around 51% so they have always been the majority. Towards the latter years, 2000-2003 they tried to change that, but they never seemed to manage to do that. Even though they focused on trying to get more business people on the board, those particular business people were AME. That make-up continued to be that 51% or more. Maybe even more. I

⁴⁴⁴ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 29 January, 2007.

think actually toward the end, it may have increased. It may have even been 60-40%. And this was in the time that they were trying to attract more business people. But [they were] not looking at the fact that the business people were AME; they were looking at them as business people but it so happened that these particular business people were AME so you were still getting that AME spin.⁴⁴⁵

Although the board's strong religious affiliation has been a point of contention at times, my research has revealed that the relationship between the board and the Church has been beneficial to the College in some respects, just as the Church's level of authority at the College has created governance issues (amongst the college community and at time with regard to accreditation). As explained by Agatha Grendon, in some respects the board was the only real mechanism through which the College maintained an interactive relationship with the AME Church.

Actually, there was no open relationship [between the Church and the College]. It was really done through the Bishop, as Chairman of the Board, and the fact that he appointed a lot of ministers to the board. There were times, I understand, when... I don't know if it ever stopped... probably didn't, some board members would send people to be hired [at the college], and if the people in charge paid them any attention, they would be hired. But there was no open relationship between the college and the AME church, unless you consider the fact that [AME affiliated] colleges had to give a report during an annual meeting of the AME church. All the presidents had to give a report, and I think that was mainly because the AME church set aside a certain amount of money each year for the colleges. And I guess the Education Committee required that the colleges give a report.⁴⁴⁶

In another conversation, she goes on to explain that, while the College is apportioned an established amount of money from the overall AME Church, the

⁴⁴⁵ Cassidy Lawson, interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

⁴⁴⁶ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 27 February, 2007.

Chairman of the Board (the Bishop of the Sixth District) was able to raise additional funds from within the District to support the institution.

I think that's because the Bishop has been the chair and so he raises money in the District, but it is my understanding that the money that comes through the Church comes through the AME Church, not just the District. But in terms of raising money, like when we had a problem in '92, the Bishop was raising money within the 6th District. But it was my impression that the AME Church gave money to the AME schools and not on a District basis.⁴⁴⁷

Educational researchers suggest that colleges in general have grappled with how to maintain an appropriate balance of power between trustees and administrators. During the 1990s, colleges and universities focused heavily on two issues: growth and change. Who directs the growth and change are contestable questions, and have greatly affected academicians' concept of effective governance, leadership, and control issues.⁴⁴⁸ With regard to the board's relationship with Morris Brown College, participants expressed a keen awareness of the board's (and as such the Church's) presence in the operation of the College. Participants were perhaps cautious, initially, in describing how the board's presence was manifested in the day-to-day operations of the College. However, it was clear that the board had some measure of authority over what the College did, and what its priorities were. Cassidy Lawson explains:

Morris Brown's board was not like other boards. It was not financial. The only thing the board did was approve or set policy and regulated whatever the president did. But having deep pockets like most boards had? Our board was not that way, because most of the years it was stacked with AME preachers.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁷ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 3 May, 2007.

⁴⁴⁸ Mary Burgan, "Why Governance, Why Now," in *Competing Conceptions of Academic Governance*, ed. William Tierney (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), vii-viii.

Faculty and staff members felt that the board's involvement in the internal affairs of the institution sometimes overreached its authority. This, according to some participants, affected the manner in which the College's affairs were handled, as well as the relationship between the president and members of the faculty and staff. Further, the relationship between the College and the board was influenced as well by the individual that served as chair and the person or status of the presidency at the College. Frederick Livingston explains:

There is a thin line between the board setting a policy and the administrators carrying out the policies of an institution. There are different Board Chairs/Bishops that carry out their roles as the chair of the board. Some understand the difference between the academic institution of higher education and the church, and there are some that do not distinguish the difference, in practice. I would venture to say that because of that difference, some may have been more involved in day-to-day decision making than others and would have been more involved with an interim president than an actual president. There were periods where there was a need for interim leadership, and there were things that were desired to be accomplished during the short time period. That may have led them to believe that the ultimate leadership was possible, and they might change their minds later. That may have happened, probably did happen throughout the course of history. But it depends on the particular leadership... it is not a universal....⁴⁵⁰

There were times when the authority of the board has led to conflict with the administration. However, there seem to be definitive hierarchies that reinforce the board's ability to enforce its philosophy and priorities at the institution. Differences between the governing body and the administrator may lead to administrative turnover. Cassidy Lawson asserts:

There was so much conflict between the administration and the board. Once you have someone in the administration, the president that was

⁴⁴⁹ Cassidy Lawson, interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

⁴⁵⁰ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 13 March, 2007.

strong enough to stand up to the board, and would express the concerns of the administrative working the day to day trenches, then there was time for them to make a change. Unfortunately.⁴⁵¹

This conflict was not lost on external bodies, such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. While the accreditation agency did not mandate the constitution of the board or dictate to what extent the board should interact with administrative affairs, the nature and relationship of the board to the College has been a point of discussion. Clara Boston, who at one time drove the College's self-study efforts, says:

Well, I don't remember all the details of every recommendation. But when we were placed on probation, there was a statement... the SACS report somewhat suggested that there was an improper relationship between the Church and the College, and that that needed to be addressed. And basically, I perceived it being a part of this whole process, that there were certain procedures that needed to be put into place so that the Church would not be running the College in the manner that it was running. And that there would be external entities in terms of advisement in terms of expertise that would be placed on the board that would afford the College an opportunity to grow and to hear different sides, and to learn more from different experts.⁴⁵²

Historians note that as higher education in the United States has changed (particularly during the twentieth century), so too did its governing boards, necessitated by the need to adjust to the changing needs and expectations of society.⁴⁵³ Assuming this to be true, it seems that some conflict and exchange of wills may be expected at an institution that in itself was undergoing a very significant transformation—felt from

⁴⁵¹ Cassidy Lawson, interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

⁴⁵² Clara Boston, interview by author, 24 April, 2007.

⁴⁵³ Edwin D. Duryea, *The Academic Corporation: A History of College and University Governing Boards* (New York: Falmer Press, 2000), 167-68.

within as well as from external bodies. At Morris Brown, any conflict that resulted from these changing relationships was likely heightened by two things: 1) inconsistencies in the board's policies and actions, and 2) a level of miscommunication between the Board and the administration. Both the inconsistencies and the miscommunication, however, seem to have occurred with greater frequency during the latter part of the 1990s.

Faculty and staff members perceived the board to have inconsistent practices with regard to governing itself as well as the College. For example, there seemingly have been on-going discussions amongst the members of the board regarding its composition—namely the number of AME members that held seats on the board. Administrative records note that there was a discussion amongst the board members in April of 1999 regarding who should be invited to sit on the board, in order to maximize the board's benefit to the College.

The Board meeting also consisted of a 'spirited discussion' between the chair and several board members. The Nominations Committee recommended two persons to be voted onto the Board (one was a group leader at the US Department of Education responsible for administering Title I Part A funds; the other was the CEO of Sallie Mae, the largest educational loan agency for institutions of higher education). The votes were divided on these, with some board members expressing that they were interested in suggesting names, but felt their suggestions were not received. Others suggested that the Board clearly outline the duties and responsibilities of the various committees to ensure that no Board member feels slighted in any way. Another suggested that the Board should develop criteria and determine what types of people they want on the Board; another agreed.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵⁴ "Minutes of the Board of Trustees" (April 21, 1999). Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

Cassidy Lawson explains that the board, particularly during the early 1990s, did not rigorously adhere to its bylaws with regard to the tenure of individual board members and the recruitment of new members.

[The Board] has violated [its] bylaws as long as I can remember... especially during that '89 [to] 2000 period... There probably could have been [more diversity on the Board] if [they'd] allowed the Nominating Committee to search for replacements. But they were seemingly happy within their own little groups. So, they kept that going. The easiest violation to think of is when an alumni representative comes on and serves his [or her] time and the Board votes [him/her] back on as a regular member. That is the easiest one. Because they feel like that person had a vested interest. [The Board was] not going out to research to see if there is someone else that [the Board] might want to cultivate to come on and [provide] more resources. [They were] just recycling the same people.⁴⁵⁵

Participants also indicated that the board uncharacteristically loosened its reins on a particular president, Dr. Cross. As Frederick Livingston explains, this had some impact on what other administrators perceived as the board's ability to effectively govern at the time when it was perhaps most important.

The board, upon the arrival of the new president in Nov. of 1998, granted the new president privileges that had not been provided previously to past presidents. That president was able to make financial decisions at a higher level, amount, without board approval. So, that opened up the avenue for the president to make decisions about employing and other decisions and things of that sort, because in essence she had negotiated that—prior to her appointment to president. So, in reality, the president would have assumed that she was making the right decisions, and had the go-ahead to do so based upon her negotiations early on with the board. Now, on the other hand, this is a high profile president, having served as president at a distinguished university; it probably was the feeling of the board of trustees that this person knew what she was doing, and would represent the college well in terms of decisions, and therefore it was not necessary to monitor her decisions as closely. Thus, the board granted approval for the president to make tough decisions, not knowing that those tough decisions would in essence throw the budget out of balance due to the major

⁴⁵⁵ Cassidy Lawson, interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

decisions in terms of positions being added, which provided financial pressures on that budget at which she was operating.⁴⁵⁶

It was also during the Cross administration that participants perceived a weakening in the communication between the board of trustees and the administration. Although participants acknowledge that this was likely the intent of the administration at the time, it nonetheless was inconsistent with the board's previous mode of operating. When asked what mechanisms were in place at the College during the Cross administration to evaluate the administration and the progress of the overall college, Frederick Livingston explains:

The only persons that would have been able to recognize that would have been the Presidential cabinet, for example, the President, some of major officers such as the academic leader and others. Between 1999 and 2002, you had a whole new set of administrators that were very secretive, and not much information in terms of the facts of what was happening was passed on beyond that small group— which is no longer here. That is very important, because, in terms of management style, because the President during the time of 1999 and 2002 kept the information in a small circle of people that she selected in terms of administrators, frequently they decided what they would share with the Board of Trustees and what they would not share... I believe that it was a fault of the administration between 1999 and 2002 that they may not [intentionally] have been creating a problem by not sharing the information fully with the Board of Trustees. In essence, as we note in hindsight, there is a strong feeling that it was a mistake, because had the Board been aware of the true picture of the college, they would have taken action earlier to raise the appropriate questions with the administration.⁴⁵⁷

Agatha Grendon also remembers the miscommunication between the administration and the board of trustees. She worked closely with the board in an executive position prior to Dr. Cross' administration, and was privy to some of

⁴⁵⁶ Frederick Livingston, interview by author 13 March, 2007.

⁴⁵⁷ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 13 March, 2007.

the on-going transition processes after Cross' arrival. However, she says that there was a definitive and intentional lapse in communication with the board when it came to certain issues.

The College should not have been out money in the Fall of '98. But because of the way the new president spent money, they may have been out. I don't know what happened after that point, except I know that the College was hiring all these people and paying them these hefty salaries. According to reports of court testimony, the former president said that she was doing all that stuff to keep the college afloat. And people out in the public knew Morris Brown had been having trouble before, so they assumed that she was telling the truth. And she may have been keeping the college afloat at that time, but it is because of how she was running the College.... [One of Dr. Cross' senior officials] told me, maybe after he left, that when they got ready to tell the board something that she didn't want them to say... to tell the truth about it, she wouldn't let them do it. And the College's lawyer said the same thing. She would tell them she would take it [to the board instead].

In sum, the Morris Brown College board of trustees is a significant body of influence within the College. The board largely represents the College's interaction with (and support from) the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Many members of the board are AME ministers, and the chair of the board has consistently been held by the Bishop of the Sixth District. The board establishes and approves policy; it hires and reviews presidents, and has ultimate authority with regard to financial decisions. However, the effectiveness of the board of trustees is contingent upon factors such as the professional and financial composition of the members of the board, the board's communication and cooperation with administrators at the College, etc.

