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PROMISE YOU CAN TRUST? A CRITICAL QUANTITATIVE STUDY ON THE POLITICS OF LOW-INCOME COLLEGE ACCESS

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Abstract

Promise programs are a growing trend across the US that offer college assistance to low-income students. Many of these programs develop under the premise of supporting low-income students, but without policy language addressing the unique needs of low-income students in relation to race, gender, and class barriers. This study examined Oklahoma's Promise, a statewide tuition-free program for low-income students, through a critical quantitative method and intersectional framework. It used the entire Oklahoma's Promise population over a ten year span to ask the questions: who is being served by Promise?; when do students exit the program and what variables predict the time of that exit?; and what factors relate to the likelihood of degree completion? To answer these questions participants' demographic data, hometown, and high school characteristics were disaggregated and analyzed to evaluate equity in the program. Additionally, statistical tests such as Cox's Proportional Hazards model and multinomial logistic regressions were used to evaluate the validity of political narratives surrounding participant retention and completion. Findings discern Oklahoma's Promise currently does not equitably serve students across racial, ethnic, gender, and high school characteristics but does serve equitably across hometowns. The findings in this study depart from common trends in literature showing students from underserved populations were more likely than their counterparts to persist towards a degree. However, they were less likely to attain a degree in the program. The findings validate Crenshaw's (1989) intersectional theory relating to policy frameworks and the need for policy language and practice to consider individuals' multiple intersecting identities to holistically and equitably serve the gamut of individuals who fall under a specific marginalized status.

Keywords: Promise programs, access, retention, completion, low-income students, critical quantitative inquiry, intersectionality, higher education policy.

For my meme, Wanda Sue Jones Welchel

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Introduction

"*Promises were made for people who do not trust each other."* -Ethel M. Dell (1926, p. 313)

Problem Statement

Promise programs have been around for decades, but were catapulted into public discourse when President Barack Obama added America's College Promise, a proposal to offer all students two free years of community college tuition, to his education agenda. The program was loosely based on Tennessee Promise (Office of the Press Secretary, 2015), but in reality, there are hundreds of Promise programs already in existence in most states across the country (Perna & Leigh, 2017). These programs vary drastically from one program to another in scale, intention, purpose, outcome, and financial structure (Miller-Adams & Hershebein, 2017). These sorts of programs have drawn national attention as now there are 29 statewide programs in the United States (US) (Kanter & Venkatesan, 2020). While offering college at reduced cost to support low-income students seems simple enough to create effective and meaningful results, there is typically a disconnect from how the policy is created and the lack of attention on program design and how it affects student outcomes (Andrews, et al., 2010; Bartik, et al., 2015; Carruthers & Fox, 2016; Miller-Adams & Timmeney, 2013). Attention on who the policy is intended for, what communities they are from, and what barriers they face in the pursuit of higher education has the potential to create meaningful impact; however, these programs typically center around a single marginalized identity axis—low-income students—and prescribe a one-size-fits-all approach to policy. The value of these programs is often determined at state and national levels on the basis of student performance outcome metrics, which are separated from the context of the who the students are and what factors contribute to the reported

outcomes. This is particularly the case for one statewide program, Oklahoma's Promise (Promise), which will be investigated in this study.

In 1992 the Oklahoma Legislature made a promise to low-income Oklahomans by establishing the Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program, now known as Promise. Promise was created to address access, or students' ability to enroll and attend college, by establishing a bridge for low-income Oklahoma families through financial aid.

Addressing the cost of attendance is a valuable and worthy cause to assist low-income families; however, it does not account for or even acknowledge the additional barriers those families may be facing. Particularly those in marginalized racial and ethnic groups (Gladiux and Swail, 1999). Promise focuses on two strategies to target access: (1) Financial aid through tuition waivers but does not cover the full cost of attendance, and (2) academic preparedness (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2022). It is a program that has potential to help students get to college, but every year that flame of hope for Oklahoma families dwindles as legislators evaluate the *worthiness* of funding certain populations' access to college.

The original intentions of access and affordability, Promise's hallmark, gets lost in the political battle of return on investment (ROI). Here, Promise's worth is justified not by the number of students who use it to attend college but by how many of them receive a degree. Graduation has never been a mission for Promise as the program has always been centered around the mission to "help more Oklahoma families send their children to college" (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2022). It now seems the stakes have changed. What was at best a band aid to the access gap is now expected to be a solution to the completion gap (Forman, 2021). Further, Promise policy is written as a colorblind policy; meaning, students are accepted to the program on the basis of merit and financial need without participants' background

considered in the program. Colorblind systems are generally viewed as nondiscriminatory, but in actuality they are quite discriminatory (Gotanda, 1991). Frequently, policies developed based on one identity axis are rarely neutral to other identities. As a result, the very policies intended to "help" a marginalized population often lead to further oppression when the complexity of power dynamics associated with race, sex, class, gender, etc. are not taken into consideration (Shields, 2008; Verloo, 2013). Gutierrez and Dixon-Román, used the term "gap gazing" (2010, p. 21) to describe researchers' and policy leaders' fascination with studying and discussing achievement gaps without addressing the context surrounding those gaps. For Promise, the political tendency to "gap gaze" (Gutierrez & Dixon-Román, 2010, p. 21) to justify investing in low-income students without the context of students' complex identities and experiences may mean that this program is falling short of its intended purpose for many students while permitting policymakers to continue developing legislation based in ethos of prejudice without being questioned.

Conservative lawmakers have targeted Promise through legislation by consistently attempting to adjust eligibility, program requirements and to some degree, payback plans (see Appendix B for list of proposed legislation). In these bills, lawmakers are not reevaluating the worthiness of all Oklahoma public colleges and institutions that do not graduate every student they admit; rather, they focus on the access program that supports low-income student access. Essentially, as low-income families begin to prepare their children for college and apply for the program, lawmakers engage in the yearly activity of pulling the eligibility goal post for the program back and further out of reach for the students who need it most. This goal posting exists within the confines of the Promise program. Promise's single-identity axis structure creates a screen in which legislators mask relegation as responsible stewardship of state resources (Verloo, 2013). Uncovering who participants are, what their intersecting identities may be, the barriers

they may present to attending college, and how the program targets access continue to go unaddressed in research.

