California State University and the Black Female Graduate

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In
Women and Gender Studies

by

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Certification of Approval

I certify that I have read California State University and the Black Female Graduate by Alicia Marie Dixon, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Women and Gender Studies at San Francisco State University.

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Abstract

This thesis is established around oral histories from Black female graduates of The California State University System which include my personal journey as a student and graduate of the California State University System. The premise of this thesis is to provide an alternative context utilizing stories from Black female graduates that are grounded in personal experiences. The themes of community, engagement and resources are delineated from the oral histories to understand from the graduate’s perspective how they benefited from their education, as well as citing gaps in the System to provide recommendations in assisting future Black female students of the California State University. A qualitative research method of the oral histories is used to understand the experiences of attending and graduating from a California State University.

Keywords:  
CCC - Chabot Community College  
CSU - California State University  
CSUEB - California State University, East Bay  
DSPS - Disability Services Program  
PACE - Program for Adult Career Education / Program for Accelerated College Education  
SFSU - San Francisco State University  
SJSU - San José State University
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Introduction

My family never discussed college. When my high school classmates asked me what college I wanted to attend, I would feel a twinge of shame because I did not have an answer, yet I knew I wanted to go. High school was my personal outlet away from the religious structured household where I received very little support for furthering education beyond high school. My senior year of high school, I visited my aunt in the Bay Area, California. My aunt took me on a tour of California State University, Hayward. I knew from visiting the campus and doing research before I visited, the University would be a great match for me because of its diverse student population and graduation rates for students of color. However, the process to apply was not going to be an easy trek with my family, particularly with my father. When I finally amassed the fortitude to ask my father for the fifty-dollar application fee, he offered me a new car in lieu of pursuing a college degree. I declined. The next day, full of ignominy, I mailed the application with the money my father did end up giving me. A few months before the end of my senior year, I was conditionally accepted to CSU Hayward on the basis I would pass statistics. However, the final path to CSU Hayward was not straightforward.

Seventeen years, three community colleges, one proprietary school, an Associate’s Degree in Liberal Arts and a baby, I finally made it to California State University, East Bay\(^1\). I was hired as a full-time employee for the department of University Extension. After one year of being an employee at CSUEB I applied to be admitted as a student for a second time and again I

\(^1\) California State University, Hayward was renamed to California State University, East Bay in 2005.
was conditionally accepted. I still had to complete the statistics course so I enrolled back into Chabot Community College. The third attempt of taking statistics, I passed and was finally admitted without conditions to CSUEB as a student. Two years later, I graduated with a Bachelors of Art in Human Development Women’s Studies from CSUEB. The journey to get my bachelor’s degree took a total of 19 years. During my time as a student, I continued to work as a full-time employee with the University while raising a young child. I also had previous knowledge that working for the University would provide the advantage of paying a significantly reduced tuition which afforded me to graduate without student loans. Additionally, as a University employee I was allowed to take one class per semester on campus during my working hours without using personal time, taking a reduction in pay, or altering my work schedule to accommodate taking the on-campus class. It was during this 17-year journey to CSUEB that I collected resources, maintained engagement and created my own community.

When I was a student at Chabot Community College there were two resources I used to service my path. The first resource was through an English course called Learning Skills - Diagnostic Clinic and Study Skills. This course determined eligibility for learning disabilities services through diagnostic testing. In this course I took a series of diagnostic tests. As a result of the diagnostic tests, I learned that I could benefit from some services offered through the Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS) Department. Through DSPS I was able to take my exams at the DSPS center in a quiet distraction free setting with extra time. Along with DSPS, I was also enrolled in the Program for Adult College Education (PACE). I was particularly motivated by the PACE program because of its specificity in servicing college students aged 25 and older. PACE courses were offered in the evening and online with
guaranteed seats for PACE students and designated PACE counselors. CCC’s PACE program closely aligned with CSUEB’s PACE program (Program for Accelerated College Education) which was another incentive in applying to CSUEB the second time. I took the knowledge I gained from the DSPS and PACE resources and utilized them at CSUEB. Due to having a prior knowledge of these resources, I was able to navigate CSUEB’s programs in a quicker and more efficient manner. DSPS and PACE were important units that helped me at both institutions to progress from student to graduate.

The most important resource I gained at Chabot Community College was access to free peer counseling. I carried a lot of unrelenting guilt and shame while attending CCC, that it hindered me from enjoying my adult college experience. I noticed certain emotions were leading to an unhealthy view of myself along with suicide attempts. Although I was no longer participating in the religion, I constantly felt pulled between the religious and education systems. I felt guilty about what I was learning in community college because it was not equivalent to the stringent patriarchal religious system, I was raised in. The instructors and courses at CCC taught me how to become a critical thinker and introduced me to concepts and theories I would have otherwise not been exposed to. The consistent free peer counseling service I received at CCC helped me understand why religion and higher education were not aligning for me. I also utilized the counseling services at CSUEB, both of which were critical in my mental journey.

When I finally entered CSU East Bay, it was an easier transition because of the solid foundational resources I gained from CCC. I was able to utilize the same three programs at CCC and CSUEB. In addition, I gained a fourth resource through the Excel Program at CSUEB. The
Excel program provided an additional layer of support with specialized tutoring and planned sessions with an assigned counselor, among other services. DSPS, PACE, counseling and The Excel program were the four pillars in facilitating my path to graduation from CSU East Bay. From these programs and the assigned counselors, I had gathered a dedicated community who helped me stay engaged by mapping out my courses, my education interests, provided access to tutoring, mental health services, and a financial grant. Each one of these services helped me to graduate with my BA in Human Development, Women’s Studies from CSUEB within two years. Although I was able to graduate within two years of admission to CSU East, my overall journey to get a bachelor’s degree took three times longer than the average female Black graduate. My educational experience was not linear, traditional, or particularly easy, yet I made it work to the best of my ability and knowledge.

Another advantage I had being an employee and student of The California State University system, was acquiring knowledge about the CSU system and its history. CSU consists of twenty-three different campuses spanning over 800 miles across the state of California, making it the largest educational institution in the United States, as well as being a part of California Public Employee Retirement System (CalPERS), making it the largest public retirement system in the United States. I was proud to be an employee and graduate of this massive one-of-a-kind institution.

When I attended CSUEB banners would outline roads to the campus, the campus courtyards, and the bright red and black campus shuttles. Each banner highlighted a different

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2 The median completion rate for first-time bachelor’s degree recipients for Black females was 58 months according to the National Center for Education Statistics from 2015-2016.
student, their area of study or area of athletics. I felt a sense of pride and validation seeing the different students highlighted across campus, the community and city. Throughout my 19-year journey of higher education I have encountered graduates who did not have celebrity notoriety, but have made positive differences within their respective communities. Although what I have observed after graduating from CSU East Bay are the graduates that are celebrated have some degree of notability, particularly if they are a Black woman\textsuperscript{3}. I would call this the “celebrity graduate”, or what CSU notes as the “outstanding alumni”. In reviewing what CSU considers the outstanding graduate, I quickly noticed the lack of recognition of Black female graduates. Of course, this could be the result of the unavailability or the lack “outstanding” Black female alumni, however, here are some examples of a Black celebrity graduates, across all identifiable spectrums from the CSU chancellor outstanding alumni website:

- **Willie Brown**\textsuperscript{4}
  
  First African American mayor for city and county of San Francisco
  
  San Francisco State University - Bachelor of Art Political Science - Class of 1955

- **Yvonne Cagle**\textsuperscript{5}
  
  NASA astronaut - one of only four females in NASA’s history
  
  San Francisco State University - Bachelor of Art Biochemistry - Class of 1981

- **Ryan Coogler**\textsuperscript{6}

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\textsuperscript{3} The term Black and African American are used interchangeably in this thesis and oral histories. “Black” and “African American” are frequently used to describe people having African heritage, however not all individuals who may be considered as Black or African Americans identify in those ways.

\textsuperscript{4} https://www.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/alumni/made-in-the-csu/san-francisco/Pages/brown.aspx

\textsuperscript{5} https://www.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/alumni/made-in-the-csu/san-francisco/Pages/cagle.aspx

\textsuperscript{6} https://www.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/alumni/made-in-the-csu
Film Director/Writer

Sacramento State University - Bachelor of Science in Business Administration/Finance - Class of 2007

- Earl Gales Jr
  CEO and chairman of Jenkin/Gales & Martinez, Inc.

  Cal Poly Pomona - Bachelor of Science - Class of 1972

- Alicia Garza
  Cofounder of Black Lives Matter movement

  San Francisco State University - Master Ethnic Studies - Class of 2017

- James Monroe Iglehart
  Genie Broadway Cast of Disney’s Aladdin

  California State University, East Bay - Bachelor of Art Theatre - Class of 1998

- Lauren Ridloff
  Actress

  California State University, Northridge - Bachelor of Art English - Creative Writing - Class of 2001

There are many more examples of outstanding CSU alumni across an array of identities and disciplines. The point in highlighting the above noted graduates is two-fold; first, to highlight that CSU does recognize celebrity graduates on a grander scale. Second, a graduate

7 https://www.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/alumni/made-in-the-csu
8 https://develop.sfsu.edu/alicia-garza-speech
10 https://www.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/alumni/made-in-the-csu/northridge/Pages/lauren-ridloff.aspx
does not need to reach the status of celebrity to justify obtaining a higher education or to get the best experience from their education. My interest in compiling oral histories started with my own personal experiences in higher education, being a first-generation college graduate and the void of seeing local stories positive or otherwise at a peer level in High School and from other CSU female college graduates. Community, engagement, and resources are crucial for success in higher education, but so are personal qualities like resilience, self-motivation, and a growth mindset because these qualities help one navigate challenges, endure adversity, and actively seek out learning and growth opportunities. Furthermore, as a Black female CSU graduate, myself, I wanted to gather oral histories from other Black female CSU graduates to affirm their stories and experiences with the aspiration of highlighting the strong fabric that Black CSU female graduates have created in our local communities. Since CSU is the largest educational institution in the United States, I argue that sharing and understanding lived peer experiences through a historical optic from this substantial educational system, assists in highlighting the student’s experience, identifies gaps, and provides a road map forward to help future Black female students and subsequently all students. Lastly, it is my ambition that the benchmark to highlight a Black female graduate from CSU’s will not rely on the criterion of fame.
Literature Review

The function driving this literature review is to use a qualitative method from the oral histories exploring standard\textsuperscript{11} Black female graduate experiences. These oral histories provide insight on why the graduates chose to attend a California State University, their experiences as a student and post-graduation. I will not be using quantitative methods, such as statistics and other forms of numerical data to analyze or interpret the findings from the oral histories or within the literature reviews. I recognize that analyzing data over time is important to identify trends, understand patterns and evaluate performance, however given over the past few years that data could have been skewed due varying factors such as COVID-19, and the financial crises. Instead, qualitative information from feminist scholars, the oral histories, and my personal experiences over the course of my 19 plus year journey as a student will be used in a nuanced approach to provide an alternative angle to understand the experiences of Black female graduates from the CSU system. I would like to bring to the forefront a different method to learn about the Black female education experience. In my opinion, learning directly from Black female graduates can have a more personal meaning and provide understanding and reasons behind the numerical data. By amplifying disadvantaged voices and gathering cross-generational knowledge, the oral history approach adds to Black feminist histories. By emphasizing the experiences and viewpoints of Black women\textsuperscript{12} and highlighting their unique problems and

\textsuperscript{11} The term \textit{standard} relating to the Black female graduate implies a graduate who has not been recognized in the outstanding manner as noted by the CSU system.

\textsuperscript{12} The terms "woman", "women" and "female" are used interchangeably. This decision is made to acknowledge and encompass individuals who identify as a woman, as well as those who are assigned female at birth. The aim is to ensure inclusivity and recognize the diverse range of experiences and identities within this thesis.
accomplishments, it challenges prevailing narratives. The connection of race, gender, and other facets of identity in the lives of Black women is another topic covered by oral history. Oral history helps us comprehend Black feminist histories more thoroughly by bridging gaps in the historical record. What's so Special about Women? Women’s Oral History, Sherna Gluck makes the case that in order to preserve women's history, one must utilize an oral history model that incorporates inquiries on a variety of women's lives, such as clothes, physical activity, menstruation, childbirth, and the household's economic duties. The exclusion of these women's issues from the historical record has been made common for centuries by the male-centric perspective through which history has been narrated. Gluck highlights the significance of acknowledging women's experiences and encouraging interaction amongst women of various generations. Gluck contends that by creating an oral history model, we may correct the omission of women's difficulties in the past and make their stories more prominent. Considering the backdrop of college education, it is crucial to recognize the significance of validating women's experiences and promoting communication among women from different generations. As Gluck highlights, this process enables the discovery of our own roots and fosters the development of a sense of continuity that has been historically denied to us in traditional historical anecdotes. By incorporating the voices and experiences of women, college students can gain a deeper understanding of their own histories and the contributions of women throughout time. This inclusive approach to education helps to bridge the gaps in our knowledge and provides a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the past. Potential and current CSU students
deserve to understand they can curate their own college experiences without feeling they have to live up to a certain academic regimen or standard, based on the CSU outstanding alumni criteria or numerical data, but to review personal experiences that may not otherwise be highlighted or accounted for. This is crucial because by allowing for a more thorough investigation that extends beyond the celebrity graduate, oral histories permit the inclusion of Black women's stories within the CSU system. By providing first-person stories and personal experiences that are frequently missing from traditional research, these narratives oppose and challenge the prevailing literature on Black women in higher education. A more accurate and inclusive representation of Black women in higher education can be achieved by centering the voices and perspectives of Black women in the CSU system through oral histories. This will help to create a more nuanced and thorough understanding of their experiences, challenges, accomplishments, and resilience.

