In many respects, the distinctions between community colleges and proprietary schools are few. Proprietary schools (also referred to as career colleges and for-profit colleges) feature an array of vocational, technical, and business programming, as well as provide opportunities to complete general education courses (Hittman, 1995). Similarly, given that the mission of community colleges is to provide comprehensive educational programming, students have the option of choosing from a multitude of academic offerings, including terminal degrees (certificates, associates), vocational-technical education, and continuing education (e.g., job skills training) (Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Tillery & Deegan, 1985; Vaughan, 2006).

Furthermore, both institutional types serve high proportions of low-income and students of color (U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2011). For instance, national enrollment data from 2007–2008 indicate that 31.4% of first-time community college students and 58.7% of first-time proprietary college students are low income (National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2008a). In terms of racial/ethnic demographics, data reveal that

1 Low income is defined using federal TRIO standards, an income of $25,000 or below.
community colleges consist of the following racial distribution: White, 57.1%; Black, 14.6%; Hispanic, 17.6%; Asian, 5.7%; and Other, 5%. Student enrollments differ at propriety schools, which have fewer White (40.9%), Asian (2.6%), and Other (3.9%) students, yet higher percentages of Blacks (22.1%) and Hispanics (30.5%) (NPSAS, 2008b). Female students, who are significantly more likely to attend propriety colleges, account for the greatest difference in African American and Hispanic enrollment.

With regard to African American and Hispanic male students, enrollment percentages illustrate that community colleges and propriety schools serve approximately the same proportion of these student populations. For instance, institutional type accounts for minimal differences among African American males, whose enrollment at community colleges and propriety schools are 6.7% and 7.7%, respectively. However, more distinguishable differences are seen in enrollments for Hispanic males, who represent 7.7% of community college enrollment, yet 11.1% of propriety enrollment (NPSAS, 2008c). Similarities in academic programming and minority male enrollments present an opportunity to compare experiences and outcomes between community colleges and propriety schools. Extant research already suggests that minority males benefit from high graduation rates at propriety colleges. For example, Wood and Vasquez-Urias (2012) examined graduation rates for Black male students at associate degree-granting colleges by institutional type (e.g., control, enrollment intensity, institutional size, urbanicity). One analysis of this study focused on differential graduation rates between public, private not-for-profit, and private for-profit institutions. Findings illustrated that public two-year colleges have the lowest graduation rate among Black males (at 13.8%), with higher graduation rates for private not-for-profits (37.1%). However, their research also revealed that private for-profit institutions have the highest graduation rates for this populous (at 42.4%), a significantly greater graduation rate than community colleges.

Beyond this data, little is known about other outcomes for minority males in community colleges as opposed to propriety schools. For instance, little (if anything) is known about labor market outcomes (e.g., salary, benefits, workplace authority, job satisfaction, employment) and student satisfaction among minority males by institutional type. Such information is needed by educators in order to proffer a comprehensive narrative on whether one sector facilitates greater success than the other for these students. This study addresses this void by examining minority male (including African American, Hispanic, and Native American) sat-
isfaction outcomes between institutional types. Specifically, this research investigates students’ satisfaction with their educational experiences, six years after enrolling in community colleges in comparison to those who enrolled in proprietary schools. The goal of this study is to extend discourse on student outcomes between these institutional types to include a focus on students’ satisfaction with their major or course of study, quality of their education, and the cost-effectiveness of their educational pursuits.

Relevant Literature

This study’s focus on minority males coincides with increasing (and near ubiquitous) conversations about their challenges in postsecondary education (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2004, 2005, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007). In the community college context, minority male persistence and attainment has not fared (Bush, 2004; Saenz, Lee, Kim, Valdez, Bukoski, & Hatch, 2010; Wood, Harrison & Turner, 2011; Wood, Hilton, & Harrell, 2011). For example, while investigating attainment rates among Black male students in the community college, Wood (2011b) found that departure increases exponentially over time, with 11.5% departing without degree attainment in the first year, 48.9% within three years, and 83% within five years. In response to barriers facing minority male success, a growing percentage of community colleges have begun implementing events, activities, conferences, workshops, and programs designed to enhance their success in college (Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Wood, 2011a). In fact, as a result of such growing efforts, the American Association of Community Colleges recently unveiled a database to document initiatives designed to aid minority males in community colleges throughout the nation (Christian, 2010). However, as previously noted, this circumstance is juxtaposed with the fact that proprietary colleges have been able to facilitate better outcomes for these males (Wood & Vasquez-Urias, 2012). As such, at least in this regard, institutional type does make a difference.