There is only one published peer reviewed study on Oklahoma's Promise program. Mendoza and Mendez (2013) used a colorblind framework (Chen, 2008) to evaluate the effect Promise had on persistence in relation to Pell and Stafford federal aid programs. There is no published research on Promise in relation to access to college or through an intersectional framework (Crenshaw, 1989) of participants, thus providing no information about its core mission or the diverse population it serves.

Background

Promise was established by the State Legislature in 1992 to help more Oklahoma families send their children to college. The program was developed by and is provided through the Oklahoma State Regents of Higher Education (OSRHE), a state agency and coordinating board for Oklahoma's public colleges and universities. The program is largely a financial one as there are no resources, beyond the tuition waiver, to support Promise students once admitted to a college or university. Promise does have academic eligibility standards requiring more challenging high school coursework in preparation for college.

Current Eligibility and Application Regulations

Currently, eighth-, ninth-, and tenth-grade students from families with an annual household income of $55,000 or less can apply for the program with special provisions and extensions to include former-foster youth and families receiving Social Security disability and death benefits. It is both a need- and merit-based scholarship that: provides a tuition waiver to eligible students at any Oklahoma public college or university; or a portion of tuition at an accredited Oklahoma private college or university; or a portion of tuition for approved programs

at Oklahoma public technology centers. This scholarship does not cover fees, books, supplies, room and board, or any other living expense.

Participants must take 17 units of required high school courses to complete the OSRHE OK Promise Core Curriculum and maintain a 2.50 GPA for all high school courses. Additionally, students cannot have any record of criminal or delinquent acts, history of drug or alcohol use, and must be a U.S. citizen or lawfully present in the U. S. at the time of enrollment. Students must fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) each year and their families' income cannot exceed $100,000 at any point after benefits have been allocated or the scholarship will be canceled for that academic year.

Research Questions

1. Who is being served by Promise and to what extent do people of color, women, students from low-income high schools, and rural communities participate in Promise?
2. When do students exit the program and what variables predict the time of that exit?
3. What factors relate to the likelihood of degree completion?
    a. What factors relate to the likelihood of attaining an associate's degree relative to no degree?
    b. What factors relate to the likelihood of attaining an associate's then bachelor's degree relative to only an associate's degree?
    c. What factors relate to the likelihood of a attaining bachelor's degree relative to no degree?

Purpose Statement

The intent of this study is to understand the impact and consequences of using low-income as the single axis in providing access to Oklahomans through the Promise program.

Significance of the Study

When Promise was established in the 1990s, there was a demonstrated need to address the opportunity gap for Oklahoma low-income students (SREB, 2018). However, since the program has started it has still yet to be measured on the program's ability to successfully address that gap. This research comes at a time when 15.2 percent of Oklahomans are living below the federal poverty line ($26,200 for a family of four) and one in ten Oklahomans live in poverty (Phillips, 2020). Meanwhile, Oklahoma PK-12 school demographics are becoming far more diverse than ever before as White students are the only population in decline while all other race representations are increasing (Kids Count Data Center, accessed Jan. 2021). These students need Oklahoma to keep its promise to work towards solutions on reducing the college opportunity gap. However, to understand the barriers these students face, we must understand who these students are and how Promise is already performing as a lever for access.

Positionality Statement

I chose to study college access for low-income students because it is something that has affected me and my family on a deeply personal level. Within my own family, each member had their own experience of either being unwelcomed or uninvited entirely from higher education. My grandfather, Marvin grew up orphaned, homeless, and resigned to slave labor. He was given to an uncle after the death of his parents as free labor and spent his childhood sleeping in a chicken coup. He was not given the opportunity to learn to read until he served in the military for WWII. My grandmother Gwen always wanted to be a teacher, but experienced homelessness her entire childhood and married middle-class after high school for food and housing security. My grandparents Wanda and Tom, grew up working class but were both told college wasn't for them. My mom, Tammy, was a "high school dropout" and teen mom, but she went on to get her

associate's, bachelor's, and master's in her forties. My father, Andy, graduated high school but was gatekept from intellectual coursework because of his dyslexia and attended about one year of college before leaving. Their stories and experiences drew me to this work and inform my understanding of the impacts class has on access to higher education and the narratives around low-income student achievement.

I myself was a recipient of the scholarship program I am studying. Oklahoma's Promise waived tuition for me to go to my dream school. I qualify as a "low-income student" but also recognize my experience was very different than so many of my low-income peers. My family collectively contributed to fund the rest of the cost of attendance beyond my scholarship and I worked at my family's factory every summer to pay for text books and extra expenses, these contributions made it possible for me to attend school full-time without extra employment. I am partially Native and a member of Cherokee Nation but I am White passing and for all intents and purposes looked like a "traditional student" to my peers, faculty, and staff on campus. However, I faced many barriers invisible to my peers and instructors, particularly financially and in lack of institutional knowledge, that significantly impacted my college experience. I quickly realized that the fact that my barriers were seemingly invisible made it easier for me to find ways to navigate through them. Whereas, my peers who looked different than me or who came from different communities, had some of the same challenges I did but in contrast, less resources at their disposal to address them.

The experience of seeing resources to institutional knowledge be given to some and denied to others created a personal passion to share information and resources. As an undergraduate student I volunteered my time to work as a new student orientation leader and a mentor to freshmen students to help them navigate through some of the experiences I had just

faced. Ultimately, it led me to work professionally in first-year programs at a university after college, working directly with students at-risk of withdrawing. I worked to assist them in navigating the barriers they faced in the process of matriculating to college. My own experience alongside that of my peers and my students shaped the way I view this research, specifically around the barriers low-income students from different communities' face in persisting and achieving a degree.

