

Strategies for Enrollment Managers at Historically Black Colleges and Universities: A Single Case Study

Johnny B. McDonald¹, Charles R. Needham²

¹Lemoyne-Owens College, Memphis, TN, USA

²Jarvis Christian College, Liberty University, Lynchburg, USA

Email: jb_mcdonald@live.com, charlesneedham@yahoo.com

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore customer relationship strategies of enrollment managers of historically black colleges, and universities can utilize to increase enrollment rates leading to increased financial stability. The conceptual framework for this study was the general system theory. Data derive from semistructured interviews and employee handbooks. The data analysis consisted of compiling the data, disassembling the data into standard codes, reassembling the data into themes, interpreting the meaning, and reporting the themes. Member checking and methodological triangulation increased the trustworthiness of the study. Themes that emerged were efficiencies with technology, student retention, and financial performance. Using up to date and effective technology, including customer relationship management and creating strategies to focus on student retention, can help educational organizations improve their financial performance. The findings of this study included basic strategies HBCU enrollment managers' need to improve financial performances. The general systems (GST) enhanced the themes applicable for CRM strategies and aligned with the overarching research question. The potential for social change includes the opportunity to increase graduation and student retention rates to provide more opportunities for local business leaders and enhance the economic sustainability of local communities.

Keywords

Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Customer Satisfaction, Enrollment Data, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Marketing, Marketing Strategy, Retention Rate

1. Introduction and Background

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are institutions of higher education established before 1964 to serve the Black community (Wilcox, Wells, Haddad, & Wilcox, 2014). Some HBCU enrollment managers experienced a substantial decrease in the student enrollment rate because other college and university recruiters aggressively enrolled Black college students using effective strategies (Patterson, Dunston, & Daniels, 2013). Many enrollment managers in educational institutions, including HBCUs, continue to seek strategies to improve relationships with their customers to increase profitability (Montgomery & Montgomery, 2012). Across the United States, HBCUs are struggling financially, and the enrollment declined by 14% (Davis, 2015). High student enrollments are signs of efficiency at HBCUs and are essential to an institution's profitability (Brown & Burnette, 2014). Black colleges and universities' enrollment increased by 42% between 2000 and 2010; however, enrollment declined drastically, reducing the total productivity (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015). This study includes the problems of enrollment managers at HBCUs who struggle with trying to maintain enrollment. The study structure includes a background of the literature, the structure of the method and analysis, results from the interviews and implications for further research.

2. Problem Statement

HCBU managers lack sufficient understanding of CRM to create a high enrollment rate leading to increased financial stability (Webber & Rogers, 2014). HBCUs' enrollment declined by 14%, which resulted in a lack of financial stability for the organizational leaders (Davis, 2015). The general business problem was that the low enrollments at some HBCUs are negatively impacting business operations financially and nonfinancial. The specific business problem was that some HBCU enrollment managers lack customer relationship management (CRM) strategies to improve financial performance.

3. Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore CRM strategies used by HBCU enrollment managers to improve financial performance. The population for the study included one enrollment manager from Georgia who worked at an HBCU with high student enrollment rates and who had financial knowledge of their organization. The findings of this study will contribute to positive social change by improving student enrollment to increase the financial stability of the HBCU. Improved CRM strategies for HBCU managers can result in improved services for employees and may provide long-term growth for the institution and the community leading to more productive citizens.

4. Research Question

The Central research question guiding this study was: What CRM strategies do

HBCU enrollment managers use to improve financial performance?

5. Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions are statements made and considered accurate, but not verified (Davison, Maraist, Hamilton, & Bing, 2012). The general assumption was that each interviewee had the same level of interest in the results of the research (Parker, 2012). Another assumption was that the participant would understand the confidentiality and anonymity of the study and would respond candidly. The final assumption was that the participant would answer the interview questions honestly based on their experiences inside the educational institution.

Parker and Crona (2012) indicated that limitations are constraints that challenge researchers conducting qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research. The first limitation was that an exploratory case study of one HBCU appeared insufficient with adequate data to answer the research question. The results of the study may limit the ability to make transferable business recommendations for other HBCUs. Another limitation of this study was the challenge of obtaining approval from HBCU enrollment managers.

Delimitations control boundary conditions for theory (Lynch & James, 2012). The delimitation was the focus on customer relationship strategies for one HBCU in Georgia. The delimitation of the population is characteristics that make the transferability of results difficult to apply to other studies (Lynch & James, 2012). The participant work in the capacity of enrollment managers serves HBCUs.

5.1. Significance of the Study

The study findings may be of value because enrollment managers could learn CRM strategies that could increase profitability at other HBCUs. The findings of the study may also influence HBCU managers' future decisions to deter reduced student enrollment rates. HBCU enrollment managers may use the results of the study to develop a new process to implement effective, ethical business policies and define standards for student retention and stakeholder value.

5.2. Contributions to Business Practice

Leaders of HBCUs avoid business failures by creating and sustaining a stable financial position (Fogle, 2012). Exploration of management strategies and practices may help to determine the best strategy by HBCU business practitioners in a competitive environment, and the results of the study may show insights into successful strategies. The results of this study may help expand existing knowledge for other HBCU enrollment managers to improve the financial stability of their institutions through effective enrollment management and identification of management strategies that demonstrate success despite competitive challenges. The results from the study may equip aspiring and existing HBCU business practitioners with information to survive in a competitively challenging envi-

ronment.