Along with positive experiences, I recognize that Black women have faced distinctive challenges and various forms of oppression within higher education. These experiences have been captured by many feminist scholars and are noted from the three oral histories. While I can not elaborate on all of the written works from these scholars, my focus will be concise by reviewing a trinary of themes, community, engagement and resources. The more that is understood about Black female graduates from a personal perspective, the more we can change structured systems to work for all marginalized groups, as well as bringing attention to these groups by learning from the gaps of their lived experiences.

**Community**

Feminist scholars have contributed significant insights into the idea of community in higher education, arguing that it should be viewed as an essential part of academic life,
particularly for Black women and other marginalized groups who have historically been excluded within academic spaces. bell hooks emphasized the importance of creating inclusive and supportive learning communities that empower students from diverse backgrounds. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, hooks identified a gap at the university where she was teaching as a graduate student. hooks mentioned, “…I taught my own courses using African American Literature and African American women's stuff just because I was interested in doing that and there was a student body willing to take those courses.” (hooks, 1994, 134). In this example bell hooks used her own desire to teach about a specific topic and filled a gap that was unbeknownst to her and the students in which she taught that led to a positive result.

Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins writes in her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* about the value of community for women of color, especially Black women, in higher education. Collins makes the case that creating strong networks and collaborations can offer vital support, resources, and chances for both personal and professional advancement while traditional academic institutions can be alienating and excluding for underrepresented groups. “Black women intellectuals have laid a vital analytical foundation for a distinctive standpoint on self, community, and society and, in doing so, created a multifaceted, African-American women’s intellectual tradition” (Hill Collins, 2009, 3). Higher education is pertinent to different points of view because they influence the experiences and perspectives of students, instructors, and staff at the institution. A faculty member or staff member from a varied background may contribute a fresh perspective to their teaching, research, or service creating a subsequential community as in the example of bell hooks. As an additional
illustration, students from underrepresented groups may have distinctive viewpoints that are influenced by their experiences with marginalization and prejudice. These unique viewpoints should be acknowledged and valued in higher education since they can enhance the learning environment for all participants, hence creating communities. This may entail fostering a more welcoming and inclusive campus culture, offering assistance and resources to students from underrepresented groups, and actively seeking out and maintaining professors and staff members with varied backgrounds. Institutions of higher learning also have a duty to engage in critical research and dialogue that considers the various and intersecting perspectives of persons within the institution. This may entail investigating the ways that privilege and power are exercised in higher education and striving to confront and address the imbalances that exist. A greater understanding and appreciation of other perspectives on oneself, the community, and society can improve the educational experience for everyone involved in higher education and help to build a more just and equitable society.

Deborah K. King explores the experiences of Black women in higher education as well as the ways that community and collective identification may strengthen marginalized people and groups in her paper *Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology.*" King contends that racism and sexism are just two of the many types of oppression that Black women endure, and that these forms combine to give rise to distinctive marginalization experiences. She pushes that Black women can reject these types of oppression and establish their power within academic institutions by embracing their community and collective identity. For the growth of a Black feminist ideology, which she characterizes as a "multiple consciousness" (King, 1988, 72) that arises from the experiences of Black women,
King encounters that strong communities and networks are crucial. The shared hardships and experiences of Black women, as well as the diversity of these experiences, serve as the foundation of this collective awareness. The commitment of academic institutions to give top priority to the creation of community-building projects that concentrate the perspectives and experiences of underrepresented groups, particularly Black women. She adds that these activities can take a variety of shapes, including mentoring programs, support networks, and group research projects. Overall, King highlights the value of community and collective identity for the empowerment of Black women in higher education. For more inclusive and empowering academic institutions, strong networks and communities that highlight the opinions and experiences of excluded groups are a must.

One of the key arguments made by Black feminist scholars is that community should not be seen as a static, but rather as a dynamic and diverse set of relationships that are continually evolving. This means that community must be actively cultivated and nurtured, particularly through practices of care, empathy, and solidarity. Black feminist scholars also emphasize the importance of creating spaces within higher education that are inclusive, welcoming, and supportive of diverse perspectives and experiences. This means not only promoting diversity and inclusion within academic departments and institutions, but also challenging the dominant norms and values of the academy itself. The importance of collective action and activism within academic communities is vital. Feminist scholars argue that academics have a responsibility to engage in social justice work both within and outside of the academy, and that this work is critical to building a more just and equitable society. Overall, Black feminist scholars offer a nuanced and insightful perspective on the importance of community within higher education,
emphasizing the need to cultivate inclusive and supportive spaces that are responsive to the needs and experiences of diverse individuals and groups.

**Engagement**

Community and engagement are closely linked pivotal tools in higher education. bell hooks states in *Teaching to Transgress* that education should be a transformative process that gives students the tools they need to question and alter established power structures. Instead of only imparting knowledge to students, hooks emphasizes the value of engaging with them as full persons. hooks define engagement as establishing a learning atmosphere that is welcoming, participative, and respectful of all viewpoints. The "Engaged Pedagogy" chapter contains one particular example. In this chapter, hooks makes a case that appreciating the many experiences and viewpoints that students bring to the classroom is a crucial component of engaged pedagogy. hooks says:

"To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.” (hooks, 1994, 13).

In this passage, hooks made a case that teaching is more than just imparting knowledge; it also involves cultivating a learning atmosphere that is encouraging, nurturing, and appreciative of students as individuals. She focuses on the significance of acknowledging the sacredness of
teaching and the duty that instructors have to take care of their students' intellectual and spiritual development.

Audre Lorde makes a case that silence is detrimental to engagement. This is developed by Audre Lorde in her article, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,". Lorde discusses how oppression may be facilitated by silence and how speaking up is essential for both individual emancipation and societal progress. Remaining silent can lead to systemic injustice as well as self-imposed oppression. The value of participation and action and speaking out on a subject is not sufficient by itself; action must also be taken. According to Lorde, genuine activism entails not only speaking out against injustice but also actively trying to alter the structures that support oppression. Involvement and action are essential for societal and personal transformation. "It is vitally necessary for each of us to establish or examine her function in that transformation and to recognize her role as vital within that transformation," the author adds. "In the transformation of silence into language and action" (Lorde, 1977, 304). Lorde is of the opinion that each of us must speak out and act in order to contribute to the development of a more just and equitable society.

Community and engagement are intertwined in higher education. In the TED Talk, *The Urgency of Intersectionality*, Kimberlé Crenshaw stressed the importance of emphasizing the experiences and viewpoints of oppressed people in social justice work more generally. Although the significance of involvement in advancing social justice and meeting the needs of underrepresented populations inside higher education is not specifically discussed in Crenshaw's talk, she emphasizes the significance of acknowledging the varied experiences and viewpoints of
marginalized communities as well as the importance of listening to and learning from those who are most affected by these issues. Crenshaw states in her talk,

“When facts do not fit within the available frames, people have a difficult time incorporating new facts into their way of thinking about a problem…because there are not frames for us to see them, no frames for us to remember then, no frames for us to hold them. Why does a frame matter? Without frames to allow us to see how social problems impact all members of a targeted group, many will fall through the cracks” (Crenshaw, 2016, 3:22).

A concise and engaging framework for the issues at hand is necessary for effective community participation in higher education. This entails laying up a specific plan for change and organizing people around it, whether the goal is to advance diversity and inclusion, deal with student loan debt, or increase access to higher education. A compelling and unambiguous framework aids in creating a sense of urgency and a common goal surrounding the issue, which can be essential for rallying support and enacting change. In addition, a feeling of relatedness and connection between individuals and groups is necessary for community engagement. This entails acknowledging the various viewpoints and life experiences of community members and developing connections based on mutual respect and trust. Recognizing the shared responsibility that all community members have for fostering good change and collaborating to address problems that affect the entire community is another aspect of relatedness. Community involvement in higher education can take a variety of shapes, such as service-learning initiatives, community-based research projects, and collaborations between academic institutions and
student-based organizations. A clear framework for the issues at hand and a sense of relatedness and connection among people and groups are necessary for effective community participation because these factors can serve to foster trust, rally support, and spur positive change.

Community and engagement are the creation of venues where people can gather to learn, grow, and work toward shared objectives, as well as the promotion of a feeling of community among students, teachers, and staff, are vital functions of colleges and universities. Higher education must, however, place a priority on participation outside of campus boundaries if it is to have a real impact on society and address the problems affecting our communities. This entails forming strong relationships with neighborhood organizations, paying attention to the wants and needs of local residents, and cooperating to overcome social and economic inequities. Higher education may be a strong agent for good change and help to create a more just and equitable society by emphasizing both community and engagement.

Resources

Resources in higher education are the ribbons that encompasses student’s success. The value of resources for Black women who want to pursue higher education cannot be amplified enough. There are a variety of tools that are essential for assisting Black women in their academic success. These resources might include programs for mentorship, advising, social networks, information and resource access, tutoring, childcare, inclusive curriculum and pedagogy, and assistance with overall well-being are some of these resources. They can also include financial assistance, such as loans (with reasonable terms and conditions), grants, and scholarships, to help overcome the financial obstacles that frequently prevent people from accessing higher education. Black women are frequently underrepresented in higher education,
and they encounter a variety of difficulties and impediments that can delay their academic performance without proper resources. These difficulties range from prejudice, financial constraints, a lack of access to social support systems, and cultural bias in the curriculum. Access to a variety of services and support networks in order to tackle these issues is key.

Supportive mental health networks and treatments that are culturally sensitive as these resources can provide them a feeling of belonging at a time when they may feel alone or ostracized. These resources, according to feminist scholars, are crucial for addressing the particular difficulties that Black women have in higher education and making sure that they have the assistance and resources they need for success. The criticalness for support in higher education not only applies for the success of Black women, but also for the development of society at large. Higher education enables Black women to address the structural inequities and obstacles they encounter in their communities and advance social justice and equality.

A study by Lori D. Patton and Shaun R. Harper, titled "Mentoring Relationships Among African American Women in Graduate and Professional Schools," appeared in the Journal of College Student Development in 2003. The success of African American women in graduate and professional programs is examined in the article, along with the qualities and advantages of successful mentoring relationships. In order to establish essential themes about mentoring, Patton and Harper drew on interviews with African American women enrolled in graduate and professional programs. These themes included the value of emotional support, the sharing of experiences, and the availability of opportunities and resources. Although this article mainly focused on the experiences of graduate students, the recommendations for resources seamlessly can apply to undergraduate students. In the article, Patton and Harper advise, “African American
graduate women must be willing to reach out to African American female faculty and administrators, both within and beyond their department” (Patton, Harper, 2003, 75). Mentors “do not have to be of the same race or gender as their mentees; however, they must be aware of the politics of difference. Furthermore, considering that trust issues tend to be a significant barrier, it is important that culturally different faculty and staff members ensure confidentiality when mentoring African American women” (Patton, Harper, 2003, 75).

Financial aid is an imperative part of higher education, whether it is obtained through scholarships, grants, working through college, a student’s parents, loans or by other means. Financial barriers can be a serious obstacle for Black female students pursuing higher education. Ensuring that students have the resources they need to thrive can be achieved by offering financial aid and scholarships that are particularly focused on supporting the needs of Black women. However, is financial aid the broken bridge to access college? That is argued in the article, “Financial Aid: A Broken Bridge to College?” While this article expresses many issues with the financial aid process for college students and their parents, one problem that is worth mentioning is the financial aid process and its complexity. According to the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, students and their families are dismayed and confused by the financial aid form. “An American Council on Education study found that 850,000 students who would have been eligible for federal financial aid in 2000 did not complete the necessary forms to receive such aid” (Bridget, T. L., & Riley, E. 2007).

Essentially, all of the resources mentioned previously share a common background connection, which include, but are not limited to the following:
• Inclusive and intersectional perspectives: Urges instructors to include different viewpoints and experiences while challenging prevailing narratives and power systems. It places a strong emphasis on intersectionality, acknowledging how race, class, and sexual orientation are all tied to gender in society.

• Empowering the student voice while creating safe and supportive learning spaces: Strives to provide interactive learning environments that support students' life experiences and give them voice. It honors student input, stimulates discussion, and fosters analytical and critical thinking so every student feels supported, respected, and cherished. It acknowledges the emotional components of learning and fosters care and wellbeing in the educational setting.

• Investigating knowledge and praxis: Demonstrates the significance of integrating theory and practice. By addressing gender inequality and other forms of social injustice, it encourages students to apply their knowledge to practical situations and participate in social change initiatives.

By allowing students access to the resources they need for college, educational institutions can establish a climate that supports students' academic and personal growth by giving them access to the resources they require for college. This includes establishing comprehensive mental health services to address students' well-being, offering financial aid and scholarships to remove financial obstacles, promoting inclusive curriculum and pedagogy that reflects various viewpoints, and developing supportive networks to foster a sense of belonging. Greater equity and opportunities for all students will result from acknowledging the importance of resources in higher education and actively striving to close any disparities, enabling them to thrive and
prosper in their academic endeavors. However, “it is certainly the case that responsibility for diversity and equality is unevenly distributed…if diversity and equality work is less valued by organizations, then to become responsible for this work can mean to inhabit institutional spaces that are also less valued” (Ahmed, 2012, 4). This suggests that how diversity and equality work is assigned and viewed inside an organization depends on the value that it is given. Those who take on this role may find themselves inhabiting positions inside the institution that are themselves undervalued or marginalized if an organization does not place a high importance on diversity and equality efforts. The allocation of resources may be impacted by the unequal distribution of responsibilities for diversity and equality work in higher education, with underprivileged groups possibly receiving fewer resources to promote their academic performance. Limited access to financial aid, mentorship programs, scholarships, and other forms of support can cause disparities to persist and impede the academic success of students who are underrepresented in certain fields. Resource allocation and support for projects aimed at increasing inclusion and equity in higher education may also be influenced by the recognition and value of those involved in diversity and equality activities. The ultimate goal is to ensure that higher education continues to be a transforming and uplifting experience for students from all backgrounds by making a commitment to provide necessary resources.
Chapter 1: Oral Histories

As fore-mentioned there are many examples of CSU graduates who have been recognized for their great accomplishments and contributions to our society. While it is certainly noteworthy to recognize such graduates, I would like to offer a different perspective of a CSU graduate, in which the CSU has not assigned recognition creating a celebrity graduation based on their own criterion. Black female graduates or any graduate that accomplishes completing a 4+ year degree is an accomplishment in-and-of itself. Upon graduation, most CSU graduates go on to live what most of us would consider nominal careers and lives. These CSU graduates, in particular Black Female graduates, get lost in the shuffle of everyday life. Black female graduates should be celebrated and recognized for their contributions to our societies along with the outstanding or “celebrity” graduates.