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

The purpose of this study was to closely examine the relationship between the College, the AME Church, and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. As such, it is logical that SACS was mentioned repeatedly within documents and in conversation with the study's participants. However, given the priority that accreditation (not necessarily SACS itself, but its function) represented to the College during the time frame of this study, it seems very likely that any study of the College from a variety of lenses (i.e. student services, faculty relationships, alumni and alumnae participation) would have also contained significant information regarding accreditation (hence SACS). The information contained within this section details what SACS represented to the College during these years, how it was perceived and received, and its influence on the College's operations.

The sub-codes that frequently appeared in printed documents and conversations in conjunction with SACS are:

- SACS, criticisms or violations (referring to formal recommendations or sanctions from SACS);
- SACS, Board censure (referring to any sanction of trustee board activity or infrastructure by SACS);
- AME, implied relationship (referring to the influence of the AME Church on the College, perhaps in intangible or non-definitive ways);
- SACS, changing guidelines (referring to changes in standards, requirements, or expectations mandated by SACS for re-affirmation/accreditation purposes);
- Progress, at the College;
- Stagnation, regression (referring to periods at the College in which there was a lack of progress toward established goals).

There was not a period within the timeframe of this study that SACS was not a focal point for someone at the College. In 1989 the College was preparing to enter a re-affirmation review. That review resulted in follow-up monitoring processes that

concluded in 1994. In 1994, the College had successfully met all requirements to assure its reaffirmation. After 1994, there was a brief period of non-official activity with SACS. However, given the complexity of the previous review and follow-up monitoring, officials at the College were very aware that it would have to conduct on-going analysis and strengthening of some processes (e.g. comprehensive self-evaluation, budgetary control, and fiscal management) in order to be fully prepared to meet the expectations of the re-affirmation committee again in 1999. As it was, the 1999 review (which resulted in re-affirmation, with follow-up monitoring contingencies) also resulted in follow-up monitoring, eventually leading to the complete revocation of the College's accreditation.

An examination of institutional documents and interviews with participants revealed that SACS (and accreditation) was indeed a crucial focus for the College. Data analysis and coding suggests these things about SACS during this period:

- Internal constituencies were aware of sanctions from SACS, and the impact of the accrediting body on the well-being of the College;
- The accrediting body had some concern regarding the constitution, role, and activities of the board of trustees;
- The accrediting body had some concern regarding the authority/influence of the AME Church on college operations;
- Internal constituencies perceived changing requisites from SACS to be a challenge.

As with other major themes mentioned in this chapter (specifically Administration), I am not suggesting that there is a causal relationship between the major code (SACS) and the sub-codes. However, because printed documents and participants discussed SACS along with at least one of the sub-codes (or a combination of sub-codes), it is important to examine how SACS and accreditation fits into the discussion(s) regarding other facets of the College's existence. Interestingly, the "SACS" major code was not grouped with

either sub-code “external perception, negative” or “external perception, positive,” as perhaps one would expect.

Researchers indicate that accreditation evaluates the worth of an institution based on a standard derived from the policies, practices, and effectiveness of other institutions.⁴⁵⁸ Administrators at four-year colleges desire accreditation for the legitimacy that it provides to the institution. It speaks to the quality of the school’s operations, and provides the prestige that accompanies membership amongst ranked peers.⁴⁵⁹ Subsequently, it is the determining factor of an institution’s eligibility for state licensure and federal funding.⁴⁶⁰ Data suggest that Morris Brown College was in a period of re-adjustment and growth during this period, perhaps independently of (or in conjunction with) the re-affirmation process. Additionally, however, the need to maintain external credibility (for the purpose of maintaining competitiveness with other institutions and to maintain federal funding), officials at the College as well as alumni/ae and students were aware of the importance of meeting the expectations established by the College’s accrediting body as well. Frederick Livingston describes the College’s priorities during the early years of this study:

Between ’89 and ’03, the College went through a growing process... growing in the sense of adding academic programs. It added non-academic programs, more community related services. It continued to increase its enrollment from about 1500 all the way up to about 2800 students, almost double its enrollment. It was trying to move into an arena that would change the negative stigma in terms of the open admissions, and in turn

⁴⁵⁸ Jerry Miller and L.E. Boswell, “Accreditation, Assessment and the Credentialing of Educational Accomplishment,” *Journal of Higher Education* 50 no. 2 (1979): 219, 223.

⁴⁵⁹ David G. Imig, and Mary Harrill-McLellan, “Accrediting Standards Affecting Mid-Level Teacher Evaluation Preparation in the Community College,” *New Directions For Community Colleges* 121 (Spring 2003): 80.

⁴⁶⁰ Laurence Marcus, “Self –Study In Higher Education: The Path to Excellence,” *ERIC Digest* (1984).

develop an academic reputation. However, in doing so, it faced a tremendous amount of financial challenges.⁴⁶¹

As a part of the effort to grow the College and establish an academic reputation, officials acknowledged the need to maintain a positive rapport with SACS. Livingston goes on to describe the College's interaction with SACS during this time:

There was progress between '89 and '92 because we had come out of an accreditation, with very few recommendations... a very positive report—even though there was a financial concern. Yet it was a positive report from the accrediting body. In 1992 obviously when the cumulative deficit hit, that created a problem with the accrediting body and with the board. Then from 1992 to 1994, and coming out of that in 1994 with a clear financial record, things were more positive, all the way up to whatever time period in 2002. During those times, when there was progress, it was related to the positive reports... and I have to say, they were truthful in the '90s. But in the 2000s, there were questionable reports, but they were not questioned. There were questionable reports, but they were not questioned. And the administration had a good way of polishing up things, at least during the period of 1999 to 2002, putting a very positive spin on the institution.⁴⁶²

Data also suggest that administrators at the College had varying perceptions regarding the College's relationship with SACS. Frederick Livingston, who has been directly involved in re-accreditation activities, suggests that the College shared a positive working relationship with the accreditor, despite receiving strong feedback regarding the College's finances.

There was an increase in synergy between SACS and Morris Brown between '89 and '92, because there were individuals at the college that played major roles with the SACS program through college representation being on visiting committees at other institutions. This continued through '98 and really even continued through 2002. There was always that representation from the College. So, toward that end, there was synergy. But somewhere between '99 and 2002, there were frequent calls from the

⁴⁶¹ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 29 January, 2007.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

college administrators requesting privileges too frequently... in terms of late submissions of reports, in terms of providing a positive spin for the college... not necessarily the truth. I think SACS began to recognize some of those things. The administration was very forceful with SACS during the '99 and '2002 because of the personality and nature of the college leader. It developed a barrier between the two, Morris Brown College and the accrediting body. The accrediting body could not get the information that it needed in a timely manner, and sometimes the information that was in the report did not represent what was happening at the college. So, when the Visiting Committee would come, sometimes there were puffed-up reports. The lesson learned is that an institution that grows and strengthens itself is an institution that deals with the reality, and plans accordingly. Failure to do so would create exposure and challenges in future years.⁴⁶³

Cassidy Lawson, a mid-level manager, however, perceived on-going sanctions and follow-up monitoring as indicative of a different type of relationship with the accrediting body.

The College's relationship with SACS has always been strained, but workable—mainly because we have always dealt with financial issues. SACS wants you to show financial stability, so it becomes strained with them coming back doing their reviews, and finding the same problems. I think it was ultimately going to happen that they loss their accreditation, because we were dealing with the same problems over and over again every ten years. I believe those problems, that loss of accreditation, would have happened regardless of who the president was. And also I believe that the board has a weak understanding of the SACS process, and that does not help if your board does not understand your accrediting body.⁴⁶⁴

Lawson, who has worked with the governing body of the College, may have developed this perspective based upon SACS' assessment of the trustee board. She and others had read various documents that contained language, such as the following excerpt from a Visiting Team Report, that suggested that external reviewers were attentive to the relationship between the board and the College.

⁴⁶³ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 29 January, 2007.

⁴⁶⁴ Cassidy Lawson, interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

While the bylaws indicate that the Board ‘will delegate the responsibility and authority for the day to day administration and conduct of the aforementioned and other affairs of the Institution to the President,’ the language in the complete text of the document and practice, as discerned from official minutes of the Board meeting, make it unclear as to where policy-making ends and administration begins... Therefore, the Committee suggests that the Board of Trustees review its bylaws on an annual basis and periodically evaluate its own performance.⁴⁶⁵

At the same time, however, Lawson recalled instances in which select officials from SACS were very supportive of the College.

There were fluctuations with changes in the administration. As far as SACS, the relationship was always open. There is a person assigned to the institution. For us it was Ann Chard. She was always there if the institution needed anything. If they needed her to come over if there was an explanation needed, she was the one to go to the president... So, she would go to that person [on the Visiting team] who might have a particular answer or she would actually find the answer herself, or go to the head of SACS. But the open communication with SACS was always there. There was never a case where we could not call and say what do we need to do? [SACS] even went so far as sending the college consultants to help them get through it. She was a very good one. I think she always had Morris Brown at heart, because Morris Brown has always been one of her schools. I personally believe that is how we got through the '89 accreditation. I think if she was not [as supportive], it would have [resulted in the loss of accreditation] before now. Her hands were tied at this point. You couldn't do a lot when it was this bad.⁴⁶⁶

According to participants, SACS had been cautious about the influence (and perhaps authority) of the AME Church on the College. The College has never expressed an interest in distancing itself from the AME Church, nor did any participants suggest that it should. Beyond being the founding body for the College, the AME Church was a source of financial support for the institution. Research suggests that many historically

⁴⁶⁵ “Report of Special Committee to Morris Brown College,” (October 18-20, 2000) Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

⁴⁶⁶ Cassidy Lawson, interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

Black colleges are caught in a counterproductive cycle, and are denied much-sought-after aid because the institutions do not meet certain standards, and they fail to meet certain standards because they lack certain resources.⁴⁶⁷ Certainly, the AME Church represented a resource for the institution in terms of championing its cause, but it was also a supplier of monetary support. At the same time, participants understood that an objective external entity (e.g. SACS) might question the role and authority of the Church. Participants shared:

Morris Brown discloses the connection between the AME Church and the Chairmanship of the Board of Trustees. The Bishop is always the Chair... SACS is always looking at that connection. Sometimes SACS does not always get its information from the college. Sometimes it gets it from external sources to the College.⁴⁶⁸

There was a recommendation during the last self-study reaffirmation... that indicated that SACS was saying that the AME Church should not be influencing what goes on at Morris Brown. But the truth of the matter is, there were some people who saw [the document] and believed the SACS was told something about the AME Church.⁴⁶⁹

All I know is that SACS stipulated that the Church needed to bow out of the day-to-day management of Morris Brown.⁴⁷⁰

Beyond concerns with financial instability and Board structure, participants expressed an on-going awareness of the evolution of SACS, its policies, and expectations for colleges and universities. During the early years of this study, the College's officials

⁴⁶⁷ Daniel C. Thompson, *Private Black Colleges at The Crossroads* (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1973), 248.

⁴⁶⁸ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 29 January, 2007.

⁴⁶⁹ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 27 February, 2007.

