

## Demographics of Targeted Area

The University of West Alabama (UWA) is located within a rural area known as the Black Belt. The area is a segment of the larger Black Belt Region of the Southern United States, which stretches from Texas to Virginia. This region includes the poorest counties in Alabama and the United States. The name referred originally to the thin layer of exceptionally fertile Black soil which encouraged cotton farming in the pioneer period of Alabama history. Now the descriptive title is mistakenly taken as a reference to the exceptionally high proportion of Black residents in these counties. Major characteristics of Black Belt counties include:

- Proportionally large Black Population
- Highest rates of obesity in state and nation
- Low rates of educational attainment
- Highest levels of poverty in state and nation

The Black Belt Region of Alabama is burdened with an environment that results in a wide range of social, economic, cultural, health, political and physical ills. The area is poor and economically underdeveloped. The demographics reported by the most recent Census Bureau Reports (2015) validate that the area is a poor, rural, undeveloped with low-achieving schools. The proposed project focuses on six Black below depicts demographics of the targeted area.

Category	Clarke	Choctaw	Greene	Marengo	Perry	Pickens	Sumter	Wilcox
<b>Population</b>	24,675	13,170	8,479	20,028	9,652	20,864	13,103	11,059
<b>Population of African Americans</b>	10,906	5,558	6,809	10,214	9,496	8,346	9,460	7,808
<b>% of African Americans</b>	44.2%	42.2%	80.3%	51.0%	67.3%	40.0%	72.2%	70.6%
<b>Persons in poverty</b>	6,144	3,293	2,815	5,128	4,527	5,216	4,992	3,727
<b>Persons in poverty %</b>	24.9%	25%	33.2%	25.6%	46.9%	25.0%	38.1%	33.7%
<b>High School Graduate or higher, 25+years %</b>	80.1%	74.1%	75.1%	84.3%	69.6%	78.6%	77.1%	78.6%
<b>Bachelor's Degree or higher, 25+years %</b>	11.9%	12.8%	11.5%	16.0%	9.1%	9.6%	15.0%	11.5%

**Table 1: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 Census**

The average family in this poverty stricken, economically undeveloped area is a single, female head-of-household with three children cared for by a grandparent or another elderly relative. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2005), 56% of the children in the area live in single parent families with 60% of children under 18 living with their grandparents. Children do not have chores or responsibilities, and they are burdened with excessive unsupervised free-time. Parents and caregivers are constantly working to meet financial

responsibilities, are not able to give their children the proper supervision that is needed. Most residents must commute no less than 20 miles a day in order to secure a job that pays minimum wage. They live in a home worth less than \$15,000 with many people. The poverty rates in the six counties, which provide 46% of UWA's undergraduate enrollment exceed most in the state of Alabama and nation.

Secondary Education: The schools of the six counties targeted typically parallel the demographics. The six county school systems are characterized by high a percentage of students on the free lunch program, high dropout rates, and low expenditure per student, low test scores, high rate of uncertified teachers, and low passing rate on Graduation Exam, low ACT scores, and low percentage of students attending postsecondary institutions. *Kids Count for Alabama Data Book, 2006* reports that five of the six counties were ranked among the 17 worst in the state. The significance of the data represents an ongoing cycle of the poor educational standards in which students have no exposure to a quality education thus the few who complete college and return do not change the existing norm established decades ago.