Without the work and contributions of our Black female graduates, and every graduate, much of our social systems would not operate or function with ease. The excerpts of the following interviews represent three of the twenty-three (23) CSU campuses. The entirety of these interviews is located in the appendices. Experts from the interviews have been delineated to align with the three themes of community, engagement and resources. The women I interviewed I either know personally, or were referred to me. The interviewees were encouraged to share as much as they were comfortable with about their experiences from their respective California State University, and post-graduation.
Interview One

Frances Joanne Gholson Nelson was recommended to me by a friend and former colleague who is Frances Nelson’s daughter. Nelson graduated from CSU Hayward (East Bay) in 1972 with a Bachelors of Arts in Criminal Justice. She attended CSU when the institution was in the first stages of admitting Black students. She then went on to obtain four additional degrees with her final degree in Doctorate of Education from University of San Francisco. Frances Nelson embodies the definition of determination in her pursuit of higher education.

Now retired, Frances Nelson has always had a love and joy for reading. She used to read with a flashlight at night so as to not to disturb her sister she shared a room with, reading material in which she states, “...bad stuff I shouldn’t have been reading”.

Frances Nelson created community and network with her professors, other parents in school and her work environment. Nelson would often have her kids in tow in class. She was always a few minutes early to class and made sure they had their snacks and toys to keep them entertained while not disturbing the professor’s instruction. Nelson recalled in one instance the professor came to her on the last day and said “I just want to tell you Mrs. Nelson, you have the nicest well-mannered kids. The mere fact that you kept coming to class no matter what, you have never been absent, you bring your children and they are well mannered kids. I just admire the fact you really want to get your degree and grade.” She mentioned in confusion that she doesn’t understand know why some professors are so unkind if students have to bring their kids to class. She knows it can be hard for some people because a lot women in her age group tell her why they couldn’t finish their degree, because “I had a kid”, and couldn't do this. Nelson continued
with, “That’s just life, that’s just the way it goes. We do what we have to do. If you have a desire
to get through, just work it the best way you can to get through. Because it will all be over and
just look back on it…when I look back, it wasn’t as difficult as I thought. But at the time I was
doing it, it seemed like that, but it’s not. You are doing something for yourself and for your
children too.”

From personal experience, I can attest to this. While I was in community college and
obtaining my undergrad degree, there were students who did not have an option but to bring their
kid(s) to class. Sometimes the instructor was sympathetic to the students’ situation and other
times, I witnessed the student being asked to leave because they had their child with them. The
reason being, the school does not carry insurance for children to be on campus. As Patricia Hill
Collins makes the case that creating strong networks and collaborations can offer vital support,
resources, and chances for both personal and professional advancement, ultimately, empowering
students to confront oppressive structures and contribute to transformational change in society
and academia.

Nelson stayed engaged in her higher education by taking courses in the evening and or in
the summer. When she started working and had her kids, she could not take classes during the
day because she was working. She also made sure she did not waste her time. On the first day of
her classes, she decided if she was going to stay in that class. She used the school catalogs
religiously and followed them during the years at her respective institutions. By following the
school catalog for her enrollment year, it got her through the program in an engaged manner
which allowed her to stay focused and on track. She also stated that she had to be careful about
time management, as she had to make scarifies in terms of friends, going out and taking trips.
She did what she could with her family and children because she didn’t want her kids to suffer and miss out on their development. Anyone can find it difficult to stay focused in college, but women who have children may find it more difficult for a variety of reasons, especially Black women. Financial limitations, a lack of affordable high-quality childcare options, societal expectations, stereotypes about motherhood, lack of institutional support and resources tailored specifically to the needs of student-parents are some of the factors that can make it challenging. Other factors that can make it challenging include the added responsibilities of childcare and managing the demands of both academics, parenting and employment. It may be difficult to retain focus and strike a balance between these three obligations. Due to these aspects, it can potentially lead to increase stress, time limits, and emotional demands. hooks made a case that teaching is more than just imparting knowledge; it also involves cultivating a learning atmosphere that is encouraging, nurturing, and appreciative of students as individuals. I would argue this is more so the case when a student also has a child or children and maintains employment.

**Interview Two**

I was introduced to the second interviewee, Jennifer Maxwell, through my sister-in-law. Jennifer graduated from San Francisco State University in 2007 with a Bachelor of Art in Criminal Justice. Jennifer had a unique experience entering SFSU, and serves as a strong example of making college a personal experience.

While Jennifer Maxwell did not provide any specific examples of community during our conversation, she utilized her familial community in choosing to go to SFSU because most her
family grew up in San Francisco and she was the only member of her family who had yet to live there.

Maxwell was engaged with her passion of technology, but quickly realized after her first class in coding, that it was something she did not want to do for the rest of her life. She knew she was going to be using computers at work in some capacity so she found something else that she was interested in. At the same time, she was really engaged with crime scene investigation (CSI), forensic and criminal law, so she decided to change her major from computer science to criminal justice. This was an important decision in Maxwell’s college career as it saved her time, kept her engaged with going to school and on track to graduate, as she had a unique path because of the high school she went to. Maxwell’s high school experience consisted of both high school and college components. As such, upon enrolling at San Francisco State, she entered as a junior instead of starting as a freshman, enabling her to finish college in two and a half years. Maxwell is an exceptional outlier when it comes to Black women entering college ahead of the curve. 52.6% of Black women ages 18-19 enroll into college compared to Asians at 77.0% and Whites at 56.2%\(^\text{13}\).

Maxwell provided resource gems in terms of going to college. She stated: “one could go from community college or a state school to take a course to give you an introduction to another level. It is okay to not know what you are going to do when you go to college. Your classes, experience and even your major can change. School affords you the opportunity to try things out. It is not ideal to constantly change because it costs money to try

\(^{13}\) https://familyinequality.wordpress.com/2016/06/10/black-women-really-do-have-high-college-enrollment-rates-at-age-25/
things out, but it does afford you the opportunity to try things out if you need to switch what you want to learn”.

In hindsight, she believes that it was advantageous for her to have had that experience. Maxwell realized early on school is a resource in-and-of-itself and was flexible with herself to make sure she enjoyed her experience. By remaining flexible in college, students that come from a variety of backgrounds may have particular duties and circumstances. Colleges can accommodate unique situations like employment commitments, family obligations, or health difficulties by providing flexible choices. Students can mix their academic goals with other responsibilities. Flexibility also acknowledges the various learning preferences and styles of students. By giving students the choice of online courses, self-paced study, or alternate delivery modalities, educators may better meet each student's needs. Furthermore, by allowing students to select courses and programs that suit their interests and professional objectives, flexibility promotes exploration and customization. Additionally, it enables students to adjust to unforeseen occurrences and shifting situations without having such setback their academic progress. In general, a flexible approach in college fosters inclusion, aids student achievement, and equips students for a dynamic and always changing environment.

**Interview Three**

My final interview was with my daughter’s preschool teacher, Ms. Simoné Utsey. Ms. Simoné graduated from San José State University in 1994 with a Bachelor in Health Science. Ms. Simoné’s CSU experience is an example of a well-rounded college tenure.
Ms. Simoné was able to build her community at San José State, by becoming a part of the Divine Nine, Delta Sigma Theta in her second year of college. Being in a sorority was challenging in navigating personal space, but it taught her and her fellow sorority sisters a bond, and 30 years later they are still very close. Black sororities have a membership of nearly a quarter of a million women, and that figure is rising every year. These women make a lifelong commitment to defend the lofty principles of activism, public service, education, and integrity while carrying on the tradition of creating social capital. Ms. Simoné emphasized that is very important to get connected with someone or something going in “your” direction. I can attest to this, as finding mentors and programs within community college and at CSU helped me reach my ultimate goal of graduation.

Ms. Simoné shared a story of an African American studies professor who kept their students engaged in their class by being inclusive. She mentions that this particular professor would address students in a respectful manner by their last name, particularly if they did not complete their homework. The manner in which the professor would question the students about their homework, would prompt the student to come to the next class and subsequent classes prepared and ready to engage in class discussions. The approach from Ms. Simoné’s professor made for respectful, harmonious class interactions, while placing the responsibility of homework back onto the student without shame or guilt while promoting class engagement. As Ms. Simoné states, “it was always respectful, he never called you out, and his class was full every semester”.

Professors are responsible for treating all students with respect, especially students of color, in

14 https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/african-american-sororities
order to promote a welcoming atmosphere for learning, support student success, address systemic disparities, and serve as role models for respectful behavior. It promotes psychological safety and a sense of worth, which improves motivation and academic success. By treating every student with respect, instructors promote equity and trust in the classroom and act as great role models for their students.

Financial aid is an important resource in higher education. Frances Nelson worked her way through college, Jennifer Maxwell had assistance from her father in paying for college and Ms. Simoné had the assistance of Robert Clark. Robert Clark worked at the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at SJSU and showed Ms. Simoné’s mother how to maneuver the financial system to qualify for financial aid in lawful manner. This is one of the most important resources in attending college and one of biggest barriers not only for Black female students but other students as well. Like France Nelson, I also worked my way through college. There were times that I was able to obtain financial aid and there were times where I did not qualify, in which I had to pay for college out-of-pocket, which was not easy. As I am currently pursuing a graduate degree while raising a child, I applied for financial aid, but did not qualify. Aware of the long-term ramifications, I opted against taking out student loans due to the lasting burden loans would impose on me post-graduation. If more students had resource such as Robert Clark to traverse the complicated financial aid process, students could better grasp the options accessible to them, such as scholarships, grants, and loans, and successfully navigate the application process by receiving advice and help. What I also appreciate about Ms. Simoné sharing about her experience with financial aid which is not typical, is she had a direct contact. Based on my personal experience and the experiences of many of my fellow student colleagues, it
is rare to successfully reach someone in the financial aid office, particularly during the COVID pandemic, or to consistently receive accurate information regarding financial aid. For example, I had a particular frustrating encounter with financial aid during my time as a graduate student at SFSU. I contacted the Financial Aid office to inquire about tuition fees for services I do not use on campus, such as the recreation services fee and the health services fee. I inquired if those fees could be removed from my tuition because I do not utilize the recreation services and I maintain my own health insurance through my employer. Financial aid instructed me that the Bursar’s Office could remove the fees and I would need to speak with them. I contacted the Bursar’s Office and was then informed I had to send an email to the Dean of Students and Student Affairs. After sending multiple emails and subsequently making additional phone calls as a result of not receiving a response to my emails, two months later I eventually received an email from the Dean Students informing me the fees could not be removed, and if I needed financial assistance the school has, “a good Basic Needs program called Food+Shelter+Success that helps many students on campus.” The response from the Dean of Students left me utterly offended. The insinuation that I could not meet my basic needs was deeply degrading and filled me with a sense of shame. Moreover, the abundance of misinformation, lack of information, and delayed responses I encountered only exacerbated the situation, resulting in a significant waste of time. While I understood the fees might not be waived, what baffled me was the excessive amount of time to receive a response and the frustrating run-around I endured for two whole months. Such a level of service and interaction can swiftly demoralize students, deterring them from pursuing their educational journey or even seeking assistance in the future out of fear of further humiliation. I believe it is crucial for CSU system and other universities to prioritize financial aid
for students due to its potential to yield several benefits, such as enhanced student retention rates. Financial aid plays a pivotal role in ensuring that students can focus on their studies without constant worry of financial constraints.

In order to provide welcoming environments for Black female students and advance anti-racist and feminist ideals in higher education, it is important that students have the option to decline paying for services they do not use. First, the choice to opt out acknowledges that students have a variety of needs and goals, enabling them to allocate resources in accordance with their particular situations. This recognizes the potential financial difficulties of students, particularly those from disadvantaged families. Second, colleges can assist or possibly eliminate financial barriers in connection with tuition fees and support fair access to education by giving students this option. In the case of Black female students, the option to opt out of fees acknowledges the concurrent challenges they may encounter, such as systemic racism and gender-based discrimination. Third, it empowers these students to assert their agency in navigating their educational experiences and makes higher education institutions more responsive to their specific needs. By actively considering the experiences and concerns of Black female students, colleges can take steps towards creating more inclusive and supportive environments. The concept of free college, or at least reducing financial barriers to education, aligns with anti-racist and feminist principles. Higher education institutions play a crucial role in perpetuating or dismantling systemic inequalities. By offering free college, institutions can challenge the financial disparities that disproportionately impact marginalized communities, including Black women. It can help level the playing field, promote equal access to educational opportunities, and address historical inequities that have limited the advancement of
marginalized groups. By prioritizing these principles, colleges can create more welcoming and empowering spaces for the Black CSU female students and subsequently students across all higher education institutions.

In addition to the concept of free college, financial assistance not only lessens the stress and tension related to the procedure but also lowers the possibility of mistakes or delays that can have a negative influence on enrollment to the institution. This help boosts their chances of finding the money they need to pay for college and reduce the disruption to register for clases. The application procedure for financial aid may be unfair or contain obstacles that disadvantage underprivileged students more than others. When students from underprivileged backgrounds gain access to the financial resources required to pursue higher education, this can level the playing field in overcoming these obstacles. It encourages a more inclusive and fair educational system and aids in addressing underlying disparities. By extending assistance and guidance through helpful and effective financial aid portals and financial aid counselors, college institutions have the potential to fulfill a vital role in supporting students in surmounting financial obstacles thus helping them achieve their educational goals. Nevertheless, it is imperative to complement these initiatives with tangible examples and success stories highlighting the accomplishments of Black women who have obtained college degrees.