Through a focus on crucial constructs, the results of the study may include valuable information for the management of private or for-profit universities on why many students leave before graduation. Enrollment managers at HBCUs continuously look for ways to encourage students from dis-enrolling from college (Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2011). Effective CRM results in financial benefits to companies, regardless of the industry (Wang, Hu, & Hu, 2013).

5.3. Implementations for Social Change

A business in decline impact jobs, organizations, and communities (Palmer et al., 2011). The results of the data from this study may contribute new insights into how practitioners of HBCU leaders can succeed beyond 5 years. HBCU leaders may survive competition by implementing new strategies and practices from this study. HBCU business practitioners contribute to economic growth through job creation and total production output (Brown & Burnette, 2014). Leaders of successful HBCUs may continue to employ employees who depend upon these jobs for their livelihood (Palmer et al., 2011).

Successful students provide continuous revenue to HBCUs and contribute socially and financially to their communities upon graduation (Wood & Palmer, 2014). In contrast, low student enrollment rates have financial and social implications for local communities, businesses, governments, and institutions (Ansari, Munir, & Gregg, 2012). Managers at HBCUs will find that the results of this study include valuable information regarding why students decide to leave an HBCU before graduating.

6. A Review of the Academic Literature

General Systems Theory

The GST was appropriate for the tackling of each element in an entire system (Kerzner, 2013). When employees worked as a unit, leaders share understanding with their colleagues and coordinate their decision behaviors with actions (Chakraborty, Vishik, & Rao, 2013). Chang Jiang, Klein and Wang (2014) noted that leaders could use GST to resolve a problematic system as a whole. Chakraborty et al. (2013) emphasized that using general systems in business strategies resulted in converting individual activities into team activities within an organization. The key constructs from the GST were organization strategies, appropriate technology, and effective internal and external systems working together (Chang et al., 2014). The primary purpose of using GST for the study was to reflect on how GST aspects work together in HBCUs. The findings of the study included the importance of organization strategies, technology, and internal and external systems while reflecting on problems that HBCUs incurred inappropriate skills necessary to remain competitive and profitable. The findings influenced the process, systems, and organization helps improve student enrollment and minimizing employee turnover.

7. Overview of the Higher Education Industry as a Business

HBCUs are part of the higher education industry and were vital to the success of this study. The notion that leaders of higher education institutions need to act like business leaders attracted the attention of both scholars and practitioners (Zaksa, 2012). The landscape of higher education has undergone a significant paradigm shift. Various factors including technology growth and changes in the economy, have a considerable influence on the behaviors and operations of higher education institutions (Lynch & James, 2012). Factors including the challenging economy lead to significant changes in the landscape of higher education. Some of the changes include a shift from elite education to mass education, globalization, changes in funding systems, and an increase in regulatory frameworks (Zaksa, 2012). Leaders of higher education institutions increasingly adapt applied business and marketing strategies to increase efficiency, strengthen financial stability, and attract more students (Lynch & James, 2012).

Business Challenges for HBCUS

Institutions of higher learning are vital institutions for preparing Black students for careers and graduate education in the United States (Payton, Suarez-Brown, & Lamar, 2012). Noonan, Lindong, and Jaitley (2013) wrote that the 103 HBCUs represent only 3% of the higher education industry in the United States. However, the institutions of higher education administrators graduate approximately 20% of African Americans with undergraduate degrees (Zaksa, 2012).

HBCUs have several factors that influence their competitive advantage within the higher education industry. Competitive advantage is the differences in service and products that are of interest to current and potential customers (Zaksa, 2012). Competitive advantages are necessary to identify strategies for successful CRM implementation (Trkman, 2013). Leaders of higher education institutions have the challenge of meeting the social, cultural, and economic needs of their customers, as well as remaining competitive (Matzler & Abfalter, 2013). Another challenge institutions experience is low customer retention and admission rate (Payton et al., 2012).

Student retention is a challenge for every higher education institution but is more significant for HBCUs (Payton et al., 2012; Pearson, 2012). On average, HBCUs have a 30% graduation rate, which is low comparing to predominantly White universities (Payton et al., 2012). The HBCUs also lack resources, which is one of their biggest challenges (Griffin, Muniz, & Espinosa, 2012). Iloh and Toldson (2013) discussed fund-raising as another challenge of HBCUs.

8. Concept of Customer Relationship Management

The concept of CRM began in the early 1970s (Chen, Yang, Chen, Tseng, & Lee, 2013). Chatterjee (2013) explained that the actual business of every company is to make and keep customers happy. The strategy resulted in customer satisfaction and loyalty between the customers to carry on with potential business (Sac-

cani, Visintin, & Rapaccini, 2014).

The emergence of new strategies and technologies in the global marketplace leads to competition in business and proactive strategies (Marx & Hsu, 2015). Allameh, Shahin, and Tabanifar (2012) noted that effective CRM is essential to gain competitive advantages. Managers can use customer relationship management to improve an organization's business and relationships with customers (Guercini & Runfola, 2012). Kim, Kumar, and Kumar (2012) wrote that CRM initially includes three significant principles, shielding current customers, fostering new customers, and enhancing the asset value of all customers. A CRM system emerged for management to improve customer satisfaction, increase business profit, and reduce business costs and investment (Lim, Han, & Ito, 2013).