Finally, in the process of this degree, I accepted a position at the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education where I now work for the state agency that facilitates the scholarship program I study. I am not an administrator of the program nor the policy. I am, however, frequently briefed on the closed-door conversations amongst people in power and the narrative they paint about low-income students and the *worthiness* of who gets access to higher education. but I sit every day in rooms where I hear statements addressed by people in power and the narrative they paint about low-income students, about the program, and ultimately about *worthiness* of who gets access to higher education. I am privy to the compromises and conflicts that education policy practitioners endure to navigate political systems while attempting to wholeheartedly serve students. This experience too has shaped my study and the way I understand my research topic, specifically in respect to how systems of oppression are created and sustained through political policy. Specifically, this experience impacted my study because it informed my understanding of power dynamics in relation to race, class, and gender oppression are expressed through law and policy frequently through policy language through jargon and veiled meaning.

Literature Review

This literature review will cover three major categories: systemic barriers to access, systemic barriers to retention and completion, and education policy. Because Promise is a program developed to target the access gap, the first section will explain what barriers exist to create an access gap for students from different populations. Although Promise is not a retention or completion program, it is often measured as such; for this reason, the second section will explain what barriers exist to create a completion gap for students from different populations. The last section will give context to the Oklahoma political landscape and how it shapes education policy as well as a synthesis on Promise programs throughout the United States (US) and how Promise compares.

This literature review intentionally does not address academic barriers to access or completion because it goes beyond the scope of the study. Although academic preparedness and opportunity play key roles to college access and undoubtedly a role in degree attainment, there are policy limitations to which Promise can control. Currently, Promise requires a targeted academic preparatory curriculum in high school to participate in the program. However, a different state agency outside of OSRHE set high school standards for districts which creates a structural overlap and confusion in accountability of program high school standards. In the same vein, Promise cannot override the academic choices set forth by individual faculty, institutions, or regional accrediting bodies. For these reasons, analysis in these areas will not be included.

College Promise Programs

"Promise programs are an important strategy for opportunity and access so more students from low-income backgrounds can earn a college degree. Oklahoma's Promise is a

model others can learn from." – President Stephen Pruitt, Southern Regional Education Board President (SREB, 2018).

College Promise programs have been a growing trend in higher education over the last 30 years, particularly in the last decade (Perna & Leigh, 2017). The College Promise Campaign (CPC), a campaign established by the Obama administration in 2015 to develop and support College Promise programs, identified 53 Promise programs nationwide and today recognizes more than three hundred local programs and 29 statewide Promise programs in the US (Kanter & Venkatesan, 2020). Most College Promise program definitions vary in the literature, but almost all have the overt enthusiasm of a motivational poster and underpinnings of the American dream mentality. For example, "A College Promise is a *public assurance* to prepare students for the twenty-first century workforce and the pursuit of the American dream without the burden of unmanageable college debt. A College Promise is also a *trust* to make the first two years of college—at minimum—as universal, free and accessible as public high school has been since the twentieth century" (Kanter & Venkatesan, 2020, p.20). Ultimately, College Promise programs can vary greatly and can develop at the localized community and institution level or into entire state policies.

Except for a few studies College Promise research does not cover the gamut of initiatives and is highly localized and case-specific (Miller-Adams & Hershebein, 2017). Kanter and Venkatesan (2020) synthesized the hundreds of programs across America and found that they shared a few common features: (1) Promise programs have clear policy to communicate to the public, policymakers, institutions and students on the importance of higher education; (2) messaging from stakeholders that college is obtainable for any student who is eligible and hardworking; and, (3) in addition to financial funding, quality Promise programs recognize that

additional support services are essential to student persistence and completion (Kanter & Venkatesan, 2020). Meeting all the needs of underserved students is important, but Perna (2016) points out that removing tuition as a barrier for entry is the most crucial first step to address access.

As College Promise programs have evolved, the CPC and College Promise researchers have begun to focus largely on the essential need for wraparound support services and targeting the third feature because scholarship funding does not provide the essential services necessary to support retention and completion (Kania & Kramer, 2011; Kanter & Venkatesan, 2020; Miller-Adams, 2009; Osher, et al., 2015; Perna, 2016; Rauner, 2016). State-funded models of College Promise initiatives, such as Promise, are the highest profile of options, are typically beloved by stakeholders (Boyd & Lubbers, 2017) and exist in 29 states across America in 2020 (Kanter & Venkatesan, 2020). The statewide systems vary in design greatly. Some systems are highly integrated within the K12 system; while others, like the Tennessee Promise, have expansive networks of support through partnership with a statewide nonprofit (Kanter & Venkatesan, 2020). California's program provides a revenue stream allowing local colleges and universities to develop their own programs (Rauner, 2016). Washington's Promise acts as an expansion of already existing equity focused state need grants and Kentucky's Work Ready Scholarship Program targets underserved populations and workforce needs (Kanter & Venkatesan, 2020). The offerings range from general funding models to full wraparound services such as mentorships, job placements, career counseling, summer bridge programs, and other dedicated services.

Most researchers looking at statewide programs suggest layered approaches to the program (Boyd & Lubbers, 2017; Millet, 2020). One model will not meet the needs of all

students, but creating multiple overlapping federal, state, local, nonprofit, and private programs to create financial sustainability and student support services can move the needle on access and completion (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Statewide programs come with certain policy trade-offs that must be made. A layering of programs and services that all operate with autonomy to serve the specific needs of an individual community will maximize buy-in and sustainability of College Promise programs (Boyd & Lubbers, 2017). The combination of statewide and local College Promise programs has the potential to provide unmatched levels of flexibility and a better opportunity to meet the unique needs of student needs (Miller-Adams, 2009). At the very worst, the layering of programs will duplicate efforts; at best, the partnerships can greatly increase the impact of Promise and serve the students who need resources most in the ways they most need it (Kanter & Venkatesan, 2020). Essentially, to yield best outcomes for underserved students, states should invest in additional community-specific resources to layer services and bolster the services promise programs already provide. Increasing retention and completion in College Promise programs requires additional investments from communities, not divestments in education.