A comparison of institutional types

There are numerous differences and similarities between community colleges and proprietary schools, with trends demonstrating convergence (Hawthorne, 1995; Hittman, 1995). The most compelling dissimilarities include the mission and goals of these two institutional types (Bailey, Badway and Gumport, 2003). For example, Mullin (2010) noted that the primary distinction between community colleges and for-profit institutions is their oversight. Public institutions are designed to serve the public good; as such, public entities (e.g., trustees, state coordinating bodies)
oversee their operations to ensure that local community needs (e.g., educational enhancement, workforce development) are attained. In contrast, for-profit institutions are established and owned by individuals and corporations. As a result, they are designed to serve the best interests of the company owners and shareholders. While these institutions may serve the public good, their primary focus is profit. This emphasis has led to enhanced scrutiny and disdain from the academic community (Hittman, 1995).

Despite these distinctions, Clowes (1995) stated that, “within postsecondary education, the community college and the proprietary or career school are most alike” (p. 6). These institutions feature specialized training programs, academic programs with general education requirements, a confluence culture of open-access, emphasis on remedial education, public funding through federal aid programs, and merging accreditation oversight (Clowes, 1995; Hyslop & Parsons, 1995). Furthermore, as stated, proprietary schools and community colleges are also reaching a nexus in terms of student demographic served. Both institutions serve high proportions of students who are minority (particularly African Americans and Hispanics) adult learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and whose parents have lower levels of education (i.e., high concentrations of first-generation students) (Bailey, Badway, & Gumport, 2001; Cheng & Levin, 1995; Riegg, 2006).

Some research has illustrated that students select proprietary schools for different reasons. For instance, Morris (1993) conducted interviews with students enrolled in proprietary schools in order to better understand why they selected these colleges as opposed to community colleges. He found that students attending proprietary schools were generally more immature, dependent upon paternal support, and from low-income working-class families. Such students also tended to have unrealistic educational goals. Morris concluded that the confluence of their “dependence, naiveté, and desperation” drew them away from community colleges and “made them easy prey for hard-selling” proprietary colleges (p. 21).

This notion of “hard-sell” tactics has become a topic of increasing interest. Hittman (1995) noted that proprietary schools have been derided for aggressive sales-like marketing and outreach practices, which have been characterized as “consumer abuse.” In fact, some for-profit critics in the popular press have referred to their targeted marketing toward low-income and minority communities as “cruel,” “unjust,” and “immoral” (Kirkham, 2011). According to findings from a recent (2010) investigation
from the U.S. GAO, these assertions may have some truth. In response to requests from congress to investigate marketing practices of for-profit colleges, the GAO used undercover students to examine enrollment practices at these institutions. Findings illustrated that students were encouraged to falsify information on financial aid forms in order to receive aid. Moreover, enrollment personnel fabricated potential earnings information and avoided providing applicants with information on program length, cost, and graduate rates, even upon request. Additionally, for-profit institutions were found to use hard-sell pressure tactics to secure enrollment contracts from students. Clearly, these differential enrollment practices offer another important distinction between proprietary schools and community colleges.

In terms of outcomes, research has found that for-profit institutions have a better record of serving disadvantaged communities, a subgroup of collegians that dominate community college enrollment, yet are greatly underserved (Jenkins, 2003). More specifically, the U.S. GAO (2011) reported that for-profit colleges had higher graduation rates for certificate programs and equivalent rates for associate degree programs than their public counterparts. Bailey, Badway, and Gumport (2001) suggest that greater student outcomes are a byproduct of successful student support services, which are effective in ensuring student retention and workplace employment. Such rates may also be indicative of limited degree options, mandates for full-time enrollment, and applied curricula (Bailey et al., 2001; Mullin, 2010). These suggested rationales illustrate how nuances in institutional structure and design can affect outcomes.

Often, higher graduation rates at for-profit institutions are used as an indictment of quality, as they are generally criticized for having low academic standards (Blumenstyk, 2011; Field, 2008, 2010; Kiley, 2010; Oseguera & Malagan, 2011). Further, the vast majority of for-profit institutions have significantly higher tuition and fees (Miller & Mupinga, 2006; Riegg, 2006), requiring students to finance their educational endeavors through loans (Mullin, 2010). The ability to repay these loans has become a topic of interest in recent years. For example, in 2010 the Department of Education estimated that nearly 50% of all loan monies lent to students at for-profit colleges would be defaulted on within a 20-year timeframe (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2010). Although for-profit graduates earn equivalent salaries in the workforce, they are more highly prone to unemployment, further limiting their ability to save money and repay their loans. In addition, for-profit graduates tend to have lower passing rates on licensing exams (e.g., cosmetology, nursing, medical technicians,
radiography) (U.S. GAO, 2011), which is unfortunate considering that such institutions promote an array of vocational, technical, and business programming.