For current and future Black female college students, these three stories are significant sources of inspiration, motivation, and support. The stories demonstrate that obtaining academic achievement is not only feasible, but also a realistic possibility. Real-world examples aid in dispelling unfavorable prejudices, preconceptions, and low expectations that may be held towards Black women who want to pursue a higher education or those who are in higher
education. These stories prove that Black women are capable, tenacious, and deserving of equal chances in higher education by highlighting the accomplishments and experiences of Black women who have overcome challenges, succeeded academically, and attained their goals. They serve to inspire people to believe in themselves and pursue success by showcasing the power and intellect. By highlighting diversity, inclusivity, and the dismantling of obstacles, these stories support the representation and visibility of Black women in academia. The significance of real-life examples rests in the capacity to encourage Black women who are pursuing higher education to empower them, and to instill a feeling of possibility. They serve to inspire people to believe in themselves and pursue success by demonstrating the power, intellect, and potential of Black women students.
Conclusion

Higher education is more accessible than ever in many ways. For several groups, especially Black women, there are still considerable discrepancies in access, opportunity, and outcomes. When it comes to entering and thriving in higher education, Black women confront many obstacles, including financial, racial and gender discrimination, a lack of representation, and a lack of resources. However, as demonstrated through the oral interviews, I believe there are many more examples of Black women who have made positive experiences out of their education, through a sense of community, engagement, and access to resources. Higher education through the CSU system has enabled Black women to address the structural inequities and obstacles they encounter in their communities and advance social justice and equality.

For Black women pursuing higher education, having a sense of community is crucial. Peers, mentors, allies, organizations and or clubs are some of the ways that a university can cater to their particular interests. These teams can help students locate like-minded people who share their experiences and objectives, as well as offer emotional support and foster a feeling of community. A diverse set of mentors can help students overcome obstacles and seize opportunities by offering support, encouragement, and guidance. Finding mentors with comparable experiences and backgrounds or those who work in professions that interest them may be beneficial for Black women. Furthermore, allies can play a significant role in building a community for Black women in higher education. Allies are those who stand up for oppressed groups and support them. They can be essential in promoting a sense of recognition, respect, and
worth among Black women. Allies can support Black women in advocating for change and working to build a more welcoming and fair learning environment.

Engagement can take many different forms, including participating in class discussions, going to lectures and events, and looking into research, internship, and community service possibilities. Students who are actively involved in their studies are more likely to find meaning and purpose in their academic work and extracurricular activities. Engagement also has the potential to be an effective strategy for social change. Black feminist academics have long contended that education may be utilized to undermine hierarchies of power and advance social change. Black women who remain active in higher education can foster critical thinking, confront prevailing views, and fight to advance equity and representation in their areas.

Finally, Black women in higher education must have access to resources. These resources can come in many different ways, such as opportunities for professional growth, financial help, and academic support. Black women can excel in their courses and reach their academic goals with the aid of academic support services including tutoring, writing centers, and academic advising. The financial pressures that Black women may have while seeking higher education might be lessened with the use of financial aid, scholarships, grants, high-quality affordable childcare, and access to reasonable and compatible employment while attending a university. The use of mental health services, such as therapy and support groups, can prioritize wellbeing and control their stress and anxiety. Black women can prepare for their future jobs and attain their professional goals with the aid of professional development facilities including career centers, internships, and job placement services that are in alignment with their field of study and
interests. This is a call to action to universities to provide an array of employment opportunities to students beyond just the popular most sought-after fields of employment.

Resources, community, and engagement are all crucial for Black women to succeed in higher education. When it comes to gaining access to and succeeding in higher education, Black women confront particular difficulties and barriers, therefore it's critical that they have the assistance, involvement, and resources they require to overcome these difficulties. Black women can succeed in higher education, accomplish their goals, and contribute to a more inclusive and fair educational system with community, remaining committed to their studies, and gaining access to resources that cater to their particular needs. Black women have historically made important contributions to many different fields and subjects, yet in academic settings, their accomplishments are sometimes disregarded or neglected. Higher education institutions should give Black women's needs and experiences top priority, as they should make all students feel more welcome and supported. By doing this, it can be possible for Black women to succeed in higher education, thrive, and contribute significantly to their fields and communities. The promotion of Black women in higher education is crucial.

Actively seeking out and showcasing the successes of Black women in diverse industries and disciplines is one strategy to address this problem. This can be accomplished by creating curricula, doing research, and giving Black women forums on which to express their perspectives. Institutions of higher education can assist combat harmful stereotypes and advance a more accurate and inclusive understanding of Black women's experiences and contributions by elevating the voices and experiences of Black women. In addition to celebrating Black women's successes, it's critical to provide them with the platforms and chances they need to take charge of
academic communities. This can entail giving them access to mentorship programs, encouraging them to hold executive positions in student organizations, and assisting them in pursuing academic careers. We can support the advancement of equity and social justice both within academic institutions and outside of them by providing an environment that is more encouraging and welcoming for Black women in higher education. In the end, it is critical to understand that Black women's success in higher education is necessary for both individual success and the growth of knowledge and society at large. Graduates can be a celebrity within their communities, places of employment and families. It is important to understand the systems that have worked well for Black female graduates to uplift future students, and continue to embrace, cultivate and utilize the programs that have been instrumental in facilitating a student to a graduate. In doing so, we can uplift the Black female students, and therefore all students.

Exploring and presenting the unique personal stories of Black women who have graduated from the largest public university system in the nation has been an intriguing and a captivating experience. These stories will forever be woven into the California State University records for future knowledge and discussion. All of the esteemed interviewee graduates amazingly pulled resources purely out of their own cognizant to align with their educational goals. This is an admirable skill, that I believe should be celebrated and exemplified on micro and macro levels. Due the parameters of a thesis, there was only so much that could be unpacked from the oral histories. In consideration of that, I would like to reflect on what could be explored in future works from each of the oral histories, what I took way from the three stories, and an area of friction that was unraveled along the way.
In any future work related to this thesis, I would like to explore the following areas from each interviewee graduate in greater depth:

**Frances Nelson**

- Inequity of pay for female Liberians
- CSU Hayward (East Bay) not providing a particularly welcoming environment for Black students in the 1960’s and 1970’s

**Jennifer Maxwell**

- Obtained a degree that did not afford as many opportunities as initially perceived
- Self-agency in changing degree majors

**Simoné Utsey**

- Opting to engage in employment during college
- Joining a sorority at a CSU

Sharing Black women's experiences in higher education with people of other races encourages empathy, breaks down prejudice, cultivates solidarity, broadens viewpoints, and encourages activism. This helps to create more welcoming and fair learning environments where Black women's experiences are not siloed within their own race. And this is the area of friction that was uncovered during the process of writing this thesis - siloed learning. Being one of the few Black female students in SFSU Women and Gender Studies program, I was encouraged to focus my work on Black women. There is immense value and pride to be able to contribute to the records of Black women’s college experiences in a positive manner. Nevertheless, it dawned on me that the very nature of this thesis, with its exclusive emphasis on Black women, risked creating a sense of isolation, contradicting the theme that resonated the most – community.
Across all three stories, including my own, the pivotal element that launched individuals to progress from student to a successful graduate was the power of community. These communities encompassed familial support, a multitude of diverse backgrounds, races, positions, and statuses. As such, there are various risks associated with siloed learning that is limited by rigid disciplinary boundaries. It restricts students' vantage points and keeps them from being exposed to many points of view and multidisciplinary methods. Innovation is further hampered by siloed learning because ground-breaking concepts frequently come from the blending of various disciplines.

As I approached the interviews, I had no prior knowledge of the graduates’ degrees or their personal experiences within the CSU system. My goal was to capture their stories as organically as possible. The prevalent theme of community highlights the remarkable achievement of the interviewee graduates, who were able to cultivate their own unique communities during their time at CSU. The diverse population within CSU enables a thriving learning environment, and there is much more to be gained from embracing and learning from this diversity. Frances Nelson, Jennifer Maxwell and Simoné Utsey were able to integrate their interests into their education, enabling them to contribute to our communities in essential domains of knowledge preservation through library and information science, the field of healthcare and the field of education. Contributing to these vital areas as a Black CSU female graduate helps make our communities more equitable, inclusive, and identifies gaps. That is what I consider a California State University celebrity graduate.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Frances Joanne Gholson Nelson

Frances Joanne Gholson Nelson

California State University, Hayward (East Bay)

Bachelors of Arts Criminal Justice, Class of 1972

Method of Interview: phone

Interview Location: East Bay, California

Date: December 17, 2022

I started University California, Hayward, 1970 something like that. I graduated in ‘72. I went there to get a degree in early childhood, child development. Getting a BS degree (child development) graduated, also upon graduation, I ended going to the teaching credentialing program at California State University, Hayward to get an elementary credential, and I took 18 units of elementary credential, decided that I would participate in a program, they also had at (University California) Berkeley. I took a class at Berkeley, in this specific program, and I can't remember the name of the program. You could go from community college or state to take a course to give you an introduction to another level. I went to Berkeley, because I was interested in literature. I went to Berkeley and got into the school of librarianship. It was called that at that time. It has a different name now. I think the school of information and technology, something like that. For people who want to go into the library field. For the library field it’s a lot of computer work online. I ended up at the program at Berkeley working on my Master’s of Library Science. Although I had 18 units from elementary ed from Hayward state, when I got to Berkeley
in the master’s degree program what happened is that I wanted to do library work for the schools. I was interested in children’s literature and literacy. I ended up getting accepted into the Department of Education at Berkeley also. So, the same time I was working on a master’s of library science and I was also a person working on a second California teaching credential. In that program I ended up getting a Master’s in Library Science and a secondary teaching credential. I finished my master's in library science in ‘74 or ‘75. Then I started working for the school system and realized at that point that in the library, I would also have to have another person or several people working with me that was a library technician. They are really paraeducators. I was asked several times that I would have to be the evaluator of these people. I decided I didn’t know enough about evaluating people, I didn’t have a background in any of that. I went back over to Hayward State and started working on a Master’s in Public Administration. I also have an MPA (Master’s Public Administration) and my minor in that degree was human resources because you know like human resources, learning how to do management, learning how to do skill sets you would need to supervise people. I finished my Master's of Public Administration in ‘84 because it was around the same time, I found out I was pregnant with my third child, my daughter. I went down to LA; they had an American Library association conference and I went with several other ladies I had been in library school with. We were all working at that time at different schools. One friend working in Vallejo, one friend working in Pittsburgh, I believe, one working in the Oakland school district. At that time, I was working for the Fairfield school district. When we went to the American Library Association, I found out I was pregnant with my third child. I took a little in between that, after I had my daughter. She was about two. I started back working in the school system. My career areas have been in, I have
worked for San Francisco schools, Vallejo school district, Fairfield school district, and I have worked for Vacaville unified school district for which I retired from that one (Vacaville school district) in 2011. I started out looking for work in the area of library science, using my library degree, but what happened at that k-12 level. I had a credential to work in elementary school, middle school and high school, but at the k-12 level, what happens when you end up with budgetary concerns in a school system, the first people that tend to be laid off or gotten rid of are your librarians, your psychologists, your counselors, your school nurses. After that time and realizing I would end up in the mix of the school district deciding they wanted to go on a strike or something like that where I always have to kind of defend, “oh I need to be kept, or whatever”. After finding that out, I decided that although I like working at the k-12 level I was going to find out what was going on at the community college level. I started at Solano Community College as an adjunct librarian in ‘92. I started out 3-days a week. Adjunct is a part-time librarian, work. I worked at Solano college from ‘92 until March 2020. That’s when I stopped. In the meantime, I was also working, I was in the school system and I was working for Vacaville school district, and worked there for 15 years, as I was working at Solano college. The reason why I kept working at Solano college and the public school system is because I also decided I wanted to get a doctorate in Education. The more I got involved in working at k-12 level and at Community College level, I became more and more interested in education. I went over to UCSF and finished up a doctorate in 1999. I have a doctorate in Education also. But I continued to work for the Vacaville school district and for the community college in those positions, because after I got the doctorate, it took me 5 years to pay that loan off. So, I
continued to work at the community college and used that money to pay my loan off. What
degrees, I hold; I hold:

- AA degree in general education, it’s from Merritt College in Oakland and I hold
- BS degree in early childhood development from Hayward State, and I hold a
- Master’s Library Science from UC Berkeley, and a
- Master’s of Public Administration from Hayward State, and a
- Doctorate of Education from University of San Francisco.

Alicia: Wow.