⁴⁷⁰ Clara Boston, interview by author, 24 April, 2007.

were aware that SACS was requiring institutions to strengthen their approach to self-study and planning. Clara Boston recalls:

The primary concern was in its coordination of the standards of SACS, which related to specific program areas. The fiscal management needed to be put into play and the operations for the most part were in the development of the new guidelines. Now, because we were actually entering into this new wave of Institutional Effectiveness, we had the opportunity to be one of the schools early on in the accreditation process. So, as a part of the accreditation piece, we wrote our plan as to what we would do to measure our effectiveness. So we established outcome measures. We took—in a very general sense. But, we established what we *would* do; so it was a very projective type of piece. So, we had seven years to collect baseline data, to measure successes—to measure student learning, to measure operational efficiency; to measure according to the guidelines—because again these were the new guidelines, and put into place a series of processes and operations to determine whether or not we were accomplishing these goals. So we were at the cutting edge, in the sense of this was the new wave of accountability, and we were going in at that point to establishing a criteria as to what we were going to do.⁴⁷¹

Livingston confirms that SACS was indeed evolving in terms of its regulatory stipulations and the documentation methods for member colleges. He did not believe that the College was unable to meet any of the new expectations. However, changes in accreditation guidelines undoubtedly had some impact on the learning curve for the College, in their efforts to meet external expectations. Regarding the changes in SACS guidelines, Livingston says:

SACS is continuously undergoing changes in its criteria. For example, it underwent a change in the latter '80s where in 1989 we were going under one particular set of requirements. In 1999, we were... had incorporated a lot of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning. SACS had to incorporate that into their requirements. And therefore the College was expected to make those changes and address those particular situations. And now here we are in the 2000s, where we have moved from criteria to core requirements. So it's continuously changing. I think in the 1999 situation, it may not beyond the institutional effectiveness part, there may not have been many changes within the SACS part. But I think the change came

⁴⁷¹ Clara Boston, interview by author, 24 April, 2007.

from how the new administration was beginning to address what they really did not understand in terms of SACS requirements. They were trying to institute something that was good but not necessarily satisfying the requirements set by SACS. And any time you get that type of situation where there is an accrediting body with certain set of rules and requirements, if you're not fitting in with those rules, then you are not going to get through the process. I think that's where they found themselves. They came from a different type of environment, not fully understanding the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. And therefore they walked into it. Now, their approach was, I know it, I know what is needed, I know what is required, and they failed to consult with people that really knew.⁴⁷²

In sum, SACS was a significant influence on the College during this time. College officials recognized the authority of the accrediting body, and were aware of SACS' critique of the college's governing structure. From the participants' responses regarding the College's efforts to meet accreditation standards, there seems to be an awareness (on the part of faculty and staff, members) that there were things that faculty and staff members could address and correct, and there were things that were not under their purview. For example, broadening the institution's self-study activities to be more inclusive across campus was a viable activity, while the authority and influence of the Church was not under the control of the faculty or staff.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church

Morris Brown College was founded by the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Its history is tied to the Church, and its mission was developed with Christian principles and motives in mind. As such any scholarly consideration of

⁴⁷² Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 18 May, 2007.

Morris Brown College would necessarily include a discussion of the AME Church, and its involvement with the institution. This study was designed to explore the relationship between the Church and the College during a particularly transitory period in the College's history—a period where there was perhaps an increased focus on the expectations and influence of other external bodies as well. Despite an amplified presence of SACS and other entities during this time, however, Morris Brown College remained intricately connected to (and perhaps in some ways defined by) the AME Church. The sub-codes that were densely paired with the AME Church major code were:

- AME, support of the College (referring to financial or other support provided to the College from the Church);
- AME, influence (referring to any identifiable policy, practice, or activity of the College that resulted from its affiliation with the AME Church);
- AME, survival (referring to the crucial role that the Church has played in assisting the College during periods of extreme financial crisis);
- AME, on staff (referring to the presence of individual staff members at the College who were affiliated with the AME Church);
- Board/AME (referring to the significant relationship between members of the board of trustees and the AME Church);
- AME, implied relationship (referring to the influence of the AME Church on the College, perhaps in intangible or non-definitive ways);
- SACS, criticisms or violations (referring to formal recommendations or sanctions from SACS);
- Financial hardships (referring to severe budgetary or fiscal shortcomings at the College);
- External perception, negative (referring to the general negative perception of the College or its administration by external bodies).

Both print and human data sources mentioned the AME Church repetitively throughout this study. The Church, its presence, exists beyond the College's early history. Data suggest that the following regarding the relationship between the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the College during this time:

- The AME Church is a noteworthy aspect in the way the faculty, staff, students and alumni/ae understand the identity of Morris Brown College. It is a historical anchor for the College;
- The influence of the Church is both identifiable (i.e. the make-up and activities of the board of trustees) and intangible (i.e. felt within the culture of the College);
- The AME Church is a recognized source of financial support for the College;
- Internal constituents acknowledge that sometimes external entities view the College's affiliation with the Church negatively.

Research suggests that modern religious-affiliated colleges “exist on a continuum, from the barely affiliated to the ultra-orthodox.”⁴⁷³ At some institutions, the religious Convention may elect the college's board members. Morris Brown College exists somewhere between minimal affiliation and ultra-orthodox. The Church receives more than just nominal mention at the College, as exemplified by the revision of the College's mission statement to include a mention of the Church. The 1991-1993 Morris Brown College catalog contains the following (partial excerpt of the College's) mission statement:

The primary mission of Morris Brown College is to provide educational opportunities in a Christian environment that will enable its students to become fully functional persons in society. The realization of this mission promises graduates who are able to live meaningful and personally rewarding lives and who are prepared to make socially constructive and culturally relevant contributions to society. In fulfilling this mission, the College accepts the obligation to place events and points of view in the context of man's long intellectual history and to expose both to the light of man's best thinking.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷³ Kenneth Wagner, “Faith Statements Do Restrict Academic Freedom: Most Defenses of Evangelical Colleges Miss the Point—Rigid Orthodoxy Does Not Go Well With the Quest for Knowledge,” *Academe* 92 no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 2006):21-22.

⁴⁷⁴ Morris Brown College Catalog (1991-1993), 6.

At the time of the printing of the 2000-2001 catalog, the mission had been reviewed and augmented, to include the following statement, which appeared just before the wording from the 1991-1993 catalog, specifically identifying the Church:

Morris Brown College, founded in 1881 by the African Methodist Episcopal Church, is a private, coeducational liberal arts college engaged in teaching, research, and public service in the arts, humanities, education, professional programs, social sciences and natural sciences.⁴⁷⁵

Faculty and staff members recognized that Morris Brown's philosophical support and perhaps its operations were significantly influenced by the Church. Some perceived this as a point of distinction between Morris Brown College and other institutions, even within the Atlanta University Center. Frederick Livingston explained:

I would think that Morris Brown has a closer relationship with the Church and the institution than most of the institutions in the Atlanta University Center with exception of the Interdenominational Theological Center, ITC. And the difference with ITC would be that the programs are related directly to the Church and its board administrators and its faculty are a part of the Church and a part of the institution. But in terms of undergraduate institutions Morris Brown has a closer relationship.⁴⁷⁶

When asked to identify aspects of the College that were heavily influenced by the Church, participants would readily reference the affiliation between the AME Church and the board of trustees. Cassidy Lawson said: "Well the College is governed by a board... [and it has a] president that reports directly to the board...." However, she went on to say:

... I believe that when you are [a board member] at an AME institution, you are more tempted to vote with your chair, which typically was the Bishop of the Sixth District of the AME Church. So typically, AMEs would side with [the] Bishop because they were AME.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁵ Morris Brown College Catalog. (2000-2001), 11.

⁴⁷⁶ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 13 March, 2007.

⁴⁷⁷ Cassidy Lawson, interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

Regarding how the AME composition of the board affected the development of policy, she said:

I'm really not sure. But I don't think most our policies were implemented because of the Southern Association [of Colleges and Schools]. We have the general policies that every school has to abide by, that SACS puts in place. But then you have these other policies that our Board incorporates. And I believe those policies were weighing more heavily than the policies that we should have been following from SACS.⁴⁷⁸

According to Livingston, however, there is a distinction between official policy and institutional practice. Generally, the Morris Brown College Board of Trustees developed formal policies regarding the management of finances at the institution. The board was also responsible for the selection and hiring of the college's chief administrator (the president). Academic and accreditation-related policies and practices were informed by the college's faculty body, and external regulations by SACS.⁴⁷⁹

Participants also recognized that the Church was a major source of funding for the College, and was a significant contributing factor to the College's overall survival—both during the time of this study and prior. An excerpt from the 2000-2001 college catalogs reads:

Morris Brown changed its status to a university in 1913 and, by charter amendment, it was given the right to establish and operate branch institutions of learning. Branches were established in Cuthbert, Georgia, and Savannah, Georgia. These branches posed a heavy burden on the school's finances, which came primarily from the AME Church and small individual gifts. Lacking any foundation support, the school discontinued these branches in 1929 and restored its original name, Morris Brown College.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁸ Cassidy Lawson, interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

⁴⁷⁹ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 6 March, 2008.

⁴⁸⁰ Morris Brown College Catalog (2000-2001): 10.

Participants explained that the Church had remained consistent with its financial support, exhibited by contemporary gifts as well. Even more, some faculty and staff members perceived that there was even a sense of ownership between the Church and the College. Agatha Grendon said:

I believe that these are their colleges, all of them... all the AME schools. And to me that means that the Church is responsible for whatever happens to these schools. In terms of money, in terms of everything. I was told something different after we got into this trouble [with accreditation]. And I still don't understand it. The Church founded Morris Brown and supported it, at least initially, in terms of raising money... I thought that the school belonged to the AME Church. I was told that it didn't. And now I am confused. I thought that the AME Church owned all the schools.⁴⁸¹

It also seems that the strength of the relationship between the Church and the College was more apparent contingent upon which administrator was leading the College.

Clara Boston explained:

It varied depending on who was in charge. You had one relationship where the College leadership was conciliatory but there was like one face. I felt that if the Church said it, it would mean the way it was going to be. And then you had another guise where when people took exception [to the Church's heavy influence at the College.]⁴⁸²

Research also suggests that at colleges under strict control of a church, officials and representatives of the college are expected to promote faith in the college experience and to not tolerate dissention from the "absolute truth" of God, leaving little room to debate difficult issues.⁴⁸³ Boston elaborated that at Morris Brown College, while mid-level staff persons and faculty members understood the College's relationship to the

⁴⁸¹ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 3 May, 2007.

⁴⁸² Clara Boston, interview by author, 24 April, 2007.

⁴⁸³ Beth McMurtrie, "Religion and Politics," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49, no. 43 (July 2003): A20-A22.

Church, and the significance of that partnership to the life of the College, the College also had some managerial needs that were beyond the scope of what the Church was able to provide. The College was dependent upon the Church for support, but stipulations from external funding sources and governmental regulations stipulated that the College also adhere to standards that did not originate with the Church.

It was the history. It was... you're talking about the culture. This institution was founded for, by Blacks, exclusively. This is the only institution of all the schools [in the state of Georgia] that was founded by Black entities. And, I think that is still a very [real] opportunity for this institution from a historical perspective. The financial remuneration, which I never knew exactly what proportion or whatever, was also a benefit. The opportunity from the perspective of recruitment—persons who attended Morris Brown were AME, were often times would love to have their children come to the institution because there was that connectedness there. So you're talking about a rich history of students coming to Morris Brown who had strong family ties—so I think that we had a very strong institution there in terms of the opportunity to be a conduit and to provide leadership and many of the ministers, especially in leadership, went to Morris Brown and graduated and maybe went to ITC. So there was definitely a benefit there that I thought was a rich benefit for the institution. What wasn't a priority was when it came to questions of what is required to compete in the marketplace. What's required to be successful in terms of external credentialing or criteria. What's required to be successful from the standpoint of fiscal responsibility and management? Those are the areas that the Church or the leadership did not address, or if they did, it wasn't one side... or it didn't evolve or emerge to be the priority. So therefore... or it could not be the priority. So therefore, the school had its demise. And the last demise from what I understand, it wasn't some programmatic issues, it was some fiscal issues. I know that when we addressed the earlier side to SACS recommendations and came out of the probationary period, the last stage that needed to be addressed at the point was the fiscal area. So, there was a history of fiscal ineffectiveness in terms of program management, advocacy, impact and definitely policies and procedures.⁴⁸⁴

While participants acknowledge that external bodies such as SACS were concerned with the College's fiscal health, internal constituents also recognized that the

⁴⁸⁴ Clara Boston, interview by author, 24 April, 2007.