Chopra, Bhambri, and Krishan (2012) noted that the era of globalization remains competitive, but the fast-changing economic environment is a paradigm shift. Luftman et al. (2012) suggested that the existence and success of any organization predicate on the customers and on the employees working to provide quality care to the customers. Organizational decision makers around the world are competing hard to attract and retain customers and enhance CRM, which is the central area of interest for decision makers (Gupta & Aggarwal, 2016).

The objective of every marketing person is to attract, satisfy, and win over the customers (Verhoef & Lemon, 2013). Many business decision makers continue to seek new methods for gaining insight to cultivate personal relationships with current and potential customers (Chopra et al., 2012). Business decision makers who use the concepts of CRM found profitability in retaining and rewarding existing customers rather than seeking new customers (Hutchinson, Donnell, Gilmore, & Reid, 2015). The conventional market approach is the four P's (product, price, place, and promotion) grounded in the industrial age using mass media (Mikalef, Giannakos, & Pateli, 2013). After the introduction of the information era, researchers noted CRM also includes customers on a one-to-one and one-to-many basis and satisfying individual needs (Chopra et al., 2012).

Customer relationship management is an integral business model and a set of operating practices to coordinate and align to maximize profitable revenue from target customers (Kumar & Rajan, 2012). Customer relationship management is a business strategy that includes the effective integration of marketing, sales, and integrating people, process, and technology (Verhoef & Lemon, 2013). Through the impact of the Internet, e-CRM includes CRM techniques with new electronic channels, wireless technologies with business applications (Chopra et al., 2012).

Customer Satisfaction

Many issues fall into the category of what customers consider customer satisfaction. The satisfaction of current employees is one factor that affects customers. If employees feel satisfied with their job, the employees' attitude transfers to their interactions with customers and leads to building customer's trust (Yee, Guo, &

Yeung, 2015). Measurements of employee contentment indicated the value of customer relationships and consumer confidence in the establishment, which indicated the importance of job satisfaction and positive behavior toward customers in creating a trusting relationship (Yee et al., 2015). For employees to develop positive long-term relationships, executives must understand and focus on the resources and attitudes needed (Yee et al., 2015). Business executives who understand their customers' needs take advantage of an excellent opportunity to implement strategies through customer orientation. Using data and the information obtained through market orientation, which includes customers, competitors, and technology, executives can offer essential information to strengthen the level of customer satisfaction (Wang, Chen, & Chen, 2012).

The limitations of research make customer retention difficult for having strong CRM when management does not have an effective marketing strategy focused on meeting their customers' needs (Tarasi, Bolton, Gustafsson, & Walker, 2013). When studying the significance of customers, servicing customers and building trust with customers is essential. Customer relationship management remains significant for meeting customer needs and for obtaining information on decision channels to understand and determine the value and needs of a consumer foundation (Kaur & Gupta, 2012).

9. Research Method and Design

The method for this study was qualitative research to understand the CRM strategies HBCU enrollment managers use to increase student enrollment. Qualitative research includes the multifaceted complexity-characterizing human experience and the sociocultural context in which human act (Yin, 2013). Marshall and Rossman (2014) indicated that qualitative researchers have an interest in understanding the meaning people construct to justify their experiences in the world. The goal of using a qualitative method was to generate substantive details of the phenomenon of interest and the experience of people in natural settings. Qualitative research data include textual data, narratives, and stories obtained from participants that researchers record digitally, on tape, or with written notes (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

In this study, a case study was appropriate because case studies involve an analysis of projects, policies, systems, and characteristics of real life events (Yin, 2013). Research designs include links to the components of research in the exploration of research questions to form conclusions in a study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). All elements of the research design are from CRM strategies of HBCUs. A case study design is an empirical inquiry involving the exploration of a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context (Yin, 2013). The case study design is most suitable for studies that include significant cases related to the study of an individual or program (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

A case study is particularly useful when the boundaries between phenomenon

and context are not evident (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013). Langley et al. (2013) used the case study method to explore the uses and outputs of personal contact networks. Qualitative case studies are appropriate ways to observe, and analyze particular cases in a perfect setting (Yin, 2013). The selection of a case study design was to facilitate the understanding of a real-life contemporary phenomenon in context. Case study designs include contextually rich data to study a phenomenon in a real-life context and provide an in-depth understanding of the nature and complexity of the phenomenon (da Mota Pedrosa, Näslund, & Jasmand, 2012).

Methodological triangulation and multiple data gathering techniques are pertinent strengths of case study research (Denzin, 2012; Walters, 2016). Data saturation is the point at which no new information or themes are observable in data collection (Nguyen, 2013). Yin (2013) noted that scholars use case studies to observe, study, and analyze particular cases in a perfect setting. The purpose of methodological triangulation in this study was to enhance the trustworthiness of the research.

10. Population and Sampling

The population for this study consisted of one HBCU manager from an HBCU in Georgia. The population selected for this qualitative study was a purposive sample from one HBCU. Wahyuni (2012) noted that researchers use purposeful sampling to find participants who will provide rich information on a phenomenon. Elo et al. (2014) indicated that for a purposeful sample, researchers use their judgment to select participants based on the study criteria. Elo et al. described essential parts of the design for analytic and descriptive studies to help researchers determine the appropriate sample size of the study. The criteria for HBCU enrollment managers used in this study included 1 year of management experience. The population and geographic location may appear suitable for other HBCU managers to learn more regarding student enrollment in HBCUs in a state with economic and growth challenges similar to those of other HBCUs.