I met my husband in community college. We got married, and then I ended up having two
children, my boys that are older than my daughter. When they were like pre-school and in
elementary school, I was continuing to take courses in school, working on my degrees, because I
had met my husband in college. We ended up dating and getting married and then I just
continued to work on my degrees and he continued to work on his too. He has a doctorate also
from University of San Francisco. He also went to Hayward State and got his Master’s in
Counseling. He has a teaching credential from Berkeley. He always worked as a counselor; he
worked 18 years as a counselor at Benicia High School. He was an assistant principal at Fairfield
High, he was a principal at one Vacaville school district and he was principal at Sacramento
schools. Then he came back to Vallejo schools where he retired from and he was an
administrator at the district level. All the time, I just continued to work on my degrees, even
though I had little children. I would take courses in between, sometime in the summer, sometime
in the evening when I worked on my master’s in public administration from Hayward State, I
used to drive from Fairfield to Hayward State and take a lot of my courses in the evening,
because I couldn’t take them in the daytime because I was working, I had little kids, so I would take those courses and sometimes I would only take two courses, like that. The other thing I think that kind of makes me a little interesting, but to point out this, when I was going to these colleges at the time, I went on the quarter system. The quarter system meant it runs a little faster than a semester. So, when I was going to Hayward, they were on a quarter system, when I was going to Berkeley, it was on a quarter system. Both of these institutions now, because Hayward is East Bay, they are on semester and Berkeley is on semester, so I went during the time they were on the quarter system, and we had so many books we had to read. I think back now on how I was able to do it, as soon as I went into the class, and listened to the professors on that first day and decided I was going to stay in that class, because it was a class I needed, I used the catalog religiously. I followed those catalogs for those years that I was there, you know how your catalog matched that year, and I followed the programs that they listed in the catalog for my particular majors, and I made sure that I had that all mapped out. I had to take exactly what that catalog said would get me through that program, and get that particular degree and in my particular subject area, that’s how I did it. And plus, I was on the quarter system. The only time I have ever gone on a semester system, is when I went to UCSF, first time I had ever been in college on a semester system. I never had before then. It was really a trying experience for me, because I had never gone on a semester system and what I had learned from the quarter system because it was faster, soon as you get into a class, you get your syllabus on the first day, and you decide you are going to stay and not on the waitlist or any of that, you actually got registered in that class, well what happened, I would take that syllabus and go over all midterm paper, midterm tests. How their grading system was set up, whether it was a percentage, or what way weighed more than,
does the final weigh more than the midterm, or does your final paper weigh more. If there was a final paper, I would try and find out from the professors what topics or subjects they were going to accept, and I would start working on my stuff really early. I remember one incident, when I was at Hayward in Master’s of Public Administration, because I used to have to drive up that at night, I had two little boys, and I was taking classes out there, in the summer, I was working for the school district, you know in summer we are off, and the rest of the time I had to kind of finagle it and make sure that the course work I needed being offered in the evening and then I would take it with whatever particular teacher. What happened one time, because I always looked at that syllabus, and mapped out everything and how I was going to try and get through it, for that quarter. I remember one time I turned in a paper that was due, it wasn’t due until like the end of the quarter, but I finished mine half way through the quarter and got out it out of the way, and made sure I met whatever requirements. I turned it into the professor at Hayward. And I remember on that last night the class met, that’s when we were supposed to turn in our papers, everybody was turning in their papers and the instructor or the professor, he was checking off your names, come up and bring your paper, check it off, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, he had all the papers and you put it on his desk, in that little basket thing, and then he would go through and look and call off next. I had blah blah’s paper, I have blah, blah’s paper. He calls everybody’s name and he didn’t call mine. I raised my hand and I said to him, “I turned my paper in”. And it was at the time we used typewriters, and you had to make a copy of everything. I said to him, you know, you didn’t call my name. He said “wait-a-minute”, and he said, I know you have been attending classes, I didn’t have one absence or anything like that, I was there on time or whatever. He went back through the papers, and said, “nah, I don’t have a paper here for you”.
He said, “you sure you turned in a paper? Did you turn it in tonight?”. I said, “no, remember, I turned my paper into you and I gave the date, so lucky, that I used to make copies because you do it on the typewriter, so either I had to use carbon paper, or I had to make copies, because I did it on the typewriter. Well at that time, copies were more expensive than they are now. Davis used to be 5 or 10 cents. I used to go up there and study at their library. They used to be like 25 cents or 15 cents, I can't remember how it was. I said, “well I have a copy of it. I would have to turn you in a copy of it”. I said, “I gave it to you”. You know how you take a class and it’s like two hours, then they give you a little break in between. He said we are going on a break Mrs. Nelson, he said, “I have some more papers over here”. I’m going to look through and see if yours is in there. We went on the break. He looked through it and he found my paper. That was a lesson that I learned that I always make sure I meet deadlines. I was way ahead always, and that’s how I got through all the stuff, it’s really difficult balancing when you have children, and whether you are married or not married, if you are dating, it’s really difficult, and I tell people a lot times, because I have a lot of friends in my age group, said, well Frances, you have all those degrees, you kept doing your degrees you must have had it easier. No, I didn’t have it easier, I don’t look at it like that, but it's just the way you manage time. You have to be real careful about time management, and what you are going to do and lot times you cannot have the friends, you know all the stuff friends like to do, you know, we going to go here, we going to go to a trip here, sometimes you have to eliminate some of that stuff and just do what you can with your family, with your children mainly because main you don’t want your kids to suffer from the fact you are so busying studying you miss some of their development. I think what helped me too, because I had that first second level degree in early childhood, I understood lot, we studied,
Erickson, and we studied, T.I Jay, Dr. Suess, I studied all these people I learned a lot about and I
learned about the different stages of development for children, so it made it a lot easier for me. It
helped me when I actually went into teaching for 15 years, because I understand clearly, that
each child is different and everyone has different learning styles, and you have to keep that in
mind. Even grownups. Some people cannot sit in a classroom and have someone lecture them.
They get turned off. Sometimes you have kids that are really good that can sit there and go home
and do their homework, like that. Then you may have children that need more hands on, and
experience learning through that process. So, I understand very clearly the different learning
styles and recognizing them and it made it easy when I went into teaching, having that skillset.
Now, I’m not going back to school doing anything and don’t want to ever again. So, I wish you
the very best to continue. I took Tiffany with me (Frances’ daughter) when I was working on my
doctorate. I took her to several of my classes, she used to go with me to my classes. Because
sometimes when you take classes on Saturday’s that was horrible, now that I think back on it,
you know. I’m messing up her life, taking her with me to those classes on Saturday. But she
would be in the class. I would always find a chair in the middle, or kind of almost to the back,
where she could sit right next to me. So, she got to see a bunch of different characters. She
probably doesn't remember all that stuff, I don’t know. Bless her little heart. She went with me
when I was working on my doctorate. My sons went with me when I was at Hayward working
on the first degree, I used to take my son to class with me and I would pack lunch for them, and
have snacks. I remember one of my first social one class, I had to take at Hayward. I had an
African American professor. I think the professor I had at Hayward, Dr. Benjamin Carmichael,
he was an African American professor, really nice, sociology, professor. I would bring the two
boys with me and I was always get seat kind of in the back closer so they would not have to walk through while the professor was lecturing. They could walk through the side if they needed to go to the bathroom, and I always showed them where the bathroom was and then, time them, because you can’t trust none of these people in what’s going on now. So, I would time them, if they had to leave quietly to go to the restroom. I had it down packed where we would go on our break and they could go to the bathroom and I could wait outside. They were so quiet, and sometimes they didn’t have a seat. I would give them a seat when everyone didn’t all come to class. But if the class was full, I would have a corner area and they would sit there, and they had their snacks. The professor was really nice, now that I think about it, because I have had people come to me at Solano when I was working the library at Solano, I had students come to me, they had their children with them, and they would come and sit in the library because they got kicked out of class. Because they had a 6-year-old with them. They considered that little library area at Solano, the kids were super sweet, their kids made no noise, they weren’t walking around, nothing. And I remember one lady real clearly, she said, “The professor said I couldn’t bring my child in class. He kicked me out.” I said, “What!” I was in shock. I said, “Are you serious?” And she said, “yeah”. I said that doesn’t make sense, the just child sits there. Now-a-days the kids have those little iPads, and they are playing on them, but when I had my kids, I had brought some little Legos or something like that. My kids never made any noise and these are boys, they never made a noise, just sit there all nicely, wasn’t running in and out, up and down or whatever. I remember the last day and he never said anything to me about it. I was always on time. I didn’t come in late with some kids. I was always there a few minutes early, sat in class, waiting until the professor came because the door was unlocked. He said to me on the last day, I never will
forget it, in that social one class. He said I just want to tell you Mrs. Nelson, you have the nicest well-mannered kids. He said the mere fact that you kept coming to class no matter what you never been absent, you bring your children and they are well mannered kids and he said I just admire the fact you really want to get your degree and grade. I got an A in that class (starts laughing). I don’t know why some professors are so nasty, if the kids aren’t running in and out, what does it matter, you just need to go ahead and teach. But I know it can be hard for some people, because I have a lot women in my age group and I’m talking about we are in our late 70’s and they tell me why they couldn’t finish up their degree because “I had a kid”, and couldn't do this. They say, we don’t know how you did it. I said, well, I don’t know, I can’t tell different people really what to do. I can tell them what happened to me and my experiences were. It is difficult, as far as trying to go to school, you have children, what I call re-entry. At Solano, I used to talk to a lot of ladies that would come to the library and their re-entry ladies. Some had grown kids, some had little kids. When school is out on the breaks, elementary on the days off, they didn’t have anybody to watch their kids so they had to bring their kids to class, and didn’t understand why any professor would get that pushed out of shape about it, you know. That’s just life, that’s just the way it goes. We do what we have to do. If you have a desire to get through, just work it the best way you can to get through. Because it will all be over and just look back on it like, when I look back, it wasn’t as difficult as I thought. But at the time I was doing it, it seemed like that, but it’s not. You are doing something for yourself and for your children too.

Alicia: Oh absolutely. When I talked to you on Thursday, there was a piece you highlighted that I wanted to capture today too. You said, the chair of the community when you were at Berkeley
took you under their wings, Doctor Frances. I (recall) think because the other person had a nervous breakdown and you were talking about pay equity. Can you talk some more about that?

Frances: Oh yeah. Ann Kurton, actually lives (location redacted), I had a friend in that’s another story, but I know which one you are talking about, you talking about my chair on my doctorate, Dr. Frans, because she said she never had a librarian in their program and she was a chair of her department at UCSF of the multicultural ed. She said she had never had a librarian, but one of her best friends was one of a San Francisco public librarian for the public library in San Francisco. She said her friend had a nervous breakdown because the library profession is very racist. It is a very racist profession because the whole idea is this, the librarians are over a collection of information that has been stored in a library that gives the history of basically the rest of society. That’s what we do. We go to the library and take a book; we call them collections. They are different collections. There is science fiction literature, classicals. That profession is a very racist profession. Dr. Anita, when she found out that my area was library science and that I had a master’s from Berkeley in library science, she made sure she helped guide me through. She took me under her wing and made sure I was doing what I was supposed to, to get the dissertation written and done. She did that. One of her best friends who worked for San Francisco public library and she said that lady suffered so much discrimination as a librarian, the lady had a nervous breakdown. I can’t remember the librarian’s name. I used to remember because she really did work for San Francisco public, you know because I looked it all up. I did. I always doing some kind of research. She took me under her wing and she made sure. Because the key when you get into a doctoral program or even your master’s program, you want to find a professor. That professor reads your work and edited it and tells you, you need to write this, you
need to write this paragraph over, where did get this reference from? Where did you get this
information from? How come your abstract is written this way? Everything you have to
document and make sure that it is valid information, because if you don’t, you got these little
messy people, they going to go back, you just made this up, how do we know this information is
ture. She was a chair; she was my chair. She made sure that I got through and did what I was
supposed to. She selected the other people that were on my dissertation doctorate committee. She
selected other professors within USF. I think I had 6 or 9 professors and she was the chair. First,
I had to write a proposal, then I had to do an abstract, then I had to do chapter 1, chapter 2. You
know how it goes.

Alicia: Laughs, yep that’s what I’m doing.

Frances: I’m preaching to the choir telling you this stuff. But I turned it in to her, and made
enough copies and she passed it to the other ones. She read it and made sure like okay, she would
correct stuff and say Frances, you said this, is this a quote, where did you get it from. Then she
looked at my references, because your references are what is so important because whatever your
topic is or subject that you are writing about, you are going to try and find other people that have
already written and provided information on your topic of interest, your subject. Some people
you will find are experts in that area, they are well known, or world renowned, or nationally
renowned and you can use their work, and they have further references, so you can use their
references to go read and find out some more to continue pump up your paper, thesis, or project
or your dissertation that you are trying get finished. That’s the story about Dr. Fran. And I was so
upset, she passed away about 15 years ago, and that was really heartfelt, I felt really bad, you
know, she was a linguistic person. I didn’t know anything about the Gullah people, she told us
about people in South Carolina and other parts of the United States, and the speech and their language and the different languages and stuff, she knew all about that. That is what she was an expert in.

Alicia: What was the name of the department that she chaired?

Frances: The Department of International Multicultural Education at USF.

Now that department is…oh gosh. They had the program at USF and they also have a similar program at University of Washington, you can get a degree in that same international multicultural education. I think now it’s just international multicultural, I can’t remember, but at the time I was taking it my doctorate is in international multicultural education and that was my area. My minor was in psychology.

Alicia: You also had a minor with your doctorate?

Frances: Sort of. It’s not like a minor, I sort of all included other course work, that was emphasis to try and boost up what I was also learning about international people from different cultures.

And in this program people came from all over the world that was in the program at USF. In my classes I had people from the first country Ming, Korea, Japan, Germany. It was all these different cultural groups there. The first time I ever ran into Hmong people. Hmong people they also helped the United States. I will tell you one, so you can be really familiar with it. You know the new mayor of Oakland?

Alicia: Yes.

Frances: She is a Hmong.

Alicia: Okay.
Frances: I think they come from Cambodia, by Vietnam. When our military was over there, they helped them with Vietnam and the war and whatever. These people ended up being valuable to the United States in that they were helping the United States Military. It’s a large population of them in Sacramento, because they look Asian. But their culture is very much unique in the sense that it's not Korean or Chinese. Their culture is different. Also, that whole Asian connection. Some Ming were in my class. A lot of people that were in my classes at that time it was very interesting. The women from these different cultures were saying that they program at USF was a second chance for them, because in their culture the women were not allowed or was not expected or was not let, they were not allowed to move on up in school or anything. I had an East Indian lady; it was all different kinds of people in my classes and that’s what I liked about that program. I got a firsthand account of different cultures because one of the classes I had, you had to talk about, write your paper and talk about those stereotypes that outside of your culture people see you as, or try to say what that part of the culture is. Those stereotypes didn’t even fit some of those cultures. You know what I’m saying.

Alicia: Yeah.

Frances: Yeah. Then role of women in those cultures were really important, because a lot of the cultures, like in the Hmong culture, those women, I remember, specifically, they can get married at 13 and all that kind of stuff.

Alicia: Oh wow.