Oklahoma's Promise

Oklahoma's Promise shares many common features with the other promise programs outlined above but in general is far less restrictive and complex than other promise programs across the country. Oklahoma demands a broad early commitment as early as middle school to target students from low-income households in preparation for college, similar to Indiana and Kalamazoo, but different than all other statewide programs (Elliott & Levere, 2017). This strategy in the Indiana and Kalamazoo programs have been tied to greater college-going culture among promise participants and their treatment within the K-12 system (Bartik & Lachowska,

2012; Jones, et al., 2012; and St. John, et al., 2004). Oklahoma's Promise policy relies entirely on the academic and social support services provided through the K-12 system and the individual higher education institutions to meet the additional needs of students. The openness of Oklahoma's Promise policy framework arguably has many discrete benefits, some of which may be: support of student choice in program and place; lack of redundancy in bureaucratic services; and a stable system-wide source of funding for low-income students. The openness could also arguably have many discrete drawbacks: creating administrative burden at the K-12 or institution level to support students and promote the program; and no targeted initiatives to support students from underserved backgrounds through the well-researched and documented series of barriers they are to encounter in navigating their college experience. What is most notably different about Oklahoma's Promise is the fact that students are given funding for up to five years of tuition or a bachelor's degree, whichever comes first (OSRHE, 2022), whereas many other programs only provide funding for the first two-years of college (Kanter & Venkatesan, 2020). Oklahoma's Promise also differs because there are no other programs embedded within the policy; in contrast, many states have additional requirements of the college student participants and may offer distinct support initiatives, such as mentorship or alumni engagement requirements. For instance, the Tennessee Promise requires annual community service as part of their program. Tennessee and Kalamazoo Promises both require minimum GPAs for college coursework to continue to receive the award, and limit the type and scope of institutions a participant can attend. Oklahoma's Promise allows for every participant to attend any public college or university with a full tuition waiver or a partial tuition waiver at any Oklahoma accredited private institution, to pursue any degree program of their choosing. Regardless of the pros and cons of Oklahoma's Promise model, its existing limitations and boundaries determined/impacted

data management and analysis processes in this study, therefore a full description of eligibility and award requirements are explained below.

Oklahoma's Promise Program Requirements. All information in this section may be found on the Oklahoma's Promise website (OSRHE, 2022), for ease of understanding and flow, a detailed description of eligibility and award requirements are outlined below.

As of the date this dissertation was written (2020/2021) the eligibility requirements for Promise are: student must be an Oklahoma resident, enrolled in the 8th through 11th grade of high school, and the parents adjusted gross income must not exceed $55K per year. There are special provisions for children adopted from certain court-ordered custody, children in custody of court-appointed legal guardians, and families receiving social security benefits based on the disability or death of a student's parents. The requirements of high school students participating in the program include documentation of the family's income status, FAFSA completion during the senior year of high school, achieve a 2.50 accumulative GPA or higher for all high school coursework, completion of the 17-unit college prep core curriculum, and refraining from criminal activities.

After high school, the participants have three years from the time of high school graduation to start taking postsecondary courses. They stop receiving awards after five years of enrolling in postsecondary education or until a bachelor's degree is attained, whichever happens first. Remedial courses and failed courses are not reimbursed or funded by the scholarship. Participants are responsible for meeting admission standards, enrolling, and maintaining student status at the institution of their choice. Participants become ineligible for the award if they are suspended from the college for more than a semester due to conduct violations or if they are incarcerated within a state, federal, or private correctional facility. Special eligibility timeline

considerations are made for participants in active military duty. Lastly, SB 529 was established in 2017 that affected some of the eligibly requirements affecting some participants in this study. Prior to SB 529 the income threshold was $50K, it moved to $55K in 2018, and to $60K in 2022. This bill also created a process in which Promise participants are required to participate in annual income checks, where the family household income may not exceed $100K and receive the award, all participants are evaluated annually and may fall into or outside of the awards eligibility within their college experience.

Access and Why It Matters

The American higher education system was built on elitism and exclusivity. Between 1700 and 1900 less than five percent of Americans between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two enrolled in college (Schuh, et al., 2011). In the earliest universities, which were already exclusively limited to rich White men, students were delineated on rosters according to social class and socioeconomic positions; separating "commoners" who had different dining halls from the "servitors" who sat at waited tables (Schuh, et al., 2011). It is from this colonial age that the American higher education system was born and attempting to evolve. It would take centuries before it was commonplace to admit women, students of color, or low-income students. This inherited discriminatory system laid the foundation to issues of access to higher education. Access is most simply defined for this study as a student's means of entry into higher education: meaning, it is an option they could plausibly consider and pursue. Legally, there are few limitations that bar any one particular group from admission to a college or university; however, access to college is still an impossible reach for many families because of systemic inequalities throughout American communities. This is particularly true when considering the intersectional identities many students come from.

In the following pages, I will synthesize the history of access and the barriers that continue to exist for many American families. Unfortunately, much of this research will not be from an intersectional perspective as there are still very few studies that consider intersectionality and the unique challenges and experiences women, people of color, first-generation, and low-income students face in relation to access to higher education.