Including a sample size of one HBCU enrollment manager is an opportunity to gather information using interviews and secondary data. Asking semistructured, open-ended questions of a small sample of participants adds richness to the interview process (Yin, 2014). Rowley (2012) indicated that case study research should include sample sizes between one and 10 participants. Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) described that researchers using large or small sample sizes must continue to conduct case study interviews until reaching the redundancy or saturation of data. Marshall et al. suggested that saturation occurs when information from participants becomes redundant, and newly acquired data does not lead to new information and themes (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Walker, 2012). The interviews included one HBCU enrollment manager until saturation with no new data, coding, or themes emerging from interview responses.

11. Data Collection Instrument and Technique

Data collection instruments include tools to collect data from human participants (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). In the qualitative research process, the instrumentation is pivotal (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Yin (2013), Leedy and Ormrod (2013), and Xu and Storr (2012) served as primary data collection instruments to collect data from participants. The primary data collection instrument and were the authors collecting information from the participant. Yin indicated that qualitative researchers are the primary instrument.

An interview guide, a digital voice recorder, and a journal were the primary data collection tools for the study. The digital voice recorder included a Samsung 6 Smartphone voice-recording device available as a Samsung 5 smartphone backup. The interview protocol included nine open-ended questions on CRM strategies for HBCUs. The use of open-ended interview questions facilitated the exploration of management skills that contribute to the success of small businesses in competitive environments (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The interview protocol included inquiries regarding CRM strategies for the HBCU. The interview protocol should insist of questions regarding formal and informal mechanisms to maintain consumer trust (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). The participant can provide further details through follow-up or probing questions (Falchikov, 2013).

The participant selected the time and location for the interview. In addition to audio recording the interviews, the observation of body language occurred, nonverbal cues, and gestures by the participant and maintaining handwritten notes also occurred. One approach to mitigate bias is through triangulation: multiple sources of data (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009). In qualitative research, triangulation adds depth to the data that is collected. This rich, in-depth data supports a direct link between triangulation and data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). In this study, triangulating the data sources by comparing transcribed data with interview notes occurred.

The data collection process begins with an introduction to explain the purpose of the study, encourage participation, explain the withdrawal process, and offer an opportunity to ask questions. Participants shared their relevant experiences by responding to interview questions on varying aspects of a research topic (Bjerregaard, 2011). For the study, the interview setting, time, and place came from the choice of the participant. The interview began with a review of the purpose and the reason for the study. The review included the consent form and details regarding the participant's rights to withdraw. A research field note is appropriate to gather data, for example, names, dates, questions, responses, and general observations for a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The participant provided supporting documentation during the interview process.

The advantages of open-ended interview questions are that 1) participants should feel at ease and 2) the questions facilitate detailed answers (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Open-ended interview questions also allow opportunities for

follow up questions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Another advantage of open-ended interview questions is that participants can express thoughts freely. The disadvantages of semistructured interviews include 1) interviewing participants require more time and, expense and that 2) participants may have less interest in discussing sensitive topics (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

Member checking is the most effective way of eliminating the possibility of misrepresentation (Carroll & Huxtable, 2014). Member checks serve to decrease the incidence of incorrect data and the false interpretation of data to provide authentic and original findings (Harper & Cole, 2012). For the study, the findings were shared with the participants to allow participants to analyze the findings critically and comment appropriately. Member checking affords participants the opportunity to review content to ensure data are accurate, make corrections if needed and strengthen data credibility (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

12. Data Organization Technique and Analysis

The organization techniques for this study was 1) member checking the transcribe interview 2) maintaining a reflective journal 3) reviewing the notes against the interview questions, 4) entering the raw data into Nvivo 11. Reflective journals are appropriate to organize thoughts on a topic or concept, to document work and experience, as well as to help students over a period for developmental changes (Mertens, 2014). Davies, Reitmaier, Smith, and Mangan-Danckwart (2013) described reflective journals as documents that students create while thinking of various concepts. Using journals is an appropriate method of accessing rich qualitative research to collect data (Hayman, Wilkes, & Jackson, 2012). Journals include notes written during interviews, as well as categories of the ascribed meanings to participants' responses (Hayman et al., 2012).

The data organization tools were NVivo 11, Microsoft ExcelTM, and research logs. Perrin (2014) noted that researchers could organize and store data from qualitative research by interview questions, assigned participant codes, and responses in columns in Microsoft ExcelTM workbook files. The Microsoft ExcelTM workbook file includes a separate spreadsheet for each question. NVivo 11 helped to organize responses and identify themes and research logs to track and categorize data (Perrin, 2014).

In this study, the process of generating and refining codes occurred until no identify any new unique codes occurred, consistent with the epistemology of a qualitative research method. The recording and transcription of semistructured interviews with each participant before performing thematic analyses on categories of relevant themes occurred. Data triangulation is a process of analyzing all primary data from open-ended interview questions and secondary data collected from business brochures, pamphlets, and websites (Kammerlander & Ganter, 2015). The initial phase of analysis involves independently reading transcripts and identifying specific codes. After the completion of specific codes identification, the researcher develops a comprehensive code list through rereading along

with following the initial interviews and transcriptions. The next step is refining, collapsing, or eliminating codes when appropriate. Charach, Yeung, Volpe, Goodale, and dosReis (2014) generated and refined codes continuously until no new unique codes in the study.