Frances: Yeah, they marry them off. It was just interesting. In the East Indian culture, the sister and the brother, they are real close. In the Indian culture when they get married, they wear red, or something like that. I learned something about these different cultures, I can’t remember all of it
now. It really did help me when… working in a public-school setting, you got to be able, a lot of teachers don’t and I really get on them about it, I used to get on them a lot about it, but because I had a different type of perspective. If you work in public schools, it’s public, you need to need to be able to work with all kinds of kids and family backgrounds. Sometimes what would end up happening, I remember at Vacaville High, we had another teacher that went all the way through Catholic school and he graduated from St. Pat in Vallejo and he taught History, his name was (name redacted). If any kid that came in his class didn’t do the work exactly like he said, or something was whatever, he gave an automatic F. He didn’t try call parents, he didn’t try to work with the child, he didn’t try to find out what was going on, what could he do as the instructor to make this child more receptive or have some success in his class and I thought that was just horrible. So, what they would do a lot of times, the principal, even the principal took his daughter, took her out that man’s class and put his daughter in my class. I used to always complain on him, because I said, you cannot work in public school, you are working with everybody’s kids and if you don’t understand that then get out of public-school teaching, get out of it, because all you are doing is destroying children.

Alicia: Can you talk a little more about the pay equity that you had mentioned on Thursday, as far as female librarians not getting paid the same as male librarians.

Frances: Oh okay, I'll tell you about that. My thesis that I wrote when I was at Hayward, finishing the Master’s in Public Administration, it was on the division of labor and I wanted to write about that because once I finished the Master’s of Library Science first, and then I went back and the Master’s in Public Administration, and what I discovered in the meantime working as a librarian if I worked in the public school setting as a librarian the pay was much lower than
if I worked you know as a county or public library, so that’s when I start noticing, and also, started noticing that what is interesting I’ll share this with you, what is interesting, this is the first time the United States library congress have an African American woman as a librarian, a woman. All of our librarians of congress have been males. What happened even in the library profession, like the teaching profession or like nursing, nursing has kind of moved up though a little bit. I have been watching how it goes because one of my granddaughters is interested in that field, so I have been kind of monitoring that. But what happened to jobs that are, what I call feminized, jobs that women basically go into, and get hired, it is more so women then it is men in these professions, those jobs are lower paid jobs. They are lower career areas. For example, if you are working on a job and someone say “oh they have an administrative assistant, the administrative assistant is usually a female, they are lower paid of course then maybe the next management, the management and you are starting to work your way up and you are still not getting paid what you could be getting paid if a male was in that position. So, I wrote my thesis at Hayward on the division of labor. How certain professions like library, teaching, nursing, those professions, that have more women going into those fields are lower paid career areas or professions. We don’t get paid as much as the men. Never. Before or behind.

Alicia: I am not familiar with the first African American librarian of the United States.

Frances: She has a doctorate from University of Chicago. University of Chicago is known for their library program. She was appointed by Obama. Her name is Carla Hayden. She is appointed (reading from Google on her phone) the head of Library of Congress is appointed by the president of the United States with the advice and consent of the United States Senate they have to approve her, and she gets a term of 10 years and her salary is 203k and she is considered a
level 2 of the executive schedule. Then I looked up what the highest paid librarian. Okay, the highest paid librarian works at government librarians, they earn just over 70k a year if you are working as a federal government librarian. What I’m trying to say, when wrote my thesis, I was trying to point out that professions that mainly women go into, they have more women than they do men, but even within those professions if you start looking at men working as librarians, because you have men working as librarians too, and men teachers, generally they are getting paid more than women that is in the profession, also. Men are getting paid, more, I don’t know what’s that about. Our state of California, we always had men, each state has a state librarian also, so California had a state librarian. He was a man the last time I looked, but I don't know who the librarian is now, might be a woman, might be changed, because they hold those positions so long, it’s appointed by the governor. It always interests me, which is why I wrote that thesis because the higher paying spots the men get in the library profession. Now it might have panned out to be better but this is way back in ‘84, ‘83, when I did my research back then, but I have always noticed that and how that goes. It’s a division of labor in the sense that I do the same work they do and I hold the same title as that position that they’ve held or holding but I’m getting paid less. It's that kind of stuff, I, you know that I look into also.

Alicia: You had mentioned that while you were getting your doctorate of education you had took a loan out, but you worked at the community college to make sure you paid that loan off. When you were getting your other degrees how did you pay for your education, was it also through loans, or did you work through your education?

Frances: When I was working the BS degree I was working at night for the Mint in San Francisco. It was a real low level. I would go there and work from 4-12, and it was seasonal
sometimes, summer, when my husband was there with the kids and did it in the evening where he would come home and he could watch the boys, because I only had the boys then.

Alicia: So, you worked at 4pm to 12 midnight?

Frances: Yeah. It was real low level, like $4.50 an hour. But that was in the 60’s. I remember I worked at the Mint and I used to have to. I drove over to San Francisco and the Mint had a parking garage right down the street, you park, cross Market and go in there. Now that I think about all that stuff, it’s like “oh my God”, but even if you left, you went to get lunch or something like that, or left to get a snack down the street or whatever, your lunch, you get checked in and you get checked out with the security. You had to walk through the thing to make sure you didn’t have, like when you go into the court, make sure you didn’t have anything on you. What was ridiculous, I didn’t work in the money. I worked in the, you know people send for coin collections, the federal government coin collection? And they send letters asking for the application, or coupon, me and these other ladies that worked there, we worked at that department, we opened the letters up, and put that together. I can’t remember the process now, but I remember we just opened those up and there were people ordering coins from the Mint. I can’t remember all of it because I had a horrible experience during that time. Me and my husband had a red Volkswagen, one those bugs, you probably weren’t even born, but anyway, and I remember one of the ladies would get a ride with me. She would come to the job on the bus, because you know it wasn’t real late, we had to be at work at 4 or whatever it was, but she would get a ride back with me and she lived over in the Fruitville area in Oakland and I lived at that time in East Oakland off of 101st avenue, that’s where I lived in East Oakland at that time. Me and my husband bought a little small house out there. She would ride back with me, I was
her ride to get back home, and I’d drop her off at Fruitville, so I would have to take that 35th avenue, I had to go over there some kind of way, I can’t remember exactly, it was in that area. I’ll never forget it; it was a horrible experience I had one night and this was after 12 when we were getting off. Coming back, I had dropped her off, getting to the stoplight, so I could go down 98th and come down to my house where I lived in that area, and I stopped at the red light, then turned green, I’m going through, all of sudden this police flies up behind me, lights all blazing, so I thought, I wasn’t doing anything, I was just going through the green light, I thought maybe I was supposed to just move over, just I moved over to the side, so he pulled up behind me, I’m like what, I never had a ticket or anything. He got out and came over and said, was I trying to evade them or whatever, because he said, I turned my lights on you and you were well through the green light and when you pulled over, you are supposed to pull over immediately. I said no, I didn’t do anything, I was stopped at a stoplight. I didn’t do anything, the light turned green, I thought, you know you hear a siren you move to your right, and that’s why I was moving over and I didn’t know you were after me, so by the time I didn’t even finish what I had to say, it was about 5 police cars coming and parked there and what I had come to find out somebody had robbed some kind of fast food right in that area in Oakland, and they had a red Volkswagen. Starts laughing. That was the (inaudible) after that I was kind of scared, I sent a letter, I don’t think I even went back to work at the Mint after that. I worked for them for about 2-3 years, seasonal and then in the evenings. That is how I was paying my way through also.

Alicia: So, you did that with your BS. What about your MS and MPA?

Frances: Okay, those two I was working and substitute teaching. I think with the master’s I was substitute teaching, once I got the secondary teaching credential, I started substituting and then
with the Master’s of Public Administration, I was working full time for Fairfield school district and like that.

Alicia: Oh okay, so you pretty much worked your way through school?

Frances: Yeah, that’s what I did. I had to work. Remember in the field of education, I always had the summers off, so that’s when I would try to get some of those courses completed.

Alicia: Are you a first-generation college graduate?

Frances: I think sort of. I’m the oldest of 7 kids, and I think I'm the only one that went on, went on, and went on. The others took some coursework in college, but they didn’t finish their degrees, they went and got jobs.

Alicia: Did your parents have college degrees?

Frances: My mother had a high school diploma and she is from Oklahoma, Tulsa, and she had a high school diploma and I remember when I was a teenager, they had a program at St. Mary’s for paralegals and my mother worked as a secretary for Contra Costa County legal services, and they had a program at St. Mary’s. I think it was the first time they were offering it or something. I think it is standard out there now. She was working as their secretary for Contra Costa County legal services, she went back to school to get her paralegal certificate, she ended up getting that. She ended up being a paralegal, but before she was doing paralegal she worked at these big stores, one called Newberry. She worked in their cafeteria in the kitchen part, preparing food.

Alicia: I’m curious, what made you decide on your major in library and information science?

Frances: At one point, when I was going to High School, we lived in Richmond on 45th avenue, right on Patrail, in Richmond, there was a library. I always used to go to the library. My mother read all the time, all my brothers and sisters, we all read, all of us are big time readers, like me I
bought the Michelle Obama book, and bought another book. I buy at least $100 worth of books a month. I get them from Costco, or go to Barnes and Noble and buy different books I read all the time and what happened, my mother was a reader, so all of them were readers. I used to read something I wasn’t supposed to be reading and me and my sister shared a bedroom, my sister Patsy, one twin bed and other twin bed, and she said, that’s on you if you want to do that, but the light needs to be turned off so I can go to sleep. I used to have a flashlight under the cover reading books. I would read stuff like (inaudible) I wasn’t supposed to be reading that stuff. I was reading bad stuff I shouldn’t have been reading. So, my mother wouldn’t know about it, so I hid it under the mattress. I’m serious. I used to read bad stuff, but anyway. I always read and went to the library. I could walk right now to the library from my house. I read a lot, I was always interested in children’s books, fairy tales, I just read a lot. I read lot now, like I’m always reading, I go read stuff off the internet I shouldn’t be reading that I know is not true. Because they have stuff on there that is not valid, not factual. I just read a bunch of stuff, then I read and I’m a researcher. I research a lot of stuff. I go and look up something else to see what it was. I was always interested in reading and I think because I was the oldest child and I had to help out a lot with my sisters and brothers. I was the oldest of 7, so what happened, I spent a lot of time, when I had time, quietly reading and I love poetry. I write poetry sometimes. I get into once year; I do little poetry stuff. I like doing stuff like that.

Alicia: When you say once a year for poetry, what do you do, what does that consists of?

Frances: Remember when Obama was in, I wrote a whole bunch of poetry stuff, because of the fact, I wrote about how they treated his daughters, trying to talk about how they dress, stuff they said about his wife, I write a lot of stuff like that and I just put it into a poetry type format
Making statements about what is going on in society. I like that kind of stuff.

Alicia: Have you ever shared those publicly? Or read them to an audience?

Frances: Naw, laughs.

I like putting into words what you see that going on around you. My kids say I read too much, you are always so into… you need to stop looking at the news, reading all this stuff. That’s what I do, I just do that.

Alicia: How did you stay motivated to continue through all 5 of your degrees?

Frances: I was thinking about that the other day, to me your degrees are for you personally, they don’t belong to anybody else. Once you go through any type of program to get a degree, it’s ownership for you, it’s about what you can do, it’s pushing yourself to complete something. The whole purpose of High School, I used to get really upset when kids would get right to the level to graduate and then the office would always send out this stuff to the library, give a grad check on this kid and come to find out this kid owed $130 worth of books, way back from middle school. And I was like this should not hold this kid back from getting a high school diploma, and I remember several times I would wipe it off our library records or something. One time one of the vice principals got upset with me. One time I remember I paid for a Latino kid, I paid for Black kid, I paid for it out of my pocket. Because I try to explain to people, this is the first step in success in anyone's life, it took 12 years, and you complete something which is school, that gives you an understanding that you can nearly go out in the world and try to do anything you want to do. But you need to complete that because those completions make you who you are. That’s how I feel about education. I got one, I can get another one. It was for me; it wasn’t for anybody else. I was challenging myself and that I can do it, and I did it. That’s how I looked at it.
Alicia: Like you told me before, you didn’t deny yourself and if you want something you just did it.

Frances: No. As I look back, I don’t think I missed anything or I feel satisfied about what I did, and how I did it. It makes me know I can take on some other challenges in life, and continue to push. You have to continue to push yourself and because I tell students all the time, it’s not where you start from, it’s where you end up. So, you have to keep going. A lot of people get caught up in the in between, saying, “oh I don’t if I can, it’s so hard”, and they give up. The way things are set up in society especially for Black folks, so many of us that defeats what we are trying to do and it seems like you are pushing and fighting against that. You just have to look at it and say, you know what, I can do this, I’m going to do it, and come hell or high water, I’m getting through it. When you look back on it, you say, you know what, know that I look back it wasn’t that hard, but in process of it, it does seem like it’s difficult.

Alicia: Absolutely. That was going to be my next question, tips and advice, but you gave me bits of advice I can add, so thank you, so thank you for that. Were you a part of any clubs or sororities when you were in any of your programs?