Church's financial support of the institution contributed to the Church's interest in the financial managerial capabilities of the institution as well. Unlike SACS, however, the Church's interest moved beyond the realm of accountability, to include input regarding the culture and moral code(s) that defined the student experience at the College. For example, Frederick Livingston reported:

I think the Church is more concerned about the money that they contribute and how it is being spent. If a Church who is the founder of a higher education institution continues to financially support it, it will be concerned with the bottom line of the management of the funds being contributed. History has slightly changed, so that church founding organizations are not as concerned with the nature of the programs being approved by the college unless it is something that attacks the moral and ethical character of the church. In the case of Morris Brown, with the current or past programs in 21 years, I cannot think of a time when the church would have called any of the programs into question. It has been more concerned with student activities... did they reach that gray line in terms of the moral character... at one point in history, dancing, drugs, organizations or groups that come in and perform with language that is not appropriate, etc. Those are areas of concern; organizations that come in to bring entertainment that is inappropriately dressed in terms of the manner in which the Church defines it and requests that they look at it.⁴⁸⁵

To summarize, the AME Church's presence is manifested through both formal channels at the College—namely through policies adopted and implemented by the board of trustees (which is substantially comprised of AME members), as well as informal mechanisms. The Church has provided continuous financial support to the College, and as such has exercised liberty in terms of input into the affairs of the College. Faculty and staff think of the institution in terms of its significance as a Church-affiliated college. The Church is recognized as the gauge against which the College measures its ethical and moral behavior—particularly in terms of the student experience. Participants did not

⁴⁸⁵ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 13 March, 2007.

describe any internal dissent or disgruntlement with regard the College's relationship with the Church. Participants did, however, strongly associate the Church with the board of trustees—and at times lamented the board's tendency to overly-assert its authority at the College.

In terms of external sanction by SACS, participants acknowledged that the accrediting body has expressed a concern about the authority of a religious body over the College's policy (as described in the previous section). Participants did not disclose how the College seeks to maintain a balance between its religious affiliation (i.e. founded by and continuously supported by the Church, a board heavily-comprised of Church members) with the expectations and regulations (and perhaps limitations) placed on such an institution by an external accreditor. During an interview, one participant likened the College's balancing act as having two masters. Finding the right balance has presented a challenge for the institution. It was both a child of the AME Church, as well as an institution that aspired to increase its effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability in an increasingly competitive market.

Internal Context

This is an ethnographic case study, and as such, context plays a significant part in the analysis of data, and the process of understanding the institution and people involved. Within this paper, I have discussed events, concepts, at the College between the years 1989 and 2003. Each event, policy, action, and relationship occurred within the context and culture of this particular institution, and thus it is very important to understand the institution's culture, as it is understood by the persons who lived it.

Constructs and concepts that were presented by print and human data sources are discussed in this section. Two primary constructs (or codes) are discussed here: Internal Perception, positive; and Internal Perception, negative.⁴⁸⁶ Each of these primary constructs is discussed individually below.

Internal Perception, Positive

The participants of this study were decidedly emotionally connected to this topic—the interviews and conversations were not rote, and most of the topics were discussed freely with little provocation. Many things occurred at the College during this time, and there are identifiable periods of progress, regress, achievement, and disappointment with this era. As such, participants' descriptions of events, people, and policies at the College were often accompanied by accounts of how they and other employees (as well as students and alumni/ae) related to the College, what the morale was, how person interacted with one another. Further, as expected, sometimes those feelings were positive, sometimes they were negative.

The sub-code 'Internal perception, positive' refers to the general positive perception of the College or its administration by internal constituents. This primary code was often paired with the following sub-codes:

- Pride;
- Haven For All Hungry Souls (referring to the concept of Morris Brown as a nurturing environment for students committed to self-improvement and social upliftment);
- Under-served Students (referring to the culture and practice of the College to receive and nurture students who may have been excluded from entry at other institutions);

⁴⁸⁶ While seemingly simplistic, it was important for me to describe the nature of the participants' feelings toward the College—whether individuals felt connected to and supportive of the institution, or if they felt disconnected and unsupportive. These perceptions affect relationships, decision-making, and activities with the College.

- Student Achievement (referring to the academic attainments of Morris Brown College students);
- Multiple Roles Within the College (referring to an individual or individuals who fulfill unofficial roles at the College beyond one's job description—such as the Clara Boston planting flowers during the weekend hours);
- Increased enrollment;
- Progress, at the College;
- Reinventing the College (referring to the effort to improve upon the College's internal processes, image, and overall status).

Culture, as understood by sociologists, includes a people's beliefs, values, customs, traditions, economy, etc. Scholars observe that cultures do change, but that change is incremental, and often unrecognized by those involved.⁴⁸⁷ The culture at Morris Brown College was complex, although there were some consistencies. For example, all of the participants expressed an appreciation for what they perceived to be the core purpose for Morris Brown—the need for the institution to exist, even within a competitive network of other colleges. Participants expressed pride in the institution's ability to mold a diverse student body (those with previous academic achievement and those in need of academic support and enrichment) and expose students to academic experiences that were competitive and beneficial. Clara Boston describes the College's approach to student development:

MBC has a history and it was not about all negatives. Let the story be told that it had many many successes in its history, many who are still alive today. So this story that is being told in this interview is only about the periods reflecting on selected aspects of the SACS visit and subsequent change in status at MBC. And I don't want to give an unbalanced picture of the institution. During that same time, there were lots of successes at the institution. And I can only express the successes based on my little area. But I do know, for example, that we did have the Department of Interior Initiative with the other campuses, where students had an opportunity to explore non-traditional careers, where we went to the

⁴⁸⁷ Carle M. Hunt, Kenneth Oosting, Robert Stevens, David Loudon, and R. Henry Migliore, *Strategic Planning For Private Higher Education* (New York: The Haworth Press, 1997), 71-72.

mining entities. Hydrologists came and students learned about those non-traditional careers. We took students out west to Denver to see the DOI operations in the flesh, and to Washington, DC to see the government in operation. This was just one small area. MBC offered so many exciting opportunities both as a student and an employee. It was a place where innovation was welcomed and supported. The best thing about Morris Brown was its support for tradition and innovation. I won't say that everybody supported every innovation for every area, but I know personally, they encouraged you to get grants and work on programs to advance the institution with enthusiasm.⁴⁸⁸

Participants also expressed pride in the College's history and purpose. However, there was also the perception that persons outside of the institution did not necessarily share an appreciation for the College's decidedly non-elitist approach to education.

Livingston says:

Morris Brown has been thought [of] internally and externally as having a strong historical significance, by Blacks for Blacks. A child of the AME church in that it was founded by it. Within, it was thought to have a strong academic program. Sometimes without... for those that didn't know MBC as well, felt that the academic programs weren't as challenging. It was thought that it was an open-door institution, those that were not well-prepared for college had an opportunity to come here to get an education.⁴⁸⁹

He goes on to say, however, that the College sought to maintain its ability to identify and serve needy students, but also sought to improve its overall standing within higher education.

Right around the latter '80s and early 90s, it was a stigma. Morris Brown, in looking at an admissions process, found that it did not accept every student. The stigma at that time was open-admission. Morris Brown felt that there were times that it would not accept a student; it was more selective in its process.... It was trying to move into an arena that would change the negative stigma in terms of the open admissions, and in turn

⁴⁸⁸ Clara Boston, interview by author, 24 April, 2007.

⁴⁸⁹ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 29 January, 2007.

develop an academic reputation. However, in doing so, it faced a tremendous amount of financial challenges.⁴⁹⁰

Agatha Grendon explains that the College's approach to educating the masses may have also influenced the College's relationship with external bodies as well.

Internally, the general feeling is that the College operates or serves both highly qualified students as well as students who may have some difficulties, or need extra. Externally, I think that the understanding of people on the outside is that we only cater to low income, to students who are below... that we don't have good students, that we cater to those that are in need of remediation. That, I think, is a part of Morris Brown's problem, in terms of the way it raises money. Because people tend to... people gave money to schools in the AUC, but didn't want to give us any because, according to them, we only cater to students which are on the lower end of the academic scale.⁴⁹¹

Internal Perception, Negative

Despite the pride with which many employees approached their roles within Morris Brown College, changes in administration, financial hardships, accreditation troubles, and other factors did lower morale and affect the interaction between the College and its employees. "Internal Perception, Negative" refers to the general negative perception (or resentment) of the College or its administration by internal constituents.

This primary code was often accompanied by the following sub-codes:

- External perception, negative;
- Alienation, staff (referring to the perception that executive administrators distanced themselves from other employees, resulting in the staff being uninformed);
- Administration, agenda (referring to the perception that a president had his or her own agenda for the College that was not based on the priorities and values of others);
- Administration, transition (referring to the appointment of a new president)

⁴⁹⁰ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 29 January, 2007.

⁴⁹¹ Agatha Grendon, interview by author, 27 February, 2007.

- Administration, critical of faculty/staff (referring to a lack of valuing or open critique of the faculty/staff);
- Administration, condescending (referring to the perception that a president did not value the employees of the College);
- AUC, disconnection or dissent (referring to a disjointed or unsupportive relationship with other AUC schools);
- Academic programs, strength (referring to the assertion that the most valued commodity at the College was its academic program).⁴⁹²

Some have suggested that higher education as a whole espouses an exclusive culture, one that seeks to preserve the privilege of the elite.⁴⁹³ Again, this is an interesting consideration, given that various facets of post-secondary education (e.g. HBCUs) are innately connected to providing access and opportunity where none exists. If in fact the notion of elitism in higher education is true (and persists), then there is indeed an oxymoronic relationship between HBCUs and the larger post-secondary network that may well affect the way these institutions are perceived, rated, and ultimately funded. Morris Brown College is an example of an institution whose values do not reflect elitism. However, the employees of the institution still desired respect from peers regarding the work done at the institution. Whenever the College faced a potentially crippling hardship or the faculty and staff felt undervalued, it would also impact employees' relationships with the College in general.

⁴⁹² It is not my contention that the strength of the College's academic programs contributed to a negative internal perception about the college. However, the code "Academic Programs, Strength" did appear regularly, within the coded data, with the primary code "Internal Perception, Negative." A closer examination of the results indicates that there was in fact a sense of pride, internally, regarding the strength of the academic program at the institution. However, for reporting purposes, it is accurate to indicate that these two codes were linked in the data.

⁴⁹³ Leonard A. Valverde, *Leaders of Color in Higher Education* (New York: AltaMira Press, 2003), 3-11.

For example, two things that seemed to affect the morale of employees were administrative turnover and communication between executive administrators and the other employees. Cassidy Lawson says:

I don't think the internal or external perceptions of the College are very good. I think that [this was] because of breakdowns in communication, changes in the vision, the stated vision, and because of so many changes in the administration.⁴⁹⁴

Livingston explains that, particularly during the Cross era, although there was communication, the credibility of upper level administrators was often questioned.

No, I think the major of element of communication within the organization [contributed to low morale]. Communication was there, but it was not always believable. And I think that created a problem in the organization. Leadership style was quite different at that time, and therefore the belief within the faculty and staff as to what they were hearing was quite frequently not there—in a negative way—they believed the opposite.⁴⁹⁵

Frequently, whenever participants expressed ill feelings toward the College, the focus of the conversation was the administration, not the College itself. Faculty and staff during these years expressed a greater sense of camaraderie and trust between themselves than with regard to the president. For example, the faculty and staff members felt that they'd more than adequately prepared for the re-accreditation visit by SACS during the late 1990s, only to have that progress undermined and discarded by the Cross administration.

Generally, the perceptions of employees regarding the College itself remained consistent, supportive. The participants of this study articulated the College's mission and purpose in like manners. Similarly, faculty and staff members were very reactive to the

⁴⁹⁴ Cassidy Lawson, interview by author, 22 January, 2007.

⁴⁹⁵ Frederick Livingston, interview by author, 18 May, 2007.

leadership approach of the sitting president (and the board as well). Perceptions of alienation and administrative sloppiness were sometimes expressed as negativity toward the College.

Summary

This section has presented detailed information regarding the data that emerged during the course of this study. Data were gathered from print as well as human sources. The data presented here were coded, and categorized thematically, for the purpose of understanding individual constructs and concepts discussed by the various data sources. Within this section, I have presented data on the following major codes: Administration, Board of Trustees, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Internal Context.