Perrin (2014) indicated that researchers use NVivo11 to search for and identify themes within the data collected. Using a coding manual, analysts may compile and organize all transcripts using NVivo 11. Per Masse, Naiman, and Naylor (2013), coding of transcripts continued until reaching data saturation, and in this study, any discrepancies between codes were attained until attaining 100% satisfaction. The iterative process of organizing codes into categories is reflexive and involves using a constant comparison between transcripts to identify common and recurrent themes (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

As themes develop, interpreting the interviews may emerge with an increased understanding of customer relationship skills for improving overall student enrollment for the benefit of HBCUs. A conceptual framework is a connection between the literature, method, and the results of a study (Borrego, Foster, & Froyd, 2014). The core of the study is to guide HBCU managers to use CRM strategies effectively to increase student enrollment. The data analysis technique was exploring the strategies HBCU enrollment managers used to improve CRM to increase student enrollment. Morse and Richards (2013) used verbatim quotes from participants to support the analysis of the research data. Location of the research within the current field of study occurred. The use of verbatim quotes from the participant to support the analysis of the data was necessary.

13. Reliability and Validity

A full description of this qualitative study was to ensure data quality and reliability, also to ensure credibility, transferability, and dependability, of the findings and conclusions. Achieving the highest possible quality when conducting and reporting research is a challenge (Cope, 2014). Reliability and validity may affect the practical relevance of research through provisions of measured assurances (Street & Ward, 2012). Street and Ward (2012) posited that reliability and validity reflect an assurance that actions derivable from study conclusions do not include bias. Measured assurance that conclusions are not hearsay, but valid science is essential to ensure the reliability and validity of study findings (Street & Ward, 2012). For every research study, readers raise questions about validity, reliability, and generalizability (Loh, 2013). The trustworthiness of research is an important methodological issue because peers in the same field need to perceive the research as trustworthy for people outside the field to trust the qualitative research findings (Loh, 2013). The trustworthiness of the qualitative conclusions reflects credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013).

Reliability and validity are measures to enhance research rigor and add to the credibility of statistical data (Rao, 2013; Sin, 2010; Srivastava & Misra, 2014). Re-

liability and validity include quality case analysis to guarantee that the research findings reflect the purpose of the study. Measurements established to ensure conclusions and not biased observations are the results of reliability in research (Street & Ward, 2012). In qualitative research, reliability includes data collection and data analysis techniques, with the coding of data (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). Qualitative coding (categorization) is appropriate for reliability and validity in case study research (Perrin, 2014). Implementing the same techniques for data collection and data analysis may lead to equivalent methodological results (Ali & Yusof, 2012).

In qualitative research, procedural reliability has a relationship with consistency, which means that another person should examine the work and come to similar conclusions (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). Silverman (2013) stipulated that careful documentation of how a researcher collects, produces, and interprets the data; however, threats to reliability exist at every stage of the qualitative research process. The risks to procedural reliability during data collection include inaccurate and interview questions, as well as inaccurate transcriptions (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Silverman, 2013).

Failure to tape record the interviews may increase random errors (Meyer, Hajcak, Torpey-Newman, Kujawa, & Klein, 2015). Lacking a comprehensive research plan or a documented case analysis is also problematic. Relationships that develop may even threaten procedural reliability during data collection. McLeod, MacDonell, and Doolin (2011) indicated that researchers undermine the procedural reliability of qualitative research if they fail to collect data over long periods, or are not aware of informal evidence. Errors may also occur in classifying data, attaching data to constructs, and drawing links between constructs, as well as in the reduction, interpretation, and development of connections with theory (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). Threats to procedural reliability during data analysis and interpretation also include research preconceptions (Yin, 2015).

Threats to contextual validity during the research design phase include contradictions in logic, for example, a mismatch between research questions and the study design (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). Some threats to contextual validity that can occur during data collection include observer-caused effect, observer bias, researcher bias, data access limitations, and complexities and limitations of the human mind (Barpanda & Mukhopadhyay, 2014). Finally, the threats to contextual validity that occur during data analysis and interpretation include a lack of descriptive validity of the settings and events that affect size (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

Dependability is the steadiness of data over comparable conditions (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Eddy et al. (2012) indicated that qualitative researchers use dependability to connote the stability of the research data. In quantitative research dependability is comparable to the concept of reliability. Replication of the findings involves using appropriate processes and similar participants in similar conditions (Eddy et al., 2012). If this study demonstrates dependability

positive implications for other HBCU Enrollment managers can occurred.

The participant received a copy of the transcripts from their contributions to verify participant's accuracy. An effective audit trail of field notes appropriately addresses dependability (Charach et al., 2014). An audit trail is clear documentation of all research decisions to examine narrative accounts and attest to dependability. Schutt (2011) described the audit trail in qualitative research, as an appropriate way for keeping careful documentation of a study for external auditing. Keeping observation field notes, journals, and various drafts of interpretations are all part of creating an audit trail (Street & Ward, 2012). Member checking is a process of discovering whether the data analysis is congruent with the participants' experiences (Schutt, 2011).

Reilly (2013) posited that member checking involves testing the data and analyzing categories, with participants who supply the data as a process to ensure truthfulness and authenticity. Participants may edit or delete their words from the narratives. In line with the concept of member checking, Schutt (2011) suggested that participants have access to the interpretations to verify reasonableness. Credibility is the degree to which individuals perceive a message that is believable by the individual receiving the message (Schmidt, Ranney, Pepper, & Goldstein, 2016). Marshall and Rossman (2014) described credibility as a researcher's representation of the data or the participants' views and interpretation. Creditability in this study can have positive implications for other HBCU Enrollment managers.