Admission Barriers

American colleges and universities were established as exclusive institutions, not only on the basis of intellectual merit, but also on the basis of race and gender (Anderson, 2002; Wood,1997). College admissions offices hold the key to who gets to earn a college degree and who does not. Evaluation of applicants, even if formulaic, leave expansive room for bias and discrimination and has been the most blatant targets to demonstrate marginalization and inequity in the American higher education systems. In this section I will cover institutionalized barriers to admission for students on the basis of race and gender. This selection leaves behind many other populations who have been denied access to college through discriminatory practices (LGBTQ2S+ students, undocumented students, students with disabilities, and traditionally hidden college populations to name a few). Because this data is not gathered for Promise, it cannot be analyzed in this study and warrants future research.

Intersectionality in Admissions Barriers Research. Admissions policies and practices fall into the same binary models Crenshaw (1989) found when she first introduced the concept intersectionality. In the following sections a thorough history of barriers to admission on the basis of race and sex are outlined; however, there is no documented policy to address the overlap in those two protected groups. Furthermore, there is no research on the consequences of this in student admissions. Unfortunately, this leaves very little insight on the unique experiences of

women of color. There is also very little literature on how these particular identities, in conjunction with class or income status, relate to admissions; thus, financial barriers to access are divided into their own section because of the unique ways cost and financing can remove students from the admissions and acceptance process. Using Crenshaw's (1989) logic, policies and frameworks that operate on the binary of identity—for example Black or White, and woman or man—implicitly address the most privileged part of that population.

Discrimination on the Basis of Race. In 1954 the Supreme Court unanimously decided segregated schools are inherently unequal and deprive African American students their Fourteenth Amendment right to equal protection of laws in the *Brown v Board of Education* case. This landmark decision overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine established by the *Plessy v Ferguson* decision in 1896. Although desegregation of higher education was federally mandated, the solution for equitably integrating education institutions still has room for growth. Even within populations who were not forced to segregate at institutions were admitted and enrolled at proportionately miniscule rates. For instance, student enrollment went from around two thousand students in the late 1950s to thirty-five hundred students in the late 1960s due to the rollout of the GI Bill and the rollout of tribal scholarships (AIHEC, 2000; Carney, 1999). Today, the "solution" has been rooted in two arguments: colorblind and affirmative action admissions practices. Both arguments have inherent racist and misogynistic elements.

Affirmative action is a policy in which an individual's gender, sex, race, ethnicity, origin, income status, and/or other marginalized identity is considered to increase opportunities for access to an otherwise underserved part of society. In higher education, this may look like quotas to save spaces so that wealthy White men or other privileged groups do not represent the entirety of a student population. The application of this process varies from institution to institution.

From a critical perspective, this method is preferable to color-blind practices because it acknowledges the systemic barriers to students from different backgrounds; however, it is far from perfect. Much of the discourse in support of affirmative action, particularly the diversity rationale (Liu, 1998), are really only looking at what's best for White students (Yosso, et al., 2004). Kayoko Peralta (2016, p. 184) says, "If education policies remain within the confines of colorblindness, they will never be far-reaching enough to attack the underlying problem in public education: institutional racism." Neil Gotanda (1991, p. 62-63) takes it one step further saying, "Modern color-blind constitutionalism supports the supremacy of White interests and must therefore be regarded as racist. There is no legitimate rationale for the automatic rejection of all governmental consideration of race."

Students of color typically come into college with far more exposure to people of other races before coming to college (Kayoko Peralta, 2016); however, because of the severe segregation amongst PK-12 schools, White students rarely have the opportunity to meaningfully interact with peers of color before college (Orfield, et al., 2012). This means that the deep and meaningful student development benefits of diversity initiatives do not benefit the students of different races proportionally or equally. Moreover, this argument supporting equitable admissions practices is laced with racism as students of color are being used as a tool for White students' educational gain (Kayoko Peralta, 2016; Orfield, et al., 2012).

Legal conversations surrounding affirmative action policies are perhaps the most revealing of America's deep-rooted and foundational systems of racism. In Bell's (2003) legal analysis of the *Grutter v Bollinger* affirmative action case he explained the word *diversity* is used as a distraction from acknowledging the root issues around racism and discrimination in admissions

practices. Further, he explains the many ways the justice system has misdirected logic to avoid removing racist policy (Bell, 2003), he says:

> … It is amazing that in the highly competitive college and graduate admissions process, so many open and obvious departures from the standards of fairness and merit are accepted, even defended, by so many whites for whom they pose very real barriers. And yet policies of racial preference, by any objective terms perhaps the most justifiable departure of all, are bitterly opposed in courts, in the legislatures, and in the polls… the long-long overdue reform of admissions standards will not be easy and will be resisted fiercely by many if not most of those colleges and graduate schools with whom civil rights advocates joined in the effort to save minority admissions through the distraction we are calling diversity (p. 1633).

In another affirmative action US Supreme Court case, *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin* (2015), Justice Scalia associates student success to race in his oral argument when he said:

> There are those who contend that it does not benefit African Americans to… get them into the University of Texas where they do not do well, as opposed to having them go to a less-advanced school, … a slower-track school where they do well. One of… the briefs pointed out that… most of the… Black scientists in this country don't come from schools like the University of Texas… They come from lesser schools where they do not feel that they're… being pushed ahead in… classes that are too… fast for them (p. 67).

It is from this framework we understand the pervasive nature of racism in arguments surrounding modern-day admissions practices. Rooted within this pervasive nature is a belief that race is the dominant determining factor of success at competitive institutions, which is validated by the most influential individuals in the American justice system.

While affirmative action is far from perfect, it may be marginally better than colorblind rationales that do not acknowledge race at all. Such mindsets are usually backed with reverse-discrimination theories as was seen in the *Parents Involved in Community Schools v Seattle School District No. 1* (2007), a Supreme Court case concerning race-conscious school assignments in PK-12 schools, where conservative justices equated affirmative action policies to be discriminatory against White students. The assumption of colorblindness is nondiscriminatory (Gotanda, 1991), but that assumption does not account for the imperative context about power dynamics associated with race, gender, ability, etc. infiltrating every aspect of our society. These overarching systems of oppression render it impossible to compete fairly on an equal playing field. In states where there is policy for colorblind admissions processes, studies revealed a preference for White students in personal writing statements and a reluctance from students of color to reference their cultural identity in their personal statements (Carbado & Harris, 2008). Meaning, students of color fear sharing their authentic stories and struggles due campus climate implications, which has retention and campus climate implications.