Frances: One time, I laugh about this now. One time I was telling my niece, my niece is AKA. When I was going to Hayward, when I first started off out there, my husband is a Sigma, my husband is in (inaudible), when the Sigma’s first incorporated at Hayward State, him and four more guys started at Hayward. I can’t remember what sorority it was, I still laugh about now, my niece teasing me and we laugh about it. It was some sorority at that time, they were starting one for the females, and a can’t remember if it was Delta, AKA, I don’t remember, what is the other one, theta, that’s opposite of what my husband is, his sorority sisters or whatever they are. They
approached me, I can’t remember which one it was, they approached me because they were organizing, but I didn’t do it because they always had stuff you had to do, you had to do different things. One of things they wanted us to do was, we had to wear mismatched socks with our tennis shoes, we were supposed to wear these socks that were different and I thought it was silly. I didn’t know why I thought it was silly, but anyway I analyzing, I tell my niece about it, and we laugh about it. My niece says, auntie you didn’t need to do that anyway, you are fine just the way you are. I thought it was very silly, but that was just me. What happened is that, then they had a frat in Oakland where they used to have parties, and I remember me and my husband dating, he used to take me to the frat parties they had Saturday nights, whatever, well I went to the frat parties and the same group of young girls like around my age group, they were the ones getting all the ice, they had to make sure there was drinks there, the ice, the food, running out to store, down to the liquor store, and that kind of stuff and I said, “I’m not doing this”. We had to call the other ones, the ones that are already in, we had to call them big sister, and I refused to do it, I just thought it was ridiculous. I don’t know why I thought like that, I still don’t quite understand. My niece laughs about it and says it is ridiculous, she did pledge she is AKA, but anyway. So, I never did. But to bring you up-to-date on that, about 5 years ago the AKA gave me the Woman of the Year award for the chapter here in Solano County.

Alicia: Wow, congratulations.

Frances: They gave me an award because I have been a juvenile hall commissioner, working with youth. They gave me the Woman of Year Award. I invited my niece and her friend, and I invited, my niece’s friend she went to school with, and one of my granddaughter’s came out from Texas, my husband, it was a big little group of us, anyway, they had it up at Rancho Solano
at the clubhouse. They gave me this award, they were really nice, but also, I have gotten Woman of the year from our congressional representative John Garamendi, he is for the Solano County area. I got a woman of the year award from him in 2014 so I’m in the congressional records, in national congressional records in Washington. Now I look back on some of the stuff I did and go like, maybe I was really silly. I don’t know, I’ve always been independent doing my own thing, stick to what I need to do. I don’t know how valuable that is.

Alicia: No that is very valuable, thank you for sharing that, I had no idea, and that’s amazing.

Frances: I have been on different committees and different things here in Solano County. In 2020 I resigned off the juvenile commissioner. We worked directly with the juvenile hall making sure the kids are being treated like they should be, you know. Which meant I had all the commissioners; we inspected all the city jails. I had to inspect jails in Benicia, Vallejo, Vacaville, Dixon, and Fairfield. If a juvenile does something, when I say juvenile, 18 or under, commit some type of crime, every city has a jail, but there are state and federal laws, they can only have these kids held in their jail for so many hours, and if they are over those hours, they are in violation because they have to transport them to the juvenile hall facility which is here in Solano County right in Fairfield. They are not supposed to be held in an adult jail for facility. And they have a special cell set aside that if you end up taking one of them to one of the city jail facilities they have special cell set up in there for juveniles and it has to be away from adult prisoners. I was commissioner for that, and so every year we had to go inspect all of the jails. We had to look at the booking records and see how many kids they had bought in through the jail before they got to juvenile hall, and check the hours, what police officer brought this kid in, what it was for, human trafficking, prostitution, guns, homelessness, why did they pick up this kid,
what has the kid done? I did that for 6 years and I got off this committee. So that’s why AKA gave me this award.

Alicia: What chapter was the AKA again?

Frances: I don't know. They sent me my stuff. It’s right here in Fairfield. I have been to a lot of their scholarship stuff. I gave them some money one year. Me and my husband also have a scholarship, I was going to tell you for a sister grad foundation for all high schools here in the Fairfield area. I give $1,000 not that much scholarship every year to high school graduates.

Alicia: That’s amazing.

Frances: We do that too. Did you go to school in Fairfield?

Alicia: No, I’m from Southern California.

Frances: Here it is, right here, the board person for Solano College, she is an AKA, yeah, they have on green and yellow, no green and pink. I found a picture of them, I found it in images. I don’t where.

Alicia: That’s okay, I thought it was an interesting piece to have.

Frances: But anyway, oh the Vallejo community. I wonder if the same one for Vallejo is the same one for Vacaville and Fairfield. I don’t know. I think they might be the same one.

I have all the little stuff they gave out.

That’s my experience with them, so I don’t do any of that.

Alicia: okay. I’m also curious, why did you choose to go to a California State University?

Frances: I think the reason why I chose to go starting at Hayward, and Merritt college because they were in the community closes to me. I used to live on 101st avenue and the closest CSU was Hayward. They didn’t have East Bay; they didn’t have that one. Me and my husband both went
there. They didn’t have the one in Concord. I live in East Oakland and I was only like, it took less than an hour to get to Hayward and park and get into the classes and whatever, and at the time I went way back in late 60’s early 70’s, it was considered a commuter college because the main CSU was San Francisco state. It was the big time, if you want to go to a California State University, San Francisco State was it. Hayward was the newer one and they weren’t that user friendly to Black folks.

Alicia: Oh, they weren’t?

Frances: No, they weren’t, they were not. It was considered a commuter’s college because all we would do; we would just go out there. They didn’t have dorms or anything, you just go out there and go to your classes, and then you come back down the hill and drive down the main street of Hayward and come out of there. They didn’t have that many Black folks that went. Matter-of-fact, the Blacks that went there it was undercover rumor, we always knew you can get into Hayward, because everyone was going to San Francisco State, so they were happy to get people to come there. You can get into Hayward, but could you get out?

Alicia: When you say they weren’t particularly friendly to Black people, can you elaborate more on that?

Frances: A lot of people that started there, they wanted to get into CSU because they couldn’t get into Berkeley, they couldn’t get into University of San Francisco or Stanford, so people would go to San Francisco State, because it was easier to get in, and they were used to having minority people. Hayward wasn’t. A lot of my husband’s friends, they never graduated from there, they ended up transferring to San Francisco State and graduated from San Francisco State. They weren’t that friendly at Hayward.
Alicia: Was it the professors, was the staff, was it other students?

Frances: Yeah, the professors. Even though it was the time of during affirmative action, they act like if they letting you in you must be affirmative action, you didn’t really deserve it or whatever.

I remember when my husband finished his master’s in counseling at Hayward. I think it was only him, and might have been one other person who graduated with their masters in that department. San Francisco State was the place to go. San Francisco state was in the news, if you research, you will find out, they had a great big mess over there about getting Black Studies program. And they were on the national news, international news. Students walked out; it was a big mess. So, San Francisco state has always been, they had Asian president. He got into a lot of trouble, because they didn’t want Black studies program there and a whole bunch of these Black professors were protesting with students to get San Francisco state to put in a Black studies program and all that. So, they were the place to go to. Once they had the big mess, it opened up for everybody. You know, you got these professors you think who are so open to us and lot of times, they are not. So, you know you kind of have to back your stuff up and take on your rights. Don’t let them get you down. They think they are slick. Dot every “I”, cross every “T” watch what you are doing and watch how they react you to you. These people that read our applications and stuff, they decide, “well no”. It’s real conservative. It appears to be not conservative.

Alicia: Is it okay to use your name to highlight your story?

Frances: Its Frances, Frances and you do my maiden name Gholson and Nelson. If you want to get idea of what my doctorate was about, there is a site you go onto ProQuest and you put my Frances Joanne Gholson Nelson you can find my dissertation for USF. I wrote it on the library collection not representing, not having a clear representation on literature or books written by
Black people. A lot of stuff that libraries written, somebody else takes our information and write about us, and write books about us, about how our culture is, so I watched it over the years now, we are having more of us write about our own culture, which is much better.

Alicia: How do you spell your middle name?

Frances: Joanne. Frances Joanna Gholson Nelson, in ProQuest express, and they have a place, the title of dissertation which I never remember none of it, it’s some big long title I had I don’t remember. When you finish all this stuff you do have to have it in a publishing format and somebody wants to buy. I think one person at UC Davis, contact me one time.

End of interview.

Names and some identifying information have been redacted from this interview to protect privacy.
Appendix B: Jennifer Maxwell

Jennifer Maxwell
San Francisco State University
Bachelors of Arts Criminal Justice, Class of 2007
Method of Interview: phone
Interview Location: East Bay, California
Date: December 17, 2022

Jennifer: I did apply to multiple CSU’s, San Francisco State, Sac, Somona State, I did not want to go to Hayward, I felt like that was too close to home. I did end up going to San Francisco because most of my family grew up in SF and I was the only one who never lived in SF, not realizing it is more like Daly City than the City (San Francisco). When I enrolled, I was actually a computer science major because I was really into technology, but after my first class, I want to say it was some coding class and I just did not want to do this for the rest of my life, I’m going to be using computers at work in some capacity so I need to find something else that I would like to do, at the same time I was really into CSI and forensic stuff and criminal law, so I decided to change my major from computer science to criminal justice. That is what I graduated from San Francisco State with a degree in Criminal justice. I feel like I had a little bit of a unique path because of the high school I went to was a half high school, half college so when I went to San Francisco State I actually went in as a junior instead of a straight freshman. So, I was only in college for 2 ½ years. During my journey at San Francisco State, I was awarded the opportunity to do a program that allows you to transfer to another CSU for a semester. I forgot what the
program was, but I did end up doing that, I went to Cal State Dominguez Hills, which was
another CSU for a semester, but ended up having to withdraw because my father had a heart
attack, so I ended up moving back to the Bay Area and finishing my education through evening
schools. So, I had a switch where one I went in as a junior, then two did standard daytime classes
and then decided to transfer to another school through a program still within the Criminal Justice
major, then withdrawing from that and finishing my education through evening school so that I
could work full time during the day. I did finish in 2007, so I was technically in school for 2 ½
years because I had half of a semester off. Then I did have an on-campus job at San Francisco
State, so I did get to experience working in a program that helped freshmen understand different
opportunities to improve their math and reading grade from the entrance exam that you have take
to determine where your placement is going to be. I think I did that for a year, I’m not a 100%
sure. After I left San Francisco State, I did attempt to get a job as a probation officer, it was not
an easy road. My criminal justice degree didn’t afford me a whole bunch of opportunities that I
thought it would have, so not being able to get a job in the criminal justice area. I ended up
finding admin jobs here and there, ended up lucking up and getting a job through a temp agency
through healthcare, so then I ended up working at UCSF, Kaiser and now where I am. I want to
say I have a unique scenario where I don't feel like my San Francisco State degree helped me put
me where I am now but it definitely was an experience and I was very straight on where I was
going to college and finishing college. I think at that point it didn’t matter what degree I had, but
I was going to finish college because I was the only one in my family that would have had a
college degree therefore there was no other option for me.
Alicia: You are a first-time generation graduate?
Jennifer: Yes.

Alicia: During your time at SF state where you involved in any sororities, clubs or just infinity groups?

Jennifer: I was not. I had quite a few friends that were, but I was not. I think my focus was and determination to finish school did not allow me those opportunities to open my eyes for those social and personal experiences.

Alicia: Yeah, understood, I hear you. There is a particular question my professors and librarian I am working with wanted me to capture especially because of my unique approach of just interviewing Black women. They wanted to make sure it is captured because it is a thesis and it will be filed away in the library and if others wanted to reference, they wanted me to specifically ask about loans. Did you have to take out any loans for school?

Jennifer: Umm, I did not. But I can give you background on that and kind of why. My father was single father, my mother died when I was five and based on him, when she passed away, he was able to get social security and had put a lot of that away for me to go to college. My dad worked fulltime, he also worked side jobs, so on paper, when you do the FAFSA, on paper it looked like he made a lot of money, he didn’t, but on paper he did. So, when he did the FAFSA I think it said the first year of school is going to cost $17,500 and then they said your expected family contribution was like $17,100, so they were willing to give him a loan or financial aid for $400. At that point in time, I don’t think he understood the whole process but it just the government wasn’t giving us anything so based on that, he just ended up using what he had saved up and then also paying for that through his salary job. That was one of the reasons why I only stayed on campus my freshman year of college, or what I would consider my junior year, my first year
there, I stayed on campus, but I also ingrained to not have my dad working like a slave, I decided
to move home the second year so that he didn’t have to pay for that anymore. I did get the
experience living on campus the first year and then after that I moved back home and we only
paid for my credits and we still paid for that out of pocket. I think the first year because it was so
discouraging of what they were going give us, I don’t think we even filled out a FAFSA the
other couple of years, we just ended up paying through cash. Now that is not to say my dad may
have gotten a loan with his bank and I didn’t know anything about it, but we didn’t get
government student loans to assist with my education.

Alicia: Thank you for sharing that. I appreciate you sharing that part of your experience with the
loans and attending San Francisco State. I have one more question, and that is based on what
you know now, what advice would you give to future women, specifically Black women that
advice you know now that you wish you would have known back then.

Jennifer: Umm, how do I want to word this…San Francisco to me was a great stepping stone. I
was around a lot of people of different ethnicities, a lot of people of color. It was interesting for
me to see how many people from other areas wanted to go to school in San Francisco versus the
people that live in the Bay Area, where like ugh, we’re too close to home, and we want to go
somewhere else. There were a lot people from like LA, Atlanta, New York that came on this side
to go to school. And it was a great experience to be around people of color, people that looked
like you. I knew from my experience I didn’t want to go to an HBCU at that point in time.