Credibility reflects the value of research findings (Eddy et al., 2012). A qualitative study credible shares the same experience and recognize the descriptions of human experiences as individuals (Cope, 2014). Schmidt et al., (2016) indicated that researchers could enhance credibility by researching in a believable manner. The trustworthy dimensions of credibility include the perceived morality of the source like truthfulness, fairness, and lack of bias (Schmidt et al., 2016).

Prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checking are to enhance the credibility of a study (Black et al., 2013). Continued engagement involves spending adequate time in prior visits and 45 - 60 minutes of interview time with participants to understand the phenomenon, which is an appropriate way to ensure descriptions of human experiences (Cope, 2014). Validity is the accuracy of research findings (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Validity is critical in qualitative research based on the logic that data, credible, and trustworthy can individually defend the data. Data saturation occurs when no new information emerges (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Data came from using in-depth interviews from one enrollment manager and continued interviewing until data saturation occurred. The examination of data involves documenting themes and analyzing repetition to confirm and validate data saturation (Guest et al., 2006; Poghosyan et al., 2013).

Member checking is a quality control process in which participants have the opportunity to review statements for accuracy (Harper & Cole, 2012). Merwe

(2014) noted that confirmation of data saturation through member checking takes place after all participants have no additional contributions. Results developed from saturated data have strong credibility (Ashworth, 2012). The implementation of the member-checking process and methodological triangulation occurred at the end of the data collection and data analysis processes to track emerging themes, ensure validity, ensure credibility, and engage participants from the study (Denzin, 2012; Parker, 2012).

Transferability is the extrapolation and indicates the findings to other environments or groups (Elo et al., 2014; Heikkinen, Marmion, & Luoto, 2012). Transferability in this study occurred to provide an accurate and detailed description of the research context on CRM strategies for HBCUs and to clarify any assumptions. In applying the ideology of Fogle (2012), transferability adds an element of rigor to a qualitative study and indicates how the conclusions apply to other HBCUs seeking increased student enrollment and revenue growth through marketing strategies. In addition, the study committee helps to examine and assess the qualitative research findings to help ensure the credibility of my content analysis.

Mason (2010) suggested that saturation occurs when the research data become repetitive, and no new information emerges during the coding process for categories. For many qualitative studies, the saturation point is the determinant of the sample size. Habersack and Luschin (2013) contended that the point of data saturation is an assumption that a researcher captured everything necessary in a study. Elo et al. (2014) used the end of saturation to describe the determination of sample size in focus group studies in health journals. Mason (2010) ensured the point of data saturation through observation at the point of diminishing return. Ensuring data saturation required identifying when the data became repetitive and did not lead to more information.

14. Findings

The overarching research question for this study was: What CRM strategies do HBCU enrollment managers use to improve financial performance? Semistructured interviews and reviewed the college's website and student handbooks to gain an in-depth understanding of the strategy the HBCU enrollment manager uses to improve financial performance. The analysis of the college student handbooks included clear information regarding the benefits of HBCU, an indication of the enrollment manager using effective CRM strategies.

The semistructured interview and recording occurred over the telephone. During the interview process, the participant contributed concepts, experiences, and perceptions regarding strategies to improve financial performance. The HBCU enrollment manager responded to nine open-ended interview questions.

An interview protocol served as a guide to help answer the overarching research question: What CRM strategies do HBCU enrollment managers use to improve financial performance? The participant corrected and highlighted any

inaccurate statements. After participant verification, the verified interview data and the information from the student handbooks were recorded into NVivo 11, a qualitative analysis software, which gave me the ability to code, organize, and analyze data. The name of the participants was labeled to include P1 to maintain confidentiality.

The HBCU enrollment manager who agreed to participate in this single case study met the requirements for the study. Coding the interview transcripts from the participant uncovered categories and established themes until no new data or themes emerged, confirming data saturation. Organizational documents from the recruitment and student enrollment were appropriate to establish a reference point of customer relationship strategies at HBCUs to triangulate and validate participant inputs through member checking.

Once the interview process was complete, NVivo 11 assisted with discerning and organizing the data. Evaluation continued until no new codes emerged. Three main themes emerged related to the research topic: (a) efficiencies with technology, (b) student retention, and (c) financial performance. The findings of this study contain basic strategies HBCU enrollment managers need to improve financial returns. The GST enhanced the themes applicable to CRM strategies and aligned with the overarching research question. After identifying the themes, the findings were analyzed in relation to the themes using methodological triangulation.

14.1. Themes

Three themes emerged from the interview transcripts and other data sources. The first theme, efficiencies with technology, included statements regarding the technical objectives and goals of the business. The second theme, student retention, was composed of comments regarding how the HBCU created and employed student retention strategies. The final theme, financial performance, comprised of strategies to increase the business financial profitability through student enrollment management.

14.2. Emergent Theme 1: Efficiencies with Technology

Efficiencies with technology were the first main theme. Participant responses to the interview questions and college documents indicated that efficiencies with technology have a significant role in customer relationship strategies at the HBCU. The efficiencies with technology theme relate to the central research question by confirming that the organization had an objective or business goal that relates to using technology strategies to generate student enrollment success, in response to interview questions three and four—what technology do you use for tracking financial growth? What CRM strategies do you use to improve technology while maximizing financial performance? P1 said that efficiencies with technology have an important role in meeting their student's needs. P1 also mentioned that their college currently applies technology to communicate with and provide services to students through an automatic system. *Chakraborty et al.*

(2013) emphasized that using GST in business strategies may result in converting individual activities into team activities within the organization. Key constructs from GST are organization strategies, the appropriate technology, and effective internal and external systems working together. The primary purpose of using GST for this study was to reflect on how GST aspects work together in HBCUs.