These all serve as examples of ways that systemic and institutionalized racism and discrimination saturate the admissions processes in higher education. Race continues to play a significant role in students' opportunity to participate in higher education, which is evidence that simply editing a system built on the foundation of White supremacy has still yet to be successful in accepting and equitably educating students of color.

Discrimination on the Basis of Sex. Historically, women were excluded from admission to colleges and universities, but—through the efforts of early feminists and the efforts established at the Seneca Falls Convention—the conversation about women's education became a policy agenda item in America (Wood, 1997). In 1862, the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act

founded universities with the precedent to educate both men and women. While most women's programs were still home-focused, by 1870 thirty percent of colleges were co-educational (Wood, 1997). Since then, enrollment of women has steadily increased. Since 1980, women have surpassed their men counterparts in the number of degrees conferred each year and the number of women receiving degrees has increased almost every year since (NCES, 2020). While these numbers are promising, they can be misleading. Women dominate certain fields of concentration, but are entirely underserved in others (Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2011). This is demonstrated through the work of Bielby, et al. (2014) in their research on why women are underserved in elite colleges and universities. Through a non-linear decomposition analysis, they found that the gender enrollment gap in access to these institutions "is not a matter of student choice, but instead an issue of admissions reliance on criteria that privileges male applicants" (Bielby, et. al, 2014, p. 754) and ultimately embed male privilege in the campus climate of the institution (Milem, et al., 2005)

Women's dominance in enrollment has led to practices reflecting perspectives similar to reverse-racism. The increase of woman applicants has led to a lower rate of admission than their men counterparts and officials have admitted to weighing the scales in favor of men applicants despite evidence to show women earn higher grades and participate in more extracurricular activities than their men counterparts (Kingsbury, 2007). "Female applicants have faced an admission rate that is an average of 13 percentage points lower than that of their male peers just for the sake of keeping that girl-boy balance" (Kingsbury, 2007, p. 50). Thus, it appears underperforming men may have advantage in admissions over their more accomplished woman counterparts (Jaschik, 2006). While these practices may lead us to believe that men are now disadvantaged in higher education, data reveal that enrollments have remained steady for White

men and increased for all men of color except Latinos (King, 2006, 2010). Also, this perception is once again removed from the greater context of understanding oppression of women both inside and outside of higher education. The perception that women are not marginalized in admissions practices is evident in the fact there are very few studies examining this in recent years.

Glazner-Raymo (2008) explained that women's numbers in higher education has fueled a new form of gender bias incited by attempts to view the majority status of women in higher education as a problem. The wage gap between women and men could be reason enough to challenge the perception that more women in higher education is a problem, but King (2010), Webster and Bishaw (2007) explain that this is because men are less likely to return to college later in life or pursue degrees. Men of all education levels continue to command higher salaries in the labor market (King, 2010; Webster and Bishaw, 2007). The American labor system is built to benefit and pay men. To demonstrate, a 2019 report published by the Institute for Women's Policy Research reported the median earnings for women working full-time all year is less than 82 cents on the median dollar paid to a White man (Hegewisch, et al., 2019). Hispanic women earned less than 55 cents, Black women less than 62 cents, and Asian women less than 91 cents on the median dollar paid to a White man (Hegewisch, et. al, 2019). These numbers could look more severe if part-time or seasonal employment was considered because, "women are more likely than men to work reduced schedules, often in order to manage childrearing and other caregiving work. Women are also more likely than men to work in occupations where fewer jobs are offered on a full-time basis or where hours vary from week to week" (Hegewisch, et. al, 2019, p. 1; Shaw, et al., 2016). The same opportunities do not exist for women who need to

outperform their men peers, both in the labor market and in their college application qualifications, to earn a living or a diploma.

These are among many reasons that, despite women outnumbering men at higher education institutions, there still remains systemic misogyny and negligence in recognizing the marginalization of women in the professional workplace and society. This also demonstrates a perfect example of how statistics in a vacuum do not explain the complexity of power dynamics. Someone only looking at the statistical outcomes of women's enrollment may perceive no access barriers to women in higher education; however, it is exactly this perception that fuels the marginalization of women and adds yet another barrier to women succeeding in higher education.

Financial Barriers to Access

America has seen great progress in admissions reform in the last century and the removal of discriminatory policy that prevented students from attending college on the basis of race, gender, and ability. Although these reforms were undoubtedly victories in the battle for equitable access to education, in the background the system was developing a more guileful method for leaving unwanted students behind. The lever to do so was money. Since the 1990s, the cost of higher education and the amount of student debt grew rapidly. During this time federal, state, and institution financial aid systems shifted from supporting need-based aid programs to merit-based aid programs and dividing up critically necessary scholarship dollars to students of all income levels. A 2007-2008 study showed only 20 percent of the total-merit based aid in the US went to low-income students and 57 percent of all the merit-based aid went to high- and high-middle-income students (Woo & Choy, 2012). The system shifted from blatantly discriminating in policy to subliminally discriminating through affordability. Without surprise, enrollment rates for

low-income students have declined. Enrollment rates for low-income students have decreased by almost 10 percentage points from 2008 to 2013 (Hadavand, 2018).

Promise was created solely to address the financial barrier to access college. It is both a need-based and merit-based program; however, over time, legislation has pushed the merit-based qualifications and the income threshold has increased, shifting the focus away from the students who need it the most subtly each session. In the following sections I will address, through literature, why need-based aid is still absolutely necessary for low-income students and what other access barriers continue to persist on the basis of finance.