The intent of this section was to examine each of these major codes separately, in order to understand the impact of a particular code on the overall bounded system, the College. However, during the analysis and presentation of the data, it became increasingly apparent that these major codes, these themes, are elaborately connected to one another. A discussion of the administration can not ignore the presence and authority of the board of trustees, just as one cannot discuss the authority of the board without considering the AME Church's influence on the institution. Similarly, efforts to meet the expectations and regulations of SACS was either augmented or limited by the perceptions, values, and commitment of persons inside the institution.

Throughout this analysis, certain patterns arose that were particularly impactful on other major codes. For example, the transition of presidents had a great effect on the

College. The process of indoctrinating a new president took effort, and was particularly challenging for the College during periods in which the College was financially challenged or was facing accreditation sanctions or revocation. Further, an individual president's ability to relate to, and include, the faculty and staff affected his other ability to address the College's priorities.

The data also revealed that both internal and external entities have carefully considered the relationship between the College, the board of trustees, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. According to the data, the board of trustees and the AME Church are largely considered by internal constituents to be one and the same body. Data also reveals that the close relationship between the Church and the board can be problematic for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The data did not reveal a solution to this problem—perhaps because the College was still contending with many of these challenges during the time of this study. However, participants indicated that the relationship between these bodies was a sensitive topic, but one that greatly affected what the College did, how it was perceived, and what resources it received.

A further significant pattern that emerged from the data involves the perceptions and morale of the faculty and staff throughout this period. Participants avidly described their individual relationship with the College, as well as common experiences that they shared with other colleagues. The data revealed that participants were fond of the College's mission and purpose—particularly its practice of educating underserved students. There was a sense of connection between the College's founding purpose and the value of the institution in contemporary society.

Nevertheless, participants expressed feelings of dissatisfaction and discontent regarding persons (particularly presidents) that they felt limited the College's ability to move forward. Negative feelings were usually directed toward presidents that made faculty and staff members feel undervalued, and these feelings were heightened during times of miscommunication. There was a marked difference between what participants felt towards the College and what they felt about some of the people that were in leadership positions at the College.

In the following chapter, I will present a discussion of these data, as they pertain to the initial propositions of this study. The section contains my conclusions regarding the study, what it revealed, and what is left to be discovered. I will present recommendations regarding the applicability of this research to Morris Brown College and like institutions. Finally, I will offer conclusions as to the implication of this research to future scholarly inquisition regarding similar topics.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

“And Bow and Thank the Gracious Lord,
For Dear Ol’ Morris Brown!”

The Study: A Description

This study is an ethnographic case study, designed to examine instances in which Morris Brown College was influenced by two external entities: the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Specifically, the study was designed to examine the impact on either or both of these bodies on the institution’s administrative structure, financial management, identity, and culture. This study is about relationships—relationships between Morris Brown College and two external organizations with which it has considerable interaction. During the years leading up to the College’s loss of accreditation, the institution experienced change—in chief administrators and staffing, in the size of its student body, in fiscal standing, in the size of its endowment, and arguably in its public image as well. This study explores ways in which the College’s relationship with the Church and SACS was evidenced in the College’s internal operations during this period of change. The goal was to explore how such relationships impact who an institution perceives itself to be, and what it does. As the study developed, I developed an increased focus on internal relationships as well. These internal relationships affected how meaning is made and

communicated at the college, and influenced the relationship between the college and the external bodies as well.

In constructing the study, I presented five assumptions regarding the College's relationship with the Church and SACS:

- The mission and purpose of the College are related to the ideology given to it by its founding body;
- The organizational/authoritative structure of an institution is closely related to guidelines of accreditation;
- Fiscal management fundraising efforts/results are influenced by the accreditation review process and results of the auditing process;
- The relationship between the College and its founding body impacts the College's fiscal standing and fundraising efforts;
- The culture and perceived identity of an institution are closely related to the Church's ideology and accreditation review/standardization process; the culture and perceived identity are strongly influenced by the accrediting body's approval of the institution.

This study was not intended to prove or disprove these propositions. Instead, the propositions would serve as a framework for a description of the relationship between the College and the two external organizations. These propositions were used as points of reference, in terms of guiding my inquiry. However, as the study progressed, the research did reveal information regarding the nature of the relationship between the College, the Church, and SACS that validates some of the propositions, and invalidates others. My initial inquiry regarding the relationship between the College, the Church and SACS focused on the following questions:

- Is the College's identity and purpose understood and communicated amongst various groups within the college? Is the identity operationalized in daily tasks or decision-making processes? If so, how?
- What is the hierarchical structure and division of duties at the college? How are they developed?
- What is the fiscal state of the College? How is money managed, protected, raised? How are long-term fiscal goals established and approached?

This chapter contains a discussion of the results of the investigation (guided by the above-mentioned propositions and questions). As the study progressed, my research revealed additional questions, and further developed (and in some ways changed) the direction of inquiry. The shift in focus was prompted by data gathered from print sources as well as participant interviews. It was also affected by what documents were made available to me during the study.⁴⁹⁶

A major shift in the focus of the research was the consideration of the College, the Church, and SACS, respectively, as complex entities whose actions, interactions (with other bodies), perspectives, and policies represent a myriad of individual perspectives, values (and sometimes agendas). At the outset of this study, I intended to examine the relationship between the institution and the two external bodies. The College, the Church, and SACS were each considered a single body. Admittedly, as complex organizations, I recognized that each body represented many people. However, I still intended to examine the relationships between them as if the perspectives of each organization (for example, the values of the College) were homogenous.

However, as data evolved for the study, it became increasingly apparent that organizational behavior and culture is more complex than originally assumed in this study. The College, for example, has policies that were developed by individuals (with some variance in values and ideas as well as some commonalities). How the “College” reacts to or perceives the Church or SACS is then informed by the values, ideas, and

⁴⁹⁶ Initially, I developed the research question, study design, and propositions anticipating the use of certain administrative documents (i.e. human resource/personnel documents, fiscal ledgers, etc.) However, the sensitivity of these documents, and the College’s on-going re-organization and re-accreditation efforts prohibit full disclosure of some of this information. As such, I relied heavily on self-study documents, participant-informants, and public-relations material to inform this study.

perspectives of who (plural) is representing the College at any given time. Along this vein, the AME Church has specific policies that govern its support of the colleges and universities under its purview. Policies are adopted by the corporate body, and thus is the result of (presumably) discussions amongst various persons. How the Church perceives Morris Brown College, and the outcome(s) of its interaction with the institution, is a direct result of such policy.

Similarly, regional accreditation is structured to include a peer review process, guided by policies regarding criteria, standards, and expectations for colleges/universities. Both the policy-development and the review process involve multiple persons, with (presumably) some variance of perspective. For the purpose of this study, I considered only the composite perspective of persons involved in the peer-review process for Morris Brown College; that is, the study was limited to the examination of official correspondence from SACS to the College, as well as public information available on the SACS website. Thus, there was little variance in the data regarding the perspective of SACS. However, the complexity and intricacy of the accreditation process suggests that the information that I considered for this study was the result of an involved process with input from heterogeneous bodies.

This study involved the examination of print material, and interviews of human subjects. The study revealed some of the processes that affected the actions of the College, the Church, and SACS during the years of the study. However, it also provided pertinent information regarding the experiences of persons involved and included in these processes. I believe that the value in this study lies in what it reveals regarding these experiences. What happens to and within Morris Brown College during this time is the

composite result of who is involved, what their priorities were, and how the inter and intra-action of the bodies manifested itself.

Findings

Early in this paper, I asserted that higher education is complex and difficult to comprehensively understand by internal constituents as well as individuals and bodies external to the institution. Yet, colleges and universities are shaped and massaged by the expectations and requirements of individuals and groups both internally and externally. In this study, there are identifiable bodies and relationships. The positions and purposes of the bodies as they relate to education are easily understood:

- Morris Brown College exists for the purpose of offering programs of study leading to baccalaureate degrees.
- The AME Church is the founding body of the College; as such, it represents the origin of the College's purpose and mission, as well as an on-going source of financial support for the institution.
- The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools is an independent regional accrediting body whose purpose is to ensure that member institutions have "a purpose appropriate to higher education and has resources, programs, and services sufficient to accomplish its purpose on a continuing basis."⁴⁹⁷

However, the relationships between the three entities are complicated by the inter-reliance of one of the bodies (Morris Brown College) on the continued support of both the Church and the accrediting agency. As such, Morris Brown College must necessarily remain receptive and responsive to the ideals, expectations, and priorities of both of these bodies, both of which are crucial to the College's continued operation (in the capacity in which it existed at that time). Following is a discussion of the specifics of the findings of

⁴⁹⁷ Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges, *Criteria For Accreditation*, (Decatur: 1997). 1

this study, as it relates to the interaction between these bodies. There are four factors that create a framework through which these relationships must be considered.

First, to Morris Brown College, the Church is largely a static entity. Its linkage to the institution has historical origins. As the College's founding body, it is the point of reference at which the College's existence is justified—the education of Black students. To that end, the ideals and educational mission of the Church remains relevant to contemporary education. Data suggest that the Church's expectations and requirements of the College change little over time (if at all). Beyond the education of students, I have not discovered any inherent conflict between what the College does and what is expected of it by the Church. Yet, while the Church continues to provide financial resources to the College (and promotes the institution within its congregation), its position as a voice of authority to the College has shifted since the time of the College's inception. For example, when the Church's initial philosophy and educational outreach began, there was no external accrediting body that enforced regulations and standardization. However, Morris Brown College's current operating structure is now largely dependent upon public funding for students (i.e. federal financial aid), which itself is contingent upon the College's ability to satisfactorily meet the requirements of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Thus, whereas the Church (originally the sole source of financial support and a supplier of students) originally held a sort of singular position of authority with the College, there are now other entities whose influence is as at least as great an influence on the institution. As independent bodies, the Church and SACS are not partners in education, but each has an impact on the College's policies, internal morale, external reputation, etc.

Second, this study does not consider the Church and the College's board of trustees synonymously—although research suggests that many individuals associated with the College do in fact consider them jointly. The corporate body of the Church has established a formal system of support for the post-secondary institutions that it has established. With certainty, the Church maintains a relationship with its colleges and universities via the presence of officials on the institutions' boards. However, the boards themselves are separately operating entities, and are not solely comprised of members of the Church's body. As such, there is a level of input from individuals that are not directly responsible to the Church. The Church does have a level of influence on the board, and the Church's backing provides some authority to those members of its congregation that hold positions on the Board.

For example, members of the board of trustees are expected to contribute to the development of policy, and to provide financial contributions (and access to financial resources) to the College. Because the Church is the most consistent provider of funding to the College (it outranks other sources in longevity if not the amount of support), the ability of AME members of the board (particularly the Bishop who serves as chair) to appeal for continued (and increased) support increases the authority of the AME members. However, in theory, other members of the board are as capable of providing access to significant amounts of support from other areas, and can (in theory) hold similar authority on the board. Officially, the Church is a reliable mechanism through which the Morris Brown College Board of Trustees obtains financial support for the institution. The Church, however, is not synonymous with the board.

Third, the College's relationship with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools must remain a focus of the College, because of the perpetual nature of accreditation. Re-accreditation reviews (in most cases) occur every ten years. During the interim, a college is responsible for maintaining the standards of scholarship and practice established by the accrediting agency. Further, a re-accreditation review may result in directives (i.e. modification of the college's planning activities or reduction of debt) that require on-going activity at the college (and sometime yearly follow-up reviews, as in the case of Morris Brown College). However, policy changes (and the impact of those changes) happen gradually; thus, an institution must continuously monitor both its internal activity as well as the response of the accrediting body, in anticipation of the next re-affirmation process or follow-up monitoring review. Unlike the Church, whose relationship to the College does not change significantly, there are contingencies attached to the College's relationship with SACS that must be managed constantly.

Finally, this study evolved such that "organizational culture" became an increasingly important factor in the discussion of the relationships between these bodies. Through this project, I sought to identify the values and beliefs that are unique to Morris Brown College, to examine if there is an identifiable "broad population," and how values and beliefs are communicated internally and externally. Through the examination of print documents, and (more significantly) through interviews with participants, I discovered that organizational culture is not a separate consideration as originally intended (i.e. an examination of the impact on these relationships on the institution's administrative structure, finances, and culture). Rather, the culture of the organization (what it values,

how it functions) colors all aspects of how the College operates, and its relationships (in varying degrees).