P1 stated that their organizational goal was to explore CRM using technology. The effective use of technology could improve procedures to help meet and exceed the needs of future and current students. P1 stated that the use of technology by the college staff would aid the students in an effective manner.

Table 1 includes the list of subthemes for efficiencies with technology in this study. The table includes categorized number of responses and percentage of frequency of occurrence. The total number of responses was 57 of the subthemes mentioned in the study. Of the total number of responses of subthemes, CRM strategies were mentioned 48 times with percentage of occurrence 8.4%, effective technology was mentioned three times or 0.5% and internal and external systems were mentioned six times, or 1.0%.

14.3. Emergent Theme 2: Student Retention

Student retention relates to the central research question by identifying strategies enrollment managers can use to create an effective student retention program. As indicated in the college handbook and the college strategic plan regarding student retention, P1 mentioned that the institutional goal was not to recruit and enroll freshmen, but to recruit and enroll college graduates. *Chang et al. (2014)* noted that leaders who use GST could resolve a problematic system as a whole.

P1 mentioned that all stakeholders in the college, including the administration, staff, faculty, students, donors, and alumni, have an important part in helping to maintain a high student retention and graduation rate by engaging students, mentoring students, and guiding them to graduation in a consistent manner. *Tinto (1975)* linked student success with the university environment and the academic and social integration between students and their institutions. Factors such as socioeconomic status and prior achievements impact the level of students' commitment and integration to influence student outcomes (*Kahu, 2013*). *Kahu (2013)* noted that the higher the engagement and interaction, the greater the chance of success. The relationships and bonds new students build with other students, staff, and faculty help them integrate into their new environment and lead to academic success.

Table 1. Efficiencies with technology.

Subthemes	Number of responses	% Frequency of occurrence
CRM strategies	48	84
Effective technology	3	0.5
Internal and external systems	6	10

P1 described the enrollment selection procedure and acknowledged that the college recruiter goal is to enroll some of the best, brightest, and most academically prepared applicants in their pool. P1's intent was to focus the college recruiting efforts on future college graduates and not freshmen. Participant 1 also mentioned meeting and exceeding current and future student needs is a minimum expectation from all employees working for the college. P1 stated that the college employees always strive towards achieving 100% student retention and graduation rates.

Table 2 includes the list of subthemes for student retention in this study. The table includes categorized number of responses and percentage of frequency of occurrence. The total number of responses was 29 of the subthemes mentioned in the study. Of the total number of responses of subthemes, customer satisfaction occurred 22 times with percentage of occurrence 7.0%, graduation rate emerged five times or 1.6% and internal and meeting customer needs were two times, or 0.6%.

14.4. Emergent Theme 3: Financial Performance

The third theme, financial performance, emerged from interview questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7. The participant responses and college documents showed financial performance as a strategy. P1 noted that the college demonstrated a strong financial performance because of an effective fiscal affairs office. The college's goal is to enroll students who are financially responsible, and offering minimal tuition discounts.

When leaders share an understanding of company goals with colleagues and coordinate their decision-making behaviors with their actions, the personnel are more likely to work as a unit (Chakraborty et al., 2013). HBCUs experienced several factors that influence their competitive advantage in the higher education industry. A competitive advantage is the positive difference in the services and products that are of interest to current and potential customers (Zaksa, 2012). Identifying strategies for a competitive advantage is advantageous for a successful CRM implementation (Trkman, 2013). Leaders of higher education institutions have the challenge of meeting the social, cultural, and economic needs of their customers in order to remain competitive (Matzler & Abfalter, 2013).

P1 stated that the college had effective business decision makers concerning tuition, scholarships, student discounts, and cost containments to help the college sustain financial profitability. P1 also stated that the college tuition for their

Table 2. Student retention.

Subthemes	Number of responses	% Frequency of occurrence
Customer satisfaction	22	70
Graduation rate	5	25
Meeting customer needs	2	5

students exceeds the average cost to attend an HBCU. P1 said, their college recruits the strongest students possible who are prepared academically, and financially prepared; our goal is to recruit first year students that become college graduates P1 stated that the college had effective business decision makers to help the college sustain financial profitability. P1 said, their college recruits some of the most academically, and financially prepared students to help sustain their high graduation rate.

Table 3 includes the list of subthemes for financial performance in this study. The table includes the categorized number of responses and percentage of frequency of occurrences. The total number of responses was 19 of the subthemes mentioned in the study. Of the total number of responses of subthemes, business decision makers emerged seven times with percentage of occurrence 3.6%, tuition occurred seven times or 3.6% and financial profit occurred five times, or 2.6%.

15. Applications for Social Change

The findings of this study were critical to improving business practices because the results contain accurate information concerning effective customer relationship strategies for HBCU enrollment managers to increase financial performance. The interview occurred with one HBCU enrollment manager in Georgia and found three main themes using NVivo coding, which consisted of 1) efficiencies with technology, 2) student retention, and 3) financial performance. HBCUs should build their strategies based on the essential details contained in these three themes for their business profitability and financial sustainability. Based on GST, [Chakraborty et al. \(2013\)](#) emphasized that using general systems in business strategies may result in converting individual activities into team activities within an organization. The key constructs from the GST were organization strategies, appropriate technology, and effective internal and external systems working together ([Chang et al., 2014](#)). The primary purpose of using GST for the study was to reflect on how GST aspects work together in HBCUs.