College Affordability. Affordability of higher education became a hot topic in the early 2000s as the cost of higher education continued to rise (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011). For good reason, as Gaston (2018, p. 120) explains, "College costs have increased, student debt has risen, employers have complained about the readiness of graduates for employment, and accredited institutions have shut down and turned away students." The average cost of tuition and fees has increased by more than 300 percent in public four-year colleges and universities between 1980 and 2015 (Ma, Baum, Pender, & Welch, 2016). In the battle against rising costs for higher education, the students always lose. The students who represent marginalized communities may suffer the most. The increased costs came at a time when state government funding began to decline as they faced the recession and saw declines in state revenues. Pressures to fund competing programs like Medicaid also increased, making it difficult to maintain support for higher education institutions. (Doyle & Delaney, 2009; Kane, et al., 2005; Rizzo, 2004). Simultaneously, institutions experienced increases in operating costs, leading to a demand for new revenue streams from a variety of sources—one being increased student tuition (Archibald & Feldman, 2008; Harter, et al., 2005; Hearn, 2006; Mumper, 2001; Weisbrod, et al., 2008).

These pressing financial demands led to a variety of factors that ultimately affected access and retention of low-income students in particular.

One area that affects students significantly is the widespread adoption of merit-based aid (Ness, 2008), which is a system of funding based upon the qualifications or "merits" of a student as opposed to financial need. These funding models most significantly affect low-income students because funding is not earmarked specifically for students who need it, but instead for students who have "earned" it. The underlying assumption of merit-based aid is that the financial incentives will motivate students to rise to the occasion, regardless of their background, to perform their best (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011). However, because of existing systematic barriers, low-income students who often have far more obstacles than their peers may struggle to meet the criteria necessary and will be disproportionately denied the funding they need (Hoxby, 2004; Luna, 2006; St. John, 2006).

Financial Aid Systems & FAFSA Application. Recognizing that access to food and stable housing is connected to a students' ability to be successful in college may appear to be common sense, but the number of policies that actively work against students' ability to overcome these barriers begs the question of how obvious it may be. For instance, the beginning of a school year can be especially difficult because full tuition and fees are due at the same time students need to buy school supplies and possibly have to put down deposits for new living accommodations (Rivera, 2015). Delays in financial aid disbursements create challenges for students getting necessary supplies to be successful in their coursework and frequently cause the student to drop the course altogether (Rivera, 2015). The barriers established by federal and institutional financial aid policies have been well documented by researchers in depth, but the most blatant bottleneck derives from requirements to document financial need. In order to be

eligible for all federal aid and most state and institutional aid, a student must fill out the FAFSA. However, the process is far too complicated and deters many students from even completing it (JBL Associates, 2010; Kantrowitz, 2009a, 2009b, 2011; King, 2004, 2006; Long, 2008; McClure, 2011; The Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2008a, 2008b). This is especially true for low-income students (Kane & Avery, 2004; Kantrowitz, 2009a; King 2004, 2006; Kofoed, 2012; Long, 2008; Sallie Mae Fund, 2003). It is important to note that the FAFSA is not an inclusive instrument to investigate issues related to finance and college students because only U.S. citizens and eligible noncitizens can apply. This excludes undocumented and international students from the conversation. It does, however, give us a large snapshot of student financial need when eligible students fill it out. Tebbs and Turer (2005) point out that the proportion of Pell Grant recipients at an institution is likely a greater indicator of the students who seek aid than a representation of economic stratification. Baum and Payea's (2011) study confirm this speculation. They reveal that only 63 percent of total students who had income levels of $10,000 or less received a Pell Grant as opposed to 73 percent of students in the $10,000 to $19,999 range or 65 percent of students in the $20,000 to $29,000 range.

An obvious question would be, if students do not even finish the paperwork to seek financial assistance, how is it a systemic barrier and not individual apathy or negligence to blame? Beyond the original complicated process to fill out the FAFSA, the verification process is arguably more extensive, complicated, time consuming and affects low-income students at greater proportions than their counterparts (Cochrane & Hernandez-Gravelle, 2007; Cochrane, et al., 2010; Long, 2010; Mostafavi, 2010). Many low-income students lack the information they need to complete the process (Cochrane et al., 2010). The Central Processing Center (CPS) selects applications that meet the "error prone" criteria for verification (U.S. Department of

Education, 2010c, p. 3). The process typically focuses on specific subpopulations most eligible for Pell grants (Cochrane & Hernandez-Gravelle, 2007; Cochrane et al., 2010; Rhodes, 2005). Considering the overlap between complicated processes and first-generation low-income students, it seems obvious that assistance from institutional financial aid offices would be fundamental to improving FAFSA completion rates. One successful method for addressing this challenge is offering free on-campus tax-preparation services to students. These services can save students hundreds of dollars on the professional service, but they also ensure students receive all of their education credits and exemptions for their income status (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Proven even more successful is combining the free tax services with early filing of the FAFSA as a required part of the application, which increases the likelihood that low-income students receive the maximum amount of grant aid available at their deposal (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Cohen, 2012). As is, however, financial aid offices are already frequently overwhelmed with demands (Brock et al., 2007; Chitty, 2010; Cochrane & Hernandez-Gravelle, 2007; JBL Associates, 2010; MacCallum, 2008; The Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2008b). The continuous alterations to higher education regulations create an administrative burden (Chitty, 2010) to already understaffed offices (MacCallum, 2008). Such burdens often result in leaving students to fend for themselves, to navigate complicated processes and submit accurate information—likely without all the resources necessary.

First-Generation Barriers to Access

First-generation college students (first-gen) make up a significant portion of college goers. In Oklahoma, more than forty percent of undergraduates are first-gen (Kemp, 2019). While there is a great deal of research in the area of first-gen access, a significant proportion of it is not critical and focuses on the "deficit" of the students' themselves or that of their families.