Even more, the culture of the College informs how participants understand both the College and its relationships with external bodies. It is arguable, for example, that some aspects of the influence of either the Church or SACS are real (e.g. tangible), and some aspects are perceived. There are formal policies and expectations (documented, tangible) and there are implicit (but undocumented) ideals. There is official interaction between the bodies (i.e. the contribution of money by the Church or the acceptance of the College as a member institution of the accrediting body); there are also unofficial influences (i.e. prayer and other ritualistic aspects of College ceremonies or the impact of the College's accreditation on its fundraising and recruitment activities—even prior to the official loss of accreditation). I would argue that both perceived and real influences have an impact on the College's actions and relationships with these bodies.

What began as a study that focused on a college's administrative structure, fiscal management and culture emerged into a study that informed what is known about the institution's governance, administration (executive leadership), and operations. While it is certainly possible (and useful) to construct a study of the former group, the inclusion of the AME Church and SACS into the study shifted the focus.

The data that emerged were particularly pertinent to the latter group. Morris Brown College—the collective—is a composite result of the governance of the Board of Trustees, the scholarship and processes of faculty and staff, and the matriculation experiences of its students. “Morris Brown College,” in this study, refers only to the

trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, and alumni/ae.⁴⁹⁸ The study revealed that there is a level of intimacy amongst these bodies. The size (and perhaps culture) of the institution permits a level of knowledge and involvement between the board and employee body at the College (to an extent that is perhaps not feasible at larger institutions). As such, there is give-and-take, action and reaction, amongst these groups that is discernable throughout various levels of the institution.

Governance

In considering the relationship between Morris Brown College and the two external bodies, one must ask: who speaks for the College, what is the face of the College, how is its official stance on given issues created and communicated to the external bodies? The study revealed that, in its interaction with the AME Church, the most natural mechanism of communication is the board of trustees—particularly because it is chaired by a person that also occupies a position of influence with the Church. In fact, so significant are the positions of Bishop and board chairman, that persons employed at the College largely refer to the chair as “the Bishop” and it seems that persons generally consider the board and the AME Church synonymously (that is, the stance and perspective of the board are perceived as the stance and perspective of the Church). Even more, official communication between the Church and the College (as

⁴⁹⁸ The scope of this study did not permit the inclusion of students. In this equation, students are largely the recipients of the work that is conducted by the trustees, faculty, and staff, and are not directly responsible for creating or influencing a relationship between the bodies (albeit their welfare and benefit may be the central focus of most discussions). I did, however, include alumni/ae in the study because individual alumni/ae may serve on the board, may be employed at the College, and may be members of the AME congregation as well. As such, their presence, and their perspectives are significant to this study.

well as the monetary support for the College) is fostered through the Bishop/board chairman.

However, according to SACS, “academic self-governance, a time-honored value, implies broad participation in policy-making and implementation.”⁴⁹⁹ As such, official communication between the College and SACS is fostered through the administrative body—the president, the faculty, and senior administrators. The shift in “voice” from the board to the administrative and faculty bodies is indicative of the variation in perspective and priority between the Church and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Whereas the board’s relationship to the Church encourages intimate and sustained knowledge of the activities of the College, SACS’ philosophy suggests that institutional self-governance and academic autonomy are at the core of effective management in higher education. Though one may debate whether these philosophies are mutually exclusive, it became increasingly necessary for Morris Brown College to find a balance between the two.

Despite the historical relationship of the Church as an external supporting resource of the College’s governing board, the continued ambiguity between where the Church’s authority ends and where the board’s governance begins has presented a challenge for the institution. As a result, the Church has been viewed at times as a pseudo-governing structure to the College. Although the details were slow to evolve (during interviews with participants), the general consensus is that the accreditation process has at times been impeded by a concern (from re-affirmation review committee members) regarding the level of involvement of the Church in the affairs of the College.

⁴⁹⁹ Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges, *Criteria For Accreditation*, (Decatur, GA: 1997), 67.

Participants repeatedly acknowledged that SACS review teams have critically expressed a need for the College to examine and address the level of input and influence of the Church on the College's board. However, neither print data nor participants have indicated that the board of trustees or the College's administration officially addressed this concern, or made any concerted effort to create more distance between the two.⁵⁰⁰ In addition to concerns from SACS, employees of the College also felt that there was not a clear demarcation between the board's authority and the implementation of policy and practice by faculty and staff members. Participants acknowledged that, at times, the Board also influenced hiring decisions, daily fiscal management, and other areas that are generally considered outside of the realm of a board's official activity.

This leads to the conclusion that the relationships between the College, the Church, and SACS are in some ways complicated by the ambiguous nature of the board of trustees and its governance of the College. As an independent religious-affiliated institution, the College is beholden (in terms of history, mission, and important monetary support) to the Church. At the same time, accreditation mandates a level of autonomy and integrity at a college that is free from undue external influence. Because of issues surrounding the religious influence of the board as well as the board's considerable involvement in day-to-day activities at the College, the College and the board have been unable to find a balance between governance and academic autonomy. This process is further complicated by the College's continued reliance upon the board for financial

⁵⁰⁰ After the time frame covered by this study, the board voted to elect Mr. Jim Young, a local banker, as chairman, and selected Bishop William DeVaux to serve as vice chairman. After a relatively brief stint at the helm, Mr. Young would resign, and Bishop DeVaux would assume the role of chairman. Bishop DeVaux, having an earned doctorate and experience in education in addition to a position of rank with the Church, was viewed by many (including critics of previous Bishops who have served as Chairman) as an ideal match for the role.

support, as well as the board's ability to either encourage or thwart continued (and increased) financial support from the Church.

Administration

The administration (which in this study roughly translates to “president” and “presidential cabinet or leadership team”) holds a significant position at Morris Brown College. The import of the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of a president at Morris Brown is perhaps heightened by the ambiguity and contention surrounding the Board of Trustees (discussed in the previous section). Print documents and participants repeatedly referenced administrators (presidents) in discussions of the College's accreditation-related processes, relationship with the Church, and overall progress.

As with the College's governance, one can argue that the College's administration (the office of president) is influenced by the AME Church. The board of trustees is solely responsible for developing and implementing presidential search procedures, commissioning a president, and evaluating his/her progress and effectiveness. Until recent history (during the 1980s with the arrival of President Calvert Smith), the president of the College has always been a member of the AME Church. The data collection process for this study did not reveal any formal policy regarding presidential search-and-hire procedures, but the college's official written history (*Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years*) suggests that the board has historically entrusted the leadership of the College to persons who had an understanding and appreciation for the College's history, mission, and purpose as it relates to a religious institution.

The written history, as well as current administrative documents and participants, imply that the religious connection of the office of president to the Church fosters a

collective sense of responsibility to the College—an in-house sort of management and support of one of the jewels of the Church. For example, *The First Hundred Years* notes,

after which, 20 October 1958 Dr. Frank Cunningham was elected acting president.... Dr. Cunningham's wide range of experiences included pastoral appointments of Boston's Church of all nations (sic) (Morgan Memorial), the Community A.M.E. Church, Cleveland Ohio.... The new administrative head had been a member of the Morris Brown faculty since 1945. He began duties here as Dean of Turner Theological Seminary and Associate Professor and Chairman of the Division of Philosophy and Religion.⁵⁰¹

It was under Dr. Cunningham's administration that the College first attained regional accreditation. The book also notes that Dr. Cunningham was responsible for securing significant external grants and gifts toward research and campus development. However, he also reported that the scope of the College's operations had grown, and had outpaced the amount of support that it garnered from the AME Church (particularly compared to the amounts received from other institutions supported by the Church).⁵⁰²

And;

The Selection Committee of the Executive Board of Trustees Morris Brown College recommends The Reverend John A. Middleton as President of Morris Brown College with the reservation that he be granted professional leave during the next twelve months to begin completion of the requirements toward his doctorate degree. The minutes state, "the recommendation from the Selection Committee was unanimously approved." A motion to commend the Selection Committee for its excellent work was passed. Once again the Trustees had elevated one from the ranks to head the College. The Reverend Dr. John A. Middleton, prominent pastor of Allen Temple A.M.E. Church prior to his election as President, 6 June 1965 had been a member of the Morris Brown College and/or Turner Theological Seminary faculty since 1947.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰¹ Sewell and Troup, *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years*, 93.

⁵⁰² Sewell and Troup, *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years*, 93-105.

⁵⁰³ Sewell and Troup, *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years*, 113.

As with most colleges, the office of the president at Morris Brown College is in close communication with the board of trustees and its chairman. Participants suggested that the autonomy of the president to manage the day-to-day affairs of the College was sometimes compromised by the significant involvement of the chairman of the board. This implies that though the presidential search and selection procedures had evolved to include a broader canvas of applicants, the person that occupied the position was still influenced by the priorities of the founding body of the institution. Internally, the office of president (and the executive leadership) served as a link between the priorities and values of the Board (with some influence by the Church) and the institution's faculty and staff. Simultaneously, the president's connection to the Church ensured that an incoming administrator would favor the core values and principles upon which Morris Brown College was founded.

There were three notable patterns in participants' responses regarding the administration. First, participants associated a president with change—in terms of the focus of priorities (e.g. academic programs), and in terms of momentum. Each incoming president during this period arrived amidst (and perhaps in response to) on-going challenges. A president's success was measured by his or her actions in response to the College's problems at the time—not the overall success or failure of the institution. The arrival of a president signaled hope for renewed energy and progress toward prior-established goals. Interestingly, participants did not perceive the number of presidential changes during this time period as unusual (perhaps signaling an expectation that a president's anticipated tenure was contingent upon relatively quick response and

effectiveness in addressing problems at the institution). Second, participants were aware of the pressure on the president to balance the involvement of the board in day-to-day activities while addressing pressing employee, financial, and accreditation-related concerns. Participants were aware that the office of president was transitory, and was subject to change based upon that president's ability to create that balance. Finally, participants examined the office of president based upon the president's responsiveness to the employees of the college as well. Because there were on-going employee, financial, and accreditation needs that spanned the transition of presidents, the employee body of the College was responsible for maintaining continued operation and progress toward short and long-term goals (i.e. debt reduction and re-affirmation). Participants asserted that a president was more "successful" if he or she made an effort to understand, appreciate and build upon the on-going work of existing employees.

The study suggests that, as the "voice" of the College (as it relates to communication with the board of trustees, the Church, the media, donors, and SACS), it was important for a president to establish and maintain synergy with the values and activities of the employee body. Participants suggested that the president was expected to speak for the College—but that the context and content of what was shared should be reflective of the priorities of the entire campus. In this respect, the president works for (and is accountable to) the collective college body inasmuch as individual staff and faculty members answer (and are held accountable) to a hierarchical structure led by the president. There was a sort of balance of power.⁵⁰⁴ However, it was equally important for

⁵⁰⁴ This balance of power was demonstrated during the Cross administration when the faculty body took a vote of "no confidence" in the President; similarly, the student body formally organized protests to express their dissatisfaction with the President.

the president to satisfactorily meet the demands of the Board of Trustees as well.⁵⁰⁵

Within an institution steeped with financial and accreditation issues, the expected turnaround for results is relatively short.

The role of president differed with respect to the College's relationship with the Church as compared to its relationship with SACS. The Church's primary mechanism of communication with the College was the Board of Trustees. To this end, the president was expected to be receptive to the ideology of the Church and to the support stemming from the Church, but the Board of Trustees was perhaps the most formal conduit through which the communication occurred.⁵⁰⁶ With SACS, the president served as the primary representative of the collective college body and operations. The president was expected to coordinate the College's collective adherence to the principles and criteria for accreditation, and represent the College in formal communication with SACS. Further, at Morris Brown College, it was also imperative that the president convey to accreditation review committees that the College employed processes to protect the academic integrity and functional autonomy of the institution, uncompromised by influence from external bodies.