All in all, perceptions of low academic standards, greater costs, aggressive marketing tactics, higher default rates, and greater unemployment have led to enhanced discourse about the role of proprietary colleges in postsecondary education. Furthermore, even positive markers of success, such as higher persistence and graduation rates than their public counterparts have made for-profit colleges a target for researchers and policymakers alike. As a result, these institutions continue to face increasing pressure for accountability (Outcalt & Schirmer, 2003). This pressure has primarily been exerted through accreditation standards (Prager, 1995) and federal student aid policies (Moore, 1995). In an effort to extend this conversation to student satisfaction outcomes, the next section details the methods employed in this study.

**Methods**

Data employed in this study were derived from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (referred to as BPS: 2003/2009). This nationally representative study is designed to examine first-year students’ experiences in postsecondary education. BPS collects data from students over three collection periods: at the end of their first year in college (2003/2004), three years after enrollment (2006), and six years after their initial enrollment (2009) (Wine, Cominole, & Caves, 2009; Cominole, Riccobono, Siegel, Caves & Rosen, 2008; Cominole, Riccobono, Siegel & Caves, 2010). This research focuses on data from the second follow-up, six years after students’ initial enrollment. The initial BPS collection included 16,580 respondents, of which 4,830 were community college students.

BPS data are collected using a three-stage design. In the first stage, selected participants are asked to engage in a self-administered interview, using either the telephone or Internet. In stage two, interviews are conducted with students using a computer-based telephone system. In the third stage, nonrespondents from the prior two stages are contacted and asked to participate in the study through an in-person interview (Cominole, Wheeless, Dudley, Franklin & Wine, 2007). BPS is a spin-off survey from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), which serves as the base year for the survey. NPSAS is designed to follow and assess how students finance college. Considering the important role of financial aid in facilitating the funding of many students’ collegiate endeavors, NPSAS
limits the respondent pool to students who were attending Title IV institutions (postsecondary institutions approved by the government to participate and award federal financial aid). NPSAS uses a large sample size of approximately 101,000 students. In contrast, BPS follow-ups to NPSAS employ much smaller samples, with approximately 12,000 respondents in the 1995/1996 cohort and 16,500 in the 2003/2004 cohort.

This sample population was delimited to students who were male, minority (including African American, Hispanic, and Native American), and who attended either a community college or a proprietary school. For equivalent comparison purposes, proprietary schools were operationalized as for-profit two-year or less postsecondary institutions. This resulted in a final unweighted population of 500 coarsened cases. Coarsened cases are rounded sample sizes reported by NCES to minimized disclosure risk. These 500 cases represented a weighted sample population of 253,700 minority men who attended community colleges and proprietary schools.

Three dependent variables were employed in this study, each of which were measures of minority male satisfaction in 2009. These variables include satisfaction with major or course of study; satisfaction with quality of undergraduate education; and satisfaction with the worth of educational experience in light of the costs incurred (referred to as satisfaction with educational worth). Each dependent variable was dichotomous in nature, coded as “0” representing not satisfied and “1” representing satisfied. Institutional type served as the primary independent variable in this study. Proprietary schools were coded “0” while community colleges were coded “1.” Several controls were also employed in this study, including respondents’ age when they first enrolled, two student integration variables (academic and social scales), and two environmental variables (the number of hours students were employed per week and whether the student had dependent children). These variables were selected as controls based upon prior research. Strayhorn (2012) examined predictors of student satisfaction among Black males in the community college and found that academic and social integration was predictive of college satisfaction. Strayhorn also controlled for age, employment, and family status of which he found age and family status to be predictive of satisfaction as well. Overall, his research indicated that measures of integration (with controls) accounted for 27% of the variance in satisfaction.

This study employed a two-stage analytic strategy. In the first stage, independent t-tests examined means and percentage differences between minority males in community colleges and proprietary schools on the sat-
satisfaction outcomes and control variables. The second stage of the study used logistic regression to examine the predictability of institutional type on each of the satisfaction outcomes while employing the control variables. Logistic regression outputs are interpreted by odds ratios, which is a ratio predicting the probability of an event’s occurrence. For this study, the event of interest is student satisfaction (Rudas, 1998). Data analyzed in this study were weighted for students who were respondents in the first wave (2003) as well as in the successive waves (2006 and 2009) of BPS (referred to as WTB000).