The findings of the study may also influence HBCU managers' future decisions to deter reduced student enrollment rates. HBCU enrollment managers may use the results of the study to develop a new process to implement effective, ethical business policies and define standards for student retention and stakeholder value. The results of this study indicated what CRM strategies HBCU enrollment managers use to improve financial performance.

Table 3. Financial performance.

Subthemes	Number of responses	% Frequency of occurrence
Business decision makers	7	36
Tuition	7	36
Financial profit	5	26

The results of this study may improve the financial stability at HBCUs through effective enrollment management and strategies that demonstrate success despite competitive challenges. The results from the study may equip aspiring and existing HBCU business practitioners with information to survive in a competitively challenging environment. Findings from this study may help unsuccessful HBCU enrollment managers to improve their organization's financial performance. P1 indicated that HBCU enrollment managers must ensure the entire system and departments are communicating effectively and implementing CRM strategies to help retain their students and improve the graduate rate and help improve financial performance.

16. Implementation for Social Change

HBCU business practitioners contribute to economic growth through job creation and total production output (Judge, Fainshmidt, & Lee Brown III, 2014). Leaders of successful HBCUs may continue to employ the employees who depend upon these jobs for their livelihood (Judge et al., 2014). Findings from this study might positively influence social change through increasing awareness to managers at HBCUs regarding why students decide to leave an HBCU before graduation.

The findings and recommendations from this study may contribute to social change by identifying potential opportunities or problem areas to help HBCU managers retain more students and increase financial profitability. Historically Black college and university leaders may survive competition by implementing new strategies and practices from the latest insights in this study. HBCU business practitioners contribute to economic growth through job creation and total production output (Judge et al., 2014). Leaders of successful HBCUs may continue to employ the employees who depend upon these jobs for their livelihood (Judge et al., 2014).

The results of this study could affect social change by improving student retention, graduation rate, and financial profitability at HBCUs. The ability to retain students and increase the graduation rate could increase the size of the college-educated workforce in the United States. This study provides significant value to postsecondary institutions, which could lead to increasing college enrollment, graduation, and other success rates to create a study body population that reflects the communities and workforces in the United States.

17. Recommendation for Further Action

Davis (2015) indicated that business in decline impacts jobs, organizations, and communities. Historically Black Colleges and Universities' enrollment declined by 14%, which resulted in a lack of financial stability for the organizational leaders (Davis, 2015). Leaders of historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) avoid business failures by creating and sustaining a solid financial position (Fogle, 2012). Further exploration of management strategies and practices may

help to determine the best strategy by HBCU business practitioners in a competitive environment, and the results of the study may show insights into successful strategies.

Based on the results of this study, implementing appropriate CRM strategies is important for current and future HBCU enrollment managers to improve financial performance and financial sustainability for their organization. Exploring the CRM strategies used by an HBCU enrollment manager improved financial performance and three specific recommendations for action. First, HBCU enrollment managers must utilize technology that demonstrates effective CRM strategies. Second, HBCU enrollment managers should select strategies for setting student retention and graduation goals at 100%. Lastly, HBCU enrollment managers should create and implement new strategies to help improve financial performance for the educational institution. Furthermore, HBCU enrollment managers should consider adopting CRM strategies alignment choices that result in implementing efficiencies with technology, create effective student retention and graduation strategy, and create strategies that may create and sustain financial performances.

18. Recommendation for Further Research

This study included a single qualitative case study to explore CRM strategies HBCU enrollment managers use to improve financial performance. Future studies may need to include the two limitations of this study, bias, and sample size. Despite following all procedures to manage any prejudice and not allow personal thoughts or practices to confirm the analysis and conclusions, bias may appear present because of personal experience as an HBCU enrollment manager. Second, the data came from one participant so future researchers should include a larger sample population to gather additional data. The recommendation includes future research reflecting on customer relationship strategies for HBCU outside of the state of Georgia. Future research results could also obtain data from employees in HBCU enrollment departments to determine the congruence of their statements regarding work commitment and the CRM strategies offered by managers to improve financial performance.

19. Conclusion

According to O'Brien and Sarkis (2014) high student retention rates reflect long-term tuition revenues and minimize the costs to replace students who leave, thus ensuring the sustainability of institutions. Implementing effective CRM strategies is important for an organization to improve its financial profitability. However, some HBCU enrollment managers do not utilize effective CRM strategies to improve financial performance. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies used by one HBCU enrollment manager to improve financial performance and answer the following research question: What CRM strategies do HBCU enrollment managers use to improve fi-

nancial performance? HBCU enrollment manager from one HBCU in the Georgia area of the United States participated in semistructured interviews, and a review of the employee handbooks augmented the data. Three main themes emerged after collecting and analyzing the data 1) efficiencies with technology 2) student retention, and 3) financial performance. The findings indicated HBCU enrollment managers who utilize CRM strategies succeed in improving financial performance.

The results of this study indicated that managers who implement customer relationship management strategies might increase financial profitability for their HBCU. [Chang et al. \(2014\)](#) noted that leaders who use GST could resolve a problematic system as a whole. [Chakraborty et al. \(2013\)](#) emphasized that using the general system in business strategies may result in converting individual activities into team activities within the organization. Key constructs from the GST are organization strategies, the appropriate technology, and effective internal and external systems working together.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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