Operations

This study defines the College's "operations" as any reference to the mission of the institution, as well as activities and processes within the College—why the College

⁵⁰⁵ Though no participant expressed this explicitly, there was a sense at times that participants did not perceive the campus's priorities and the board's priorities to mesh completely.

⁵⁰⁶ The President was also required to represent the College at Church conferences, and so serve as a speaker at select Church activities as well.

exists, what the College does, and how it functions. Of the three foci of this discussion (the college's governance, administration, and operations), this is perhaps the most difficult to describe—complicated by multiple actors (the board, the administration, the faculty, staff, students, and alumni/ae), varying agendas, and shifts in priority. Also, the scope of this study does not permit a description of every aspect of the institution. As such, the discussion of the College's operations is limited to broad descriptions of the general functions of the College during this time frame—particularly as they relate to the AME Church and to SACS.

During this timeframe, the College's culture generally can be described in two ways. There was a dualism, of sorts, in terms of the culture of the institution. First, there was a deeply-rooted sense of purpose and pride at the institution that spanned beyond the offering of degrees. The institution's employees (and students) perceived the College as a mechanism of social uplift, an answer to bigotry, and tool for financially empowering disenfranchised families (through the education of their children). Although it is certainly debatable whether persons or groups external to the College shared in the assessment of the College as a stronghold of "for Blacks by Blacks" opportunity, this was the modus that characterized the internal perception of the College.

Second, from the latter 1980s to the early 2000s, there was a growing awareness of some serious administrative inefficiencies and a lack of veracity within some of the college's internal operations. Persons within the institution were conscious of the College's instability as a duly-accredited and valued member of the higher education community. The College faced, in no uncertain terms, sanctions and repercussions from SACS stemming from a lack of financial resources, poor internal control mechanisms,

and slapdash strategic planning and documentation procedures. This created an anxiety, as well as an air of discontent amongst the faculty and staff at the College. The College was coming to a place of reckoning that it would have to make procedural improvements in order to solidify its ranking as an accredited institution. Further, the increasing awareness of the general public of the College's on-going financial and accreditation-related challenges affected the College in terms of recruitment, fundraising, etc.

Throughout the course of this research, print sources and participants confirmed that there was a positive sense of positivism regarding the institution's mission, its purpose, and its ability to be a change-agent in the lives of youth. What set Morris Brown College apart from its peers in the eyes of internal constituents was its historical and on-going work to create social and economic parity for Blacks. Moreover, there was a sense of accomplishment in the institution's acceptance of underserved (and in many cases under-prepared) students, in addition to its active recruitment of highly-qualified students as well. "Haven For All Hungry Souls," a phrase borrowed from the College's alma mater, became a mantra for persons at all levels of the institution. In a sense, the contemporary and continued "struggle toward uplift" was what made working (and matriculating) at Morris Brown meaningful.

Employees at the College were generally very committed to the cause. Subsequently, there was an understanding amongst the general faculty and staff that sacrifices were necessary on behalf of the larger good of the College. Modest salaries, vintage buildings, and periods of payroll uncertainty—these things were not unexpected, nor did they drive employees away from the College. In many ways, the "struggle" for the greater good in some ways increased the familial relationship between employees and

students. There was an “all for one” type atmosphere—particularly in defense of the College to outsiders.

Significantly, “Haven For All Hungry Souls,” or what it represented, was uncontested in print sources or amongst participants. I would argue that the mores associated with this philosophy promoted a sense of humility at the College that likened it to the open-doors approach to salvation employed by the Church. Therein, perhaps, lay implicit element that sustained a close and intimate relationship between the College and the Church. What the College valued most was not necessarily its degree-granting authority—rather what the granting of degrees provided for the recipients and their communities.

Despite the pride and sense of connection amongst the faculty and staff, there was also an anxiety, a growing conflict (between administrators, the Board, employees, alumni/ae), and contention regarding procedural and accountability issues at the College. Both employees and students were very critical of the College for what many perceived to be a lack of integrity in terms of administrative processes. Clearly, accreditation-review processes did not create problems at the institution—they merely assisted in identifying and publicized them. In fact, *The First Hundred Years* clearly documents that during the twentieth century, Morris Brown College contended with many of the same concerns that were significant during the 1990s. Following are excerpts that provide insight into some of the priorities and values of the institution, as documented in an evaluative study conducted in 1965.

- Faculty salaries are quite low.... Faculty members who do not accept substantial non-college employment are burdened with more than their share of committee work. The result is that all faculty members are

overworked and are unable to give as much time to their students as they desire.

- Morris Brown College has had little significant participation in the grant-receiving community.
- Faculty members have not received research grants which would enable them to make contributions that can only be grown out of costly research.
- Morris Brown College educates Negro Students who are handicapped by inadequate public school education in segregated school systems. The College also educates well-qualified students whose family finances would prohibit college education for them if it were not for Morris Brown's low tuition and other costs. Over one-third of the College's students come from families within the poverty criteria.⁵⁰⁷

During the 1990s and 2000s, the College was faced with some of the same challenges, and its priorities remained largely similar. During the early 1990s, the College conducted an Institutional Effectiveness Analysis to assess the institution's overall health. Within that document was a list of things that the College would have to address in order to 'be a serious competitor in the education market place and to assure continued growth in the future.' Some of the items listed included:

- A well-designed marketing and development program for the College
- Recruitment of faculty who can assist the institution in meeting the financial challenge of the College;
- A significant increase in the retention rate of students;
- Increase networking with business, community, governmental and inter-college relationships.⁵⁰⁸

Employees generally understood that many of the institution's problems were not new developments. Participants in this study openly spoke of the College's on-going challenges within the context of "Black" higher education. Throughout this research, I

⁵⁰⁷ Sewell and Troup, *Morris Brown College: The First Hundred Years*, 118-121.

⁵⁰⁸ "Institutional Effectiveness Annual Report of Morris Brown College Academic Years 1988-1990." Morris Brown College, Office of Accreditation Compliance.

found that printed documents often noted the institution's value and history as a Black institution. Simultaneously, however, participants would reference many of the College's financial, accreditation, and other challenges as endemic of Black colleges and universities. Many of the issues that participants referenced were well-documented in the prior-existing literature. For example, Thompson asserts that Black institutions are caught in a counterproductive cycle, and are denied much-sought-after aid because the institutions do not meet certain standards, and they fail to meet certain standards because they lack certain resources.⁵⁰⁹ Morris Brown College was definitely a prototypical example of the "counterproductive cycle" referenced in theory.

I would argue that employees' awareness that Black institutions are systemically lacking the resources (and notoriety) of majority institutions encourages a distinctive type of commitment than perhaps experienced by employees at better funded institutions. Further, I would argue that that distinctive commitment is not limited to Black employees. Although all of the formal participants for this study were Black, my interactive experiences as a research-observer allowed me to become familiar with the general patterns and perspectives of employees of various ethnic, socio-economic, and national origins. There was not a marked difference in the perspectives of non-Black employees as compared to the Black majority.

However, in terms of the College's relationship to the AME Church and to SACS, it seems the College interacted with both of these bodies within a "Black college" context. Specifically, the "Blackness" of the College created a commonality between the institution and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. By the same token, SACS (in its

⁵⁰⁹ Daniel C. Thompson, *Private Black Colleges at The Crossroads* (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1973), 248.

objectivity) was viewed as less yielding, less sympathetic to administrative lapses, less forgiving of an institution that was caught in a counterproductive cycle, and is denied much-sought-after aid because it did not meet certain standards. In this sense, the AME Church was a part of “us” and SACS was a part of “them” in the “us and them” psyche regarding Black institutions and a (historically) less than supportive public. Naturally, in a pragmatic world, accreditation procedures do not stipulate differences to accommodate for an institution’s lack of resources. However, the “us and them” dichotomy (though some might be more “perceived” than “real”) does influence the organizational culture of an institution that is contending with the potential loss of accreditation (and all public funding).

To that end, one must also consider how internal as well as external expectations influence the interaction between a college and external bodies. Morris Brown College, for example, began—and has historically operated—as an institution of modest means, primarily serving a population of students of modest means. It has operated with minimal funding, the most consistent source being the AME Church. It sits inherently in opposition of higher education’s historic elitism, and makes no apology for it. Further, the philosophy and mission of the Church are similar enough to that of the College’s to ensure a continued on-going partnership between the two.

Yet, the College also exists and operates in a modern society whereby colleges and universities are held (via membership in accrediting agencies and through competition for funding from common sources) to pseudo-universal standards and values regardless of historical origin and religious-affiliation (or lack thereof). This becomes a challenge for the institution, because the peer review process of accreditation does not

make allowances for inefficiencies (i.e. internal control and accounting procedures) that may be overlooked at the institution (whose focus was the larger “good” that the institution was offering to the population that it served). More explicitly, the acceptance of and reliance on public funding requires an institution to release some autonomy, and requires adherence to rules and policy structures employed by colleges and universities with much greater resources.

At the beginning of this study, I asserted that Black education has historically developed reactively to the activity and priorities of the general society. Whereas White institutions existed that did not admit Blacks, there was a need to establish Black colleges and universities. Based upon my research at this institution, I would argue that a scarcity of resources and other factors contribute to an on-going reactive culture within Morris Brown College. Clearly, there were times within this study (and historically) that the College’s needs outweighed its means. The College seemingly reacted by addressing the most pressing concerns when necessary (i.e. the reduction of the deficit during the early 1990s), and delaying action on other items that may not immediately threaten the institution’s existence.

For example, print documents and participants acknowledge that internal evaluations and external audits revealed that the College employed some practices that would continuously deteriorate the institution’s budget. One instance was the practice of continuously allowing students to enroll at the institution without clearing previous balances. Incoming presidents would address the fallacy of this practice, the board would admonish it, and faculty and staff members would critique it, yet it continued to occur. It occurred (in part) because the College was empathetic to the modest means of many of its

students; it occurred because the College was often slow to collect and process financial aid and other student documents (for various reasons including staffing turnover); it occurred because of the College's need to maintain a sizeable enrollment. But it occurred.

Internally, this practice (though clearly one that would have to be eliminated at some point for the survival of the College) might be considered indicative of the culture of a Black college—in that a Black college may be more concerned with the well-being and continued education of its students than with the bottom line on its financial ledger. Externally, most notably from SACS and public funding sources, such a practice would be frowned upon, considered sloppy at best and likely incompetent. It was widely accepted (by employees and students) that this sort of practice simply would not occur at a White college, but “sympathy” prevails at a Black institution.

There is certainly more to be discovered about how being a Black college (whether one interprets that as an increased sensitivity to the needs of students or a decrease in administrative diligence or otherwise) affects organizational culture at an institution. I am not suggesting that “Blackness,” as in the ethnicity, contributes to a relaxing of administrative attentiveness or efficiency. However, I am suggesting that the scope of mission, purpose and need at a Black college may far out-distance its financial resources—and may contribute to a “rob Peter to pay Paul” approach to management (that, prolonged, will create major problems at an institution).

Further, though it is extremely difficult to quantify, the “struggle and adversity” culture at Morris Brown may also play a significant (intangible, perceived) role in the activities and values of the institution. The College viewed itself as valuable to its students—and it treated its students warmly (and forgivingly, regarding financial

obligations). However, it did not view itself as a prosperous institution (having never had an abundance of wealth), and did not operate as such. In terms of its relationships with external bodies, it continued to cleave more willingly to the institution whose mission and purpose mirrored its own (the Church), while it reportedly found it difficult to measure up to the expectations and stipulations of SACS (an organization that has historically been considered less than supportive of Black institutions). Even regarding the College's relationship to other Atlanta University Center institutions, there is a sense of separatism and the perception of being externally undervalued and misunderstood that is perhaps a natural outgrowth of the environment into which the College was born. While the perception of "separatism" and undervalued are not easily substantiated, participants and others throughout the College do reference the "Black college culture" when discussing the happenings and context of Morris Brown College, as if distinctions do exist amongst Black colleges that govern the organizational behavior of Black college administrators.