Would have I changed my mind now? Probably. But I wasn’t exposed to people in my family
going to HBCU’s. I wasn’t exposed to the history of HBCU’s, so I didn’t want to be around that
many Black people at that time. So, San Francisco was like, yay, everyone’s here. So, I think that
was a good experience to meet new people from different backgrounds, but they still looked like me and you didn’t feel out of place because they look like you. So, I definitely feel like that was a good stepping stone. I don’t regret going to San Francisco State because from my high school maybe there was two of us that went. It wasn’t like everyone went to the same school, you got to build a new identity and just find yourself. When I started, I was little younger because of the way my birthday falls, so when I started college, I was 17 versus normal 18, so I turned 18 in college, get to experience different things. I do not at all regret going to San Francisco State. I think now that I look back, I would probably like to have went somewhere else, where I could have been exposed some more, like maybe go to D.C. Probably would have been in a different position but I don’t regret going to San Francisco state, I don’t regret going to a CSU. Actually, because you go to a CSU, they do a lot of programs with the UC’s. I wasn’t in a sorority but I had a lot of friends that were in sororities and fraternities so we were always at UC Berkeley, or other CSU’s, San José State because you know for a party or an event, or going to Cal State Hayward, so it wasn’t like I like I was missing an opportunity to go to those campuses and explore because I could go at any point in time. I just didn’t go there for the education. But San Francisco State was more for the history of my family and being in San Francisco and being the black sheep of not living in San Francisco. My family was die hard Filmore, Niners, everything San Francisco was them, and I didn’t have that experience because I grew up in Richmond, so that was my way of feeling like I got a little closer to my family or certain members of my family because I now got to experience what San Francisco was. It’s a beautiful campus, there is beautiful people and I didn’t have any type of regret or any problems at that school and I think because it is so diverse, I didn’t have to experience concerns of necessary racism or anything that
made me feel uncomfortable being at the school. The only thing that may have been a little bit odd was because when I came in, I wasn’t a straight freshman, so one of things was when I did orientation, I did orientation with a lot of freshmen and met a lot of people that ended up being my friends, but I had no classes with them because my levels were different.

Alicia: Thank you for sharing all of that. As you were speaking there are just more insights, I am learning about CSU experience that I wouldn’t have otherwise gathered by myself or doing the literature reviews for my paper, so thank you for sharing all of that with me. I don’t have any other questions for you. Do you have any questions for me?

Jennifer: No, I’m just here to answer whatever questions you have to help your presentation.

Alicia: Thank you. A few things to wrap up. I think I told you in the text, I do have to record this so I can transcribe it to make sure I capture what you tell me accurately, and it’s not going to be shared it just going to be for me to again to capture what you are saying so I can I put it in my paper. I will transcribe it and I would like to send it back to you to make that I what type and what you said matched and if you wanted to add anything or change anything, please let me know because I want to make sure that I not misinterpret anything you say you are represented in how you told me your story.

Jennifer: Okay.

Alicia: Also, my professors wanted me to ask as well it is okay to at least use your first name in my thesis. Are you okay with that?

Jennifer: Yes, that’s totally fine.

Alicia: Thank you. So, I will transcribe this and I will get this to you if not this weekend, by Tuesday at the latest. If you can just review and let me know if there is anything I missed, or if
there is something you would like to add, but other than that I don’t have any other questions and again I just want to thank you for taking the time this morning. I know busy with London, so I appreciate you adding to my thesis and doing this documentation for me.

Jennifer: The only other thing I would add is that it’s okay to not know what you are going to do, when you go to college. Your classes can change your experience, your classes can change your major. My first class was a coding class and I knew immediately that wasn’t something I wanted to do for the rest of my life. The schools afford you the opportunity to try things out. I know it sucks because it cost money to try things out, it does afford you the opportunity to try things out if you need to switch it up, you can. So, I definitely think that was a good thing I got to experience.

Alicia: I resonate with that all well. So, thank you for saying that. That’s an important piece of advice I want to elaborate on in my paper.

End of interview.
Appendix C: Simoné Utsey

Simoné Utsey
San José State University
Bachelors of Science Health Science, Class of 1994
Method of Interview: phone
Interview Location: East Bay, California
Date: December 23, 2022

Simoné: I’m glad to hear that you are going back to school and getting your master’s. I gotta play catch up now.

Alicia: When you have more time, we can catch up some more. It hasn’t been a fun process, so I can’t wait til it’s done.

Simoné: This is your last part right, then you’re done.

Alicia: I have one more semester, I’ll be done in May.

Simoné: I’m going to claim it, early congratulations.

Alicia: Ugh, this is such a process.

Simoné: Hang in there.

Alicia: What I’m doing my paper on is specifically Black female graduates from CSU system, so far, I have Cal State Hayward or East Bay, San Francisco State and then you. You went to San José State?

Simoné: Yes.
Alicia: Cool, San José State is the oldest CSU, East Bay is one of the newer campuses and San Francisco State is in the middle, so I have a nice little trifecta thing going on, especially with the three schools in the Bay Area. But what I’m focusing on how have Black women benefited or not benefited from attending their specific CSU. In order for my interviews not to have to through the International Review Board, so I don’t have to code them or find patterns and all of that, I’m just getting the stories in an organic manner. You can share as much or as little as you like. There are a few specific questions that I was encouraged to ask because there are gaps in the history of getting this information, so if you are comfortable sharing that, for example student loan.

Simóné: Okay, I didn’t do that.

Alicia: Okay. Or how did you get through school paying for it? And then, yeah that’s mainly the biggest question I was encouraged to ask.

Simóné: Okay, so it’s kind of quick. Financial aid, I snuck and got a job, my mother told me not to get one, but I got one anyway. Then there was this gentleman and I want to say he is still active, his name is Robert Clark, and he showed my mother how to maneuver the financial system to get everything she needed because they were pretty much her, she didn’t qualify for anything, and she was a single parent at the time, two kids in school and I think she was trying to go back to school to get her masters. But they said she did not qualify for anything and he showed her how to maneuver and what was legal and was illegal, and we were able to get financial aid.

Alicia: oh wow, that’s awesome. I need to know a person like because I getting denied. I’m a single parent. On paper it’s one thing, but in reality, it’s another.
Simoné: You know, absolutely. I can definitely give you, his contact. I’m pretty sure he is still doing it, if he hasn’t retired. But I’m pretty sure he knows somebody. Absolutely.

Alicia: Thank you. What year did you graduate from San José State?

Simoné: Spring ’94.

Alicia: You got your Bachelors?

Simoné: Yes, I got my Bachelors.

Alicia: Why did you choose San José State in particular?

Simoné: I didn’t choose it. One my cousins, she convinced me to go there. That’s where she went. She said, it was the party school. I wasn’t into partying, but she just convinced me to go. I wanted to go to a community college. My mother said, no, you are not going to go to community college, you are going to go here. So that’s why I went to San José State. It wasn’t too far from home, but it wasn’t too close either.

Alicia: Okay. What did you major in?

Simoné: Health Science. That wasn’t my original major, but Health Science is what I ended up come out with.

Alicia: Okay. Cool. I know you said you weren’t a party person. Did you join any organizations, or sororities or clubs?

Simoné: I wasn’t a party person and that’s why I didn’t want to go there, but I had my share of parties. One of my friends she said, “You are at all the parties.” I was just like; I don’t remember any of that so it must be a blur. Yes, I am apart of one of the Divine Nine. Delta Sigma Theta. I did join that my second year in college. I did join that.

Alicia: How was that experience?
Simoné: Being part of the organization or the process?
Alicia: I guess both, if you want to elaborate on both.
Simoné: It was nine of us. I can for the most part, majority of everything we went through it was for a good reason. I can say that, because I had two of my line sisters, they weren’t only children but the was 10-11 years between siblings so as far as they were concerned, they were the only child. For them, having to navigate small space, personal space with 8-9 different people was very challenging for them. It taught us sisterhood, it taught us a bond, just a whole bunch of different things, 30 years later still have that close knit bond.
Alicia: That’s cool. What was your experience going to San José State? Did you enjoy it? Do you feel you benefited from it, or not benefited?
Simoné: I can say, I can’t complain in terms of not benefiting from it because outside of Laney and Merritt here in Alameda, I didn’t have anything to compare it with. My brother went away to an HBCU. I went there to visit him and he said, these are the luxury dorms. I looked at it and was just like, I said, where’s the carpet, where this, where is that? He said, “oh we don’t have all of that here.” So compared to San José State, compared to where he was going, I considered my college an upgrade but compared to the rest of the colleges in our area, it was an upgrade. Like I said, I don’t have anything to compare it with, so there are no complaints there. But I will say it helped me to grow maturity wise. My first year, no my first semester, the place I knew how to get to was the 180 bus and that was to come home to Oakland every weekend. Let me take that back. The first semester I was dating somebody, so he would come get me every weekend. The second semester, I commuted. I would get on that bus and I would go home. But I almost ended up flunking out as well. So, I said all that to say, it’s very important to get connected to
somebody and something going in your direction. Whether it’s a club, whether it’s a professor, whether it’s teachers, it is very important to get connected because if not you will get caught up and you’ll end up flunking out. I won’t contribute it all to him. The group I started hanging out with because it was my first semester in the dorms and I didn’t want to be away, none of them made it past the first semester. I had to do a wakeup call and I said, you know what, my mother is going to kill me. I kept saying, my mother is going to kill me. I said I have to get it together. So yes, on my first semester I was on list, I almost got disqualified, but I was able to turn it back around. I ended up having to go to summer school.

Alicia: You made it.

Simoné: Oh yes, I made it. That is why I said, it is very important to get connected to someone of something going in your direction, not just anybody but someone going in your direction. It’s very important.

Alicia: I agree with that. I was going to ask you for a piece of advice you would like to share and that was exactly what I was looking for. You answered the question. Thank you for sharing that. Simoné: You’re welcome.

Alicia: I don’t have any other specific questions. The purpose of this was just to get your story, however, you wanted to share it, so I can transcribe it and include in my thesis. Because my experience and in doing literature reviews I have not come across any positive stories from Black women who have graduated from CSU. The reason why I’m highlighting CSU is because, 1. It’s the largest public college institution in the nation as far as campuses and as far as employees, it’s the largest investor retirement in the country as well. When I was at East Bay, I would see someone of color highlighted, it would be someone who was famous or for example SF State
they highlight Alicia Garza, the cofounder of Black Lives Matter. But for me, I think it’s important to highlight those who are fabric of our community such as our teachers, educators, and community service workers, because without us, nothing else would be uplifted. So that’s the purpose of my thesis.

Simoné: So that’s what I was going to say too. So, Robert Clark, he is actually one of the Divine Nine, but that was my first started getting connected at San José State just BSU, I can’t remember the name of the organization anymore. I’ll have to call my brother to get the name of the organization. (E.O.P - Educational Opportunity Program) there was a specific group, probably about 3-5 of them and we could go to them in terms of if we were having issues. If you want to put this in you can, but you have to reword it. So, there was a gentleman I went to high school with very, very, very smart and he ended up going to San José State. End of getting caught up in a rape charge, and if it wasn’t for the Black faculty he would have got kicked out. Because when it was all said and done, he was able to get in the dorm, which the dorms are locked. He was able to make it up to her room. He was able to get into her room, which she left unlocked. He was able to take off his clothes, put on a condom, have sex with her and then leave, no screaming, no nothing. And when it was all said and done, she was just embarrassed because here she was sleeping with a Black guy. That was another thing too, a lot people had never seen African Americans until they came to San José State.

Alicia: Oh really, wow.

Simoné: Yeah, so I think for her it was like, oh my goodness this is a Black guy. He literally almost got a charge, kicked out and all because, they kept asking him, how was he able to do this. Just like people are always coming in and out of dorm rooms, and it was okay, okay, we can
see that. How was he able to get into your dorm room? Well, you know I left the door unlocked for my roommate? Yeah, okay, whatever. Well, how was he able to come in the room, take off his clothes, then fold them up, and then put on a condom and how was he able to do all of this? So, it was a Black organization, it was them that were able to get behind him and keep him from getting all of these charges. It was this white woman against this Black guy, and it was really sad. I would honestly say it was mainly some of my Black professors, like we had Dr. Milner. African American Studies, everybody took that. It was an easy grade but it wasn’t an easy grade. When you came to Dr. Milner’s class, he always addressed you by your last name. And if you didn’t do your homework, it was just like oh, let me address you by your first name, “so Alicia, you’re telling me the part of the African American is not important? No, no, no, you don’t need to explain. I understand you had more important things to do.” He would say stuff like that. Oh, I better read tomorrow. But it was always respectful, he never called you out, and his class was full every semester. Every semester, Dr. Milner’s class was always filled. So, like I said, you had the African American teachers. I had a teacher my last, I think my second to last semester in college, and I was the only African American student in there. I came in the class and I was trying to fade in. I was like I just need to take this class for my major, let me get in and get out of here. After class he called me and said, may I speak to you please? I said, sure. He said just in case you haven’t noticed, it’s only you and me in this classroom, so from now on when you come in this classroom, I don’t care where you sit, as long as you are in the front row, and class will not start until you are in the front row. I refuse to let you slip through my fingers, I refuse to let you slip through the cracks, and I refuse to let you flunk this class, see you next week. From that point on, everytime I came into the classroom I always sat in the front. Like I said, it’s
teachers like that, that people like that I got up under and made sure I stayed focused and made sure I came to class. It’s hard when you look around and it’s only a few people and if you are not connected with something or somebody, it’s kind of hard to survive.

Alicia: Yeah, I agree. Well, I'm glad you found those connections, or they organically found you. It does make a difference when you have a support system no matter how small. I remember a supervisor told me, all it takes is one person to believe in you. That’s all you need.

Simoné: Um-hm, absolutely.

Alicia: That’s pretty much all the questions I have, unless you have anything else you would like to share, that you would like to for me to highlight in paper.

Simoné: Not at this time. I’ll call my brother and text you that information back. I really don’t have anything to compare it with. I didn’t have a bad experience, but I think in me getting connected, made it an enjoyable experience. But in me getting connected, I stayed a little bit longer than I should have. We would go to Stanford; we would go to the parties. Parties would start at 9:00 at night, and we would end up coming home the next day you know 8, 9 in the morning. And not because we were doing anything but we would just go back to a dorm and we would down in the common area and we would just be talking, sharing stories, and that’s just what we did, then we would come home the next day and just like oh okay, I gotta do my homework. Let me work on this now, so. My brother was the opposite. They said he always did his homework regardless how late he stayed up but he ended up pledging too, he actually a Sigma. He did Sigma because Sigma was something that was visual there, the Omega’s there wasn’t that many Omegas, even though my uncle wanted him to pledge, he went Phi Beta Sigma, and he’s okay with it, he has no problems at all, he’s okay with it.
Alicia: That’s cool you guys are a part of sororities and fraternities. I have heard you have a family for life pretty much?

Simoné: Ah-huh.

End of interview.