Limitations

A limitation of this study is the dichotomous nature of the outcome measures of satisfaction. In all likelihood, there are gradations of satisfaction; unfortunately, this is not the manner in which BPS collected this data from respondents. As such, this study is not able to identify more intricate differences in student satisfaction. Further, this study did not delimit the sample population by attainment outcomes; as such, students are referred to as attendees as opposed to graduates. This approach allowed the researcher to better understand satisfaction outcomes from a general perspective, regardless of outcome. However, this perspective did provide proprietary colleges with an advantage, given their success in facilitating attainment. Thus, study findings should be viewed with this limitation in mind.

Findings

Using independent t-tests, the researcher was able to examine several significant differences in the variable employed in this study (see Table 1). Minority males attending community colleges are significantly more likely than their proprietary peers to be academically integrated into their collegiate settings ($t = 3.52, p < .001$). Furthermore, in each dependent variable of interest, minority males in the community college were significantly more likely to have higher levels of satisfaction than their proprietary peers. In terms of minority males’ choice of major or course of study, 89.4% of community college students were satisfied in comparison with only 65.9% of proprietary students ($t = 4.43, p < .001$). Minority male students’ satisfaction with the quality of education mirrored findings from their satisfaction with choice of major or course of study. Community college students had higher percentages of satisfaction with regard to quality of education (89.7%) as opposed to 73.5% at proprietary schools ($t = 2.99, p < .01$). In terms of satisfaction with the worth of their educa-
tion, minority males in the community college had significantly greater levels of satisfaction (83.3%) in comparison with their proprietary peers (59.0%) \((t = 4.05, p < .001)\). Overall, these data suggest that minority males who attended community colleges are significantly more satisfied than those enrolled at proprietary institutions.

**Table 1. Means and Percentages Between Minority Men in Community Colleges and Proprietary Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Community College</th>
<th>Proprietary</th>
<th>(t)-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age first year enrolled</td>
<td>22.7 (0.52)</td>
<td>23.0 (0.70)</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social integration</td>
<td>55.9 (2.32)</td>
<td>58.2 (13.0)</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic integration</td>
<td>24.4 (2.05)</td>
<td>9.2 (3.80)</td>
<td>3.52***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent children</td>
<td>19.0% (2.66)</td>
<td>24.6% (4.85)</td>
<td>-1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week</td>
<td>19.8 (1.30)</td>
<td>20.0 (2.11)</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with choice of major or course of study</td>
<td>89.4% (1.39)</td>
<td>65.9% (5.12)</td>
<td>4.43***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with quality of education</td>
<td>89.7% (1.58)</td>
<td>73.5% (5.18)</td>
<td>2.99**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with educational worth</td>
<td>83.3% (2.14)</td>
<td>59.0% (5.61)</td>
<td>4.05***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** * .05, **.01, ***.001

The first logistic regression model examined the effect of institutional type on students’ satisfaction with their choice of major or course of study (see Table 2). Even when controlling for demographic, integration, and environmental factors, institutional type was predictive of student satisfaction. The odds of minority males being satisfied were 365% greater for those attending community colleges as opposed to proprietary schools. It should be noted that having dependents was also predictive of students’ satisfaction. Those students who have dependents had significantly lower odds, by 61.6%, of being satisfied. However, the relative importance of each variable on satisfaction, as assessed by the standardized beta coefficient, indicated that institutional type had a greater relative effect on satisfaction \((b = 0.26)\) than having children \((b = -0.15)\). Overall, this mod-
el accounted for 11% of the variance in satisfaction and was significant (Wald $F = 3.58$, $p < .01$).

**Table 2. Satisfaction With Choice of Major or Course of Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>$b$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age first year enrolled</td>
<td>1.017</td>
<td>0.12–3.50</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social integration</td>
<td>0.999</td>
<td>0.99–1.01</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic integration</td>
<td>1.008</td>
<td>0.99–1.02</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent children</td>
<td>0.384$^*$</td>
<td>0.16–0.90</td>
<td>−0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week</td>
<td>1.015</td>
<td>0.99–1.04</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First institution (public two-year)</td>
<td>4.650$^{**}$</td>
<td>1.86–11.61</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R2</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald $F$</td>
<td>3.57$^{**}$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N$</td>
<td>500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** $b = \text{unstandardized beta coefficient.}$