Implications for Future Research

This research study provided an opportunity to closely examine the existence and activities of a small, liberal arts, historically Black college. During the time of this study, the college was simultaneously experiencing growth, debt, increased publicity (a mixture of good and bad, depending on the current circumstances and happenings at the institution), and potential loss of accreditation. The uniqueness of this study is that its focus was the perspectives and priorities and values of faculty members, staff members, and alumni/ae within the context of an institution with a distinctive history/founding, and very challenging administrative problems. The study identified how employees make meaning of their experiences at the institution, how goals are approached, and how

decisions at the College are (or are not) influenced by external bodies. Further, the study is valuable because it considers Morris Brown College as an independent entity—a bounded system with definable characteristics that are uniquely its own.

As this study developed, other questions emerged, regarding this particular institution, as well as the existence and experience of other institutions that may have similarities to Morris Brown College. Following are some probes for further research that would be valuable to the body of knowledge regarding Morris Brown College and historically Black institutions.

First, this study revealed that the composition, priorities, activities, and perception about the Morris Brown College Board of Trustees greatly influences the existence of the institution, the actions and morale of the employees, the College's financial standing, as well as its relationships with both the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The board of trustees, and its close monitoring relationship with the College, was a common thread in conversations and interviews with participants and others at the institution. Yet, while the intended purpose and role of the board of trustees is known (and is perhaps similar to most post-secondary institutions—in terms of policy development and fundraising), the intricacies of how the board works is ambiguous. Even less is known about how the Morris Brown College board reacts to changes at the institution and crisis situations.

Further, the study revealed that the role of the board of trustees is perceived differently by the AME Church and SACS. The traditional composition and structure of the board of trustees has fostered a continued close relationship with its founding body, the AME Church. The Church has remained actively involved in and supportive of the

College, whose board is chaired by a recognized person of rank within the Church.

However, during recent accreditation reviews, the role of the Church and the board at the College have been questioned, and critiqued. In terms of research, this raises questions regarding appropriate relationships between an academic institution and a religious body.

My research has indicated that the intent of the AME Church toward higher education is not egregious at all—in fact, there is a sense of protectiveness and collective ownership toward Morris Brown College. However, higher education institutions—even those founded by religious bodies—are expected to adhere to certain standards of accountability (of academic scholarship as well as financial management) that may require some distancing between a church and its institution. How then does a college approach establishing diversity on its trustee board such that the original intent and integrity of the institution as the church intended it to be is maintained in addition to preserving the academic autonomy of the institution as a separate entity? And is the role of the Church as a founder of the college simply that—a birthing mechanism and distant source of financial support with little input into the continued mission-development and existence of the institution? How does a college balance maintaining its historical integrity with its founding body and satisfying the expectations of modern-day funding sources (i.e. the federal government, via oversight from regional accrediting agencies)?

Second, a comprehensive understanding of Morris Brown College mandates an exploration of the student experience at the institution. This study was decidedly focused on the experience and perspective of the employee experience and organizational culture of the College. It sought to understand how the college operated, how decisions were made, and how values and priorities were understood and communicated at the college.

The scope of the project did not permit the inclusion of students in the study. However, any conclusions drawn from this particular study are incomplete until the perspectives and experiences of students are cataloged. How, for example, does the relationship between the College, the Church, and SACS impact the matriculation of students? How do students make meaning of the institution's interaction with these bodies? To what extent is there an awareness of these relationships, and what affect does this awareness have on the behavior and learning processes of students?

Also, many of the values and priorities discussed in this project (i.e. Haven For All Hungry Souls) are topics that are discussed openly with (and taught to) students as well. It influences how students are recruited, how they are formally orientated into the College (i.e. Freshman Rites of Passage Ceremonies), and in some ways the relationship between faculty and students. It is therefore important to understand the extent to which these ideologies influence student enrollment, retention, and other factors. It is also important to understand how the student experience influences the behavior and involvement of alumni/ae with the institution.

Third, while the institution shares some commonalities with other colleges of its size and scope, its relationship with the AME Church, its location within the city of Atlanta and the Atlanta University Center, and other factors made it necessary to consider the College separately. However, once the history of Morris Brown is fully documented (well beyond the scope of this study alone) an understanding of the College would be enhanced by considering its relative position within the community of higher education institutions—more specifically other historically Black colleges and universities. While it would be difficult to draw direct parallels between Morris Brown College and other

institutions, documenting the experiences and perspectives of persons associated with other colleges and universities with similarities to Morris Brown College would increase an understanding of the uniqueness of the Morris Brown College experience.

Are values communicated in a similar manner? Does the history and founding of the institution drive the institution's decision-making processes and approach to educating students? How does the institution approach relationships with external bodies, and how has this affected the college's fundraising and financial management? Answers to these questions would inform what is known about Morris Brown College, and help to further identify influences on the College that perhaps do not originate within the institution.

Last, this research opens a more general discussion of elitist ideology in higher education. None of the documents nor participants in this study suggested that the accreditation-review process encouraged or required the College to adopt more stringent admissions and enrollment policies. However, the study did reveal that as Morris Brown College officials in the late 1980s and early 1990s considered the purpose and mission of the College, they took a critical look at the institution as it compared to other institutions. Subsequently, there was an increased awareness of the need to position the College to be more competitive (for students, for money, etc.).

Participants and print sources repeatedly referenced Morris Brown College as a Black institution—signifying that there are certain expectations/practices associated with a Black college. Often, conversations regarding the College's benevolent approach to educating students also referenced the "Blackness" of the institution. If there is a definable "Blackness" about historically Black colleges and universities, and if the Black college culture encourage certain practices and behaviors amongst faculty members, staff

members and students, how does this impact these colleges' relationship (and competition) with other—non Black, and perhaps more selective—institutions? How does this impact the accreditation peer-review process? How does this affect the perception of the college by persons external to the institution?

Conclusion

Inasmuch as this project enabled me to explore the experiences of persons associated with Morris Brown College during the late 1980s to the early 2000s, there is still so much more to learn about the institution, and so much more to know about the influence of religion on post-secondary education. The African Methodist Episcopal Church, as the founding body of the College, is clearly a subjective external body. It is biased (presumably positively) toward the institution. It has formally incorporated support for the College into the official budget of the Church. The College is an integral component of the activity (and perhaps ministry) of the Church. As such, it remains a voice of influence at the College.

Yet, Morris Brown (like other institutions) has come to rely on public sources of funding to operate and to offer assistance to students desiring to matriculate. Acceptance of public monies mandates compliance with (reportedly) objective criteria established and enforced by accrediting agents. Accrediting agents—though as influential as the Church—are not biased toward the College, and have no inherent interest in the College's survival; they are simply gatekeepers of entitlement to federal monies.

It is important for educators at an institution to understand the variations in priorities that have an impact on the College's culture and operations. In an idyllic world (from the perspective of a college) its external influences would not conflict with one

another. The ramifications of conflict from two (or more) key external supportive bodies may create an inability of the college to function satisfactorily. However, if there is a conflict, the College must effectively balance its relationships in a way that maintains needed support, involvement, and approval. This study does not dictate the process for creating that balance. However, it does illustrate some of the internal activities that are involved in an effort to find that balance. Specifically, this study clearly illustrates that while historical connection and philosophical meaning may be facilitated through the College's connection to the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the current financial reliance upon public monies necessitates that compliance with accreditation regulations should be a top priority for college administrators.

Further, this study provides an insight into the impact of crisis on an institution. A college that is threatened with the loss of accreditation (and the loss of public funding) does not operate in the same mode as a college that is not facing possible demise. The expectations of administrators and the board change under crisis. The rate at which negative evaluations result in employee turnover changes in crisis. Administrative processes are modified to (ideally) produce quicker results when an institution is faced with crisis. Simply, an institution that is faced with crisis requires a different system of management—and employees must be equipped to understand the difference in management, and to adapt.

Morris Brown College is but one institution. Unfortunately, the College contended with some debilitating problems during this time period. Despite these challenges, employees at the institution largely remained committed to the College's mission and existence. There were instances in which there was not synergy between the

faculty, the staff, the president and the board—and the impact of this was heightened given the urgent nature of many of the College’s problems. Ideally, this research will be used as a tool for Morris Brown College (and perhaps other institutions as well), to increase an awareness of the multiple factors and actors that impact a college’s existence at any given time. *What* a college is is contingent upon *who* is responsible for (and accountable to) the college.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Morris Brown College Presidents and Dates of Office

Dates of Administration	Title	Name	Notes
1885-86	First Principal	Mrs. Mary McCree	
1886-1887	Second Principal	Mrs. Alice D. Carey	
1887-1888	Third Principal	Dr. E. W. Lee	Would later become Fourth President
1888-1892	Fourth Principal	Professor A. St. George Richardson	Later named first President
1892-1896	First President	Professor A. St. George Richardson	Same as Fourth Principal
1896-1904	Second President	Dr. James M. Henderson	
1904-1908	Third President	Dr. J.S. Flipper	There is an AME Church within two blocks of MBC's current campus named in his honor. His presidency ended when he was elected the 33 rd . Bishop of the AME Church.
1908-1911	Fourth President	Dr. E.W. Lee	Same as the Third Principal
1911-1920	Fifth President	Dr. W.A. Fountain, Sr.	His son would later become president. During the same period, he would become Chair of Board. He was an alumnus of the institution and had also attended Clark College, and Allen University (an AME institution).
1920-1928	Sixth President	Professor J.H. Lewis	The College's Athletic Complex is named for him; he would later become Eighth President. He was an alumnus.
1928-1950	Seventh President	Dr. W.A. Fountain, Jr.	Son of fifth president. During his presidency his father was Bishop of the 6 th District of the AME Church.

Dates of Administration	Title	Name	Notes
1950-1951	Acting President	Dr. Edward C. Mitchell	He is an alumnus who'd previously served in various positions, including professor, Dean of Men, Vice President, etc. Although the College has had other Acting Presidents, his is the only picture displayed on the College's pictorial chronology of chief administrators (located in the Administration Building).
1951-1958	Eighth President	Dr. John H. Lewis	Same person as Sixth President. The Bishop's Office was moved off campus during this term, in compliance with SACS regulations.
1958-1965	Ninth President	Dr. Frank Cunningham	The College's largest/-primary auditorium is named in his honor.
1965-1973	Tenth President	Dr. John A. Middleton	The College's largest residential complex is named in his honor. He was a graduate of Allen University (another AME institution).
1973	A Consulting Firm, husband and wife team		The remaining presidents are misnumbered because the next president is listed as the twelfth president, not the eleventh.
1973-1984	Twelfth President	Dr. Robert Threatt	He is an alumnus of the institution.
1984-1992	Thirteenth President	Dr. Calvert H. Smith	
1993-1998	Fourteenth President	Dr. Samuel D. Jolley, Jr.	He would later become Seventeenth President
1998-2002	Fifteenth President	Dr. Dolores E. Cross	She is the College's first/-only female president.

Dates of Administration	Title	Name	Notes
2002-2003	Sixteenth President	Dr. Charles E. Taylor	He was in office for only three months at the time the college loss its accreditation
2004-2006	Seventeenth President	Dr. Samuel D. Jolley, Jr.	Same person as Fourteenth President

* The information contained in this figure was obtained from (1) a pictorial chronology of chief administrators (including dates in office) displayed in the College's administration building; (2) *Morris Brown College, The First Hundred Years*, by George A. Sewell and Cornelius V. Troup.

APPENDIX B:
Morris Brown College Alma Mater

Alma Mater, pride of earth,
Gav'st to me another birth,
Haven for all hungry souls,
Feeding them shall be our goal,
Ever let thy banner be,
Emblem of the brave and free,
A welcome true to everyone,
Until thy work is done.

Hail to Thee, maker of men,
Honor to Thee once again,
Sacred truths on firmest ground,
Hail to Thee, Dear Morris Brown.
To her precepts praise accord,
To them may we e'er be bound,
And bow and thank the gracious Lord,
For dear old Morris Brown.

Words by Milton Randold, class of 1933

Music by Professor E. Waymon Hathcock, Morris Brown College Department of Music