The second model investigated the effect of the institutional type on students’ satisfaction with the quality of their undergraduate education (see Table 3). None of the integration variables or environmental variables were found to be significantly predictive of persistence. In this model, age was a significant predictor, with each unit increase in age increasing students’ odds of satisfaction by 10.4% ($p < .05$). As with the first model, institutional type was also significantly predictive of satisfaction. The odds of minority males being satisfied with the quality of their educational experience were 292% greater for those who attended community colleges as opposed to proprietary schools. In line with findings from model one, institutional type accounted for the largest relative effect on satisfaction ($b = 0.22$). This significantly predictive model accounted for 16% of the variance in persistence (Wald $F = 2.84$, $p < .05$).
The third model examined students’ satisfaction with the educational worth of their academic experience (see Table 4). Unlike previous models, the only significant predictor of satisfaction was institutional type. As such, none of the control variables were significantly predictive of satisfaction. In this model, the odds of a minority male being satisfied were 293% greater for those who attended community colleges in comparison with those who attended proprietary schools. Furthermore, the unstandardized beta coefficient revealed that institutional type contributed a greater relative effect on satisfaction than other variables in the model (b
= 0.24). Overall, this model was statistically significant and accounted for 12% of the variance in minority male satisfaction (Wald $F = 3.114$, $p < .01$).

**Discussion**

This research investigated students’ satisfaction with their educational experiences, six years after enrolling in community colleges in comparison with those who enrolled in proprietary schools. The findings from this study indicated that satisfaction levels are significantly higher for minority male community college attendees as opposed to those who attended proprietary institutions. Specifically, minority male students who attended community colleges had greater satisfaction with their major or course of study, quality of their education, and the cost-effectiveness of their educational pursuits. Even when controlling for relevant factors (e.g., demographic, integration, environmental), which could mitigate evident differences, institutional type was predictive of student satisfaction. Furthermore, the relative importance of institutional type in relationship to other variables (as assessed by the standardized beta coefficient) in the three logistic regression models revealed that institutional type had the greatest effect on student satisfaction.

The findings from this study lend important insight into differential student outcomes for public and for-profit educational entities. While extant research indicates that proprietary schools have better retention and graduation outcomes for students (Bailey, Badway, & Gumport, 2001; U.S. GAO, 2011), other market outcomes juxtapose these data. Prior to this study, it was known that proprietary attendees, in comparison with their public peers, paid more for their education (Miller & Mupinga, 2006; Riegg, 2006), owed greater monies in student loans (Mullin, 2010), had higher default rates, and were more likely to be unemployed (U.S. GAO, 2011). This study has extended conversations on differential student outcomes, indicating that community college attendees have significantly greater satisfaction (six years after their initial enrollment) than do those who attended proprietary schools. Moreover, this research has illustrated greater satisfaction levels among minority males, an underserved student population that has lower levels of success in community colleges (Wood & Vasquez-Urias, 2012). Therefore, while minority males may be more likely to graduate from proprietary schools, they are certainly less likely to be satisfied with their experiences at these institutions.
Conclusion and future research

Community college leaders should not deem findings from this study as affirmation of their success. Extensive research illustrates that these institutions are challenged in facilitating positive student success (e.g., persistence, achievement, attainment, transfer) for minority male students (Wood, 2011a; Wood & Hilton, 2012; Wood, Hilton & Lewis, 2011; Wood & Turner, 2011). Thus, this study’s findings simply indicate that students at community colleges have greater satisfaction outcomes than at proprietary schools. These outcomes may have less to do with the community colleges’ success and more to do with proprietary institutions themselves.

Given the extensive public disparaging of proprietary quality (Blumenstyk, 2011; Field, 2008, 2010; Kiley, 2010; Kirkham, 2001; Oseguera & Malagan, 2011; U.S. GAO, 2010), it is possible that study findings are merely a reflection of negative societal views of proprietary schools. On the other hand, minority men perhaps do not have satisfactory experiences in these institutions. Either way, future research is needed to better understand why satisfaction differences are evident among institutions. In particular, researchers should focus on whether differential institutional factors (e.g., mission, oversight, costs) may have an effect on student satisfaction. Findings from such research will be useful to both institutional types. Such knowledge would help community colleges better understand why minority men, who perform more poorly at their institutions, are more likely to be satisfied with their experiences. Additionally, this study should be viewed as a starting point for additional inquiry examining differences in student outcomes between community colleges and proprietary schools. Future studies could focus on labor market outcomes such as salary, benefits, and workplace authority. In line with this study, research on satisfaction outcomes could focus on workplace satisfaction differences (if any) between community college attendees in comparison with their proprietary peers.

References