This *scholarship* frames the student as a problem to be solved instead of focusing on a system that is not working for the student as the problem. In an effort to mitigate the validation of deficit-focused work many published works will be intentionally left out of this section.

First-gen students are separated out in higher education research because of the unique challenges they face in the process of applying to and navigating within institutions. While many first-gen parents desire for their children to attend college, they do not have the experience to offer guidance on the process (Choy, 2001; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012). Students with parents who attended college benefit from the inherited cultural knowledge of preparing for and applying to college (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018). The inequitable lack of knowledge in the process of preparing for and applying to college extends to higher education's confusing financial aid practices—leading low-income, first-gen students to limit their opportunities when considering college (McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Mullen, 2010; Radford, 2013).

Hébert (2018) researched first-gen students from rural communities and found that robust and supportive PK-12 environments that focus on college preparation, intellectual friendships, and emotionally supportive educators had the most significant impact on college attendance. However, other research on first-gen students suggested they are less likely to be identified for gifted and talented programs, encouraged to take college preparatory courses such as Advanced Placement (AP) courses and exams, to take college placement exams such as the SAT or ACT (Brown & Burkhardt, 1999; Riehl, 1994), or to enroll in any type of post-secondary institution (Engle, et al., 2006; Engle & Tinto, 2008). Other studies found that parents' involvement with the PK-12 school, either in relationships with teachers and administration or as a volunteer, greatly increased students' likelihood of attending college (Perna & Titus, 2005; McKillip, et al., 2012; Plank & Jordan, 2001). However, we know parents' opportunity to develop meaningful

relationship with their child's educator is limited by parents' ability to take time off from work, arrange transportation, and secure childcare (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005; Tierney, 2002). The strategy of involving the parent in the school also does not account for differences in norms between cultures. Li (2006) provides an example of this by examining the experiences of eight Asian immigrant families in their experience working with mainstream teachers and pedagogy. Li (2006) found that applying mainstream beliefs to teaching minoritized students often created conflict between parent and teacher. PK-12 involvement is not only impossible for some families, it can be an unwelcome environment for many.

Proximity to Institutions of Higher Education Institutions

Where a student is from, in a geographical sense, plays a tremendous role in determining their options in respect to higher education (Turley, 2009), a factor that remains overlooked in policy and research (Hillman, 2016). In the United States, physical communities are built around racial and class lines (Soja, 2010). The location where one lives can determine access to higher education as well as many other public services that are factors to student success such as what PK-12 school a student can attend, proximity to adequate healthcare professionals and facilities, and even access to nutritious and nourishing food for families (Block & Kouba, 2006; Lamichhane et al., 2013; Tate, 2008; Walker, et al., 2010). The combination of these factors establishes geography of where a child is born as a factor in potential for upward mobility (Chetty, et al., 2014; Rothwell & Massey, 2015). Spatial discrimination by design is developed to establish and maintain a social geography of class (Soja, 2010).

The concept of education deserts is not a new concept, but—because of advancements in transportation and technology that permit students to travel to college more affordably and access institutions online—one that has been dismissed by policymakers in recent years. The

concept of education deserts is not a new concept (Hoxby, 2009; Long, 2004). Although there have been advancements in both transportation and technology, research has shown that mobile students tend to be White and wealthier than the average college student (Niu, 2015; Shaw, et al., 2009). In the 2011-2012 school year, the average distance between home and school for students at public colleges and universities was 52 miles, the median was 11 miles (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013), and less than 10 percent of undergraduate students enroll exclusively online (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Meanwhile, the costs are rising to attend college and proximity to home may be becoming a more important financial factor for students to consider than ever before (Briscoe & De Oliver, 2006; Dillon & Smith, 2013; Roscigno, et al., 2006; Shaw et al., 2009; Tate, 2008).

Proximity to any institution in higher education is essential, but proximity to a variety of types of institutions can also affect college choice. Hillman (2016) examines two communities in Texas. One community is primarily White with multiple community colleges and one four-year institution. The second is a similarly sized, but mostly Hispanic community that has only one community college. The community with more educational choices has more opportunity for upward mobility than the other, which sustains and potentially exacerbates existing inequities between the two communities (Hillman, 2016). Hillman (2016) studied the number and selectivity of colleges in relation to community geographic characteristics using multiple federal data sources. The study (Hillman, 2016) found that areas with larger White populations have more colleges and also tend to have more public two-year colleges and more private four-year colleges of all selectivity levels nearby. Black students also had similar options, but the rate of change was much smaller (Hillman, 2016). American Indian and Asian students tend to only have access to public open-access two-year and four-year institutions and Hispanic communities

have the least amount of institutions in their areas and typically only a public two-year institution (Hillman, 2016). These differences demonstrate that student choice, in relation to geographic boundaries, is limited; White communities have the most variety of education options while Hispanic communities have the fewest (Hillman, 2016). The last report evaluating Oklahoma citizens' proximity to education was in 1998. The study commissioned by OSRHE found that 93 percent of Oklahoma's population lives within 30 miles of a college or university campus but, only 14 of the 77 counties in the state offer the full range of educational degrees (Potts, 1998). Where students live and the communities in which they are part of have direct implications to what institutions they have reasonable access to attend.

The idea that the college marketplace is an open market with free choice for students completely disregards the context in which many students make their choice—or if they have one at all. Decisions around where a student applies has more influence on where a student attends college than admissions decisions (Dillon & Smith, 2017; Radford, 2013). The proximity between home and college carries weight in college choice for all students. This is especially true for students of color and/or students who work full-time, care for dependents, and have close ties to their local community (Kim & Rury, 2011; Perna, 2010; Stewart, et al., 2007). Sansone, et al. (2020) found amongst Latinx students in Texas "spatial and racial postsecondary opportunity and equity are working collectively, not independently, to disadvantage" (p. 12) and geography is an influential factor in college enrollment gaps. In recent years, political rhetoric and policymaking in higher education has elevated conversations about college choice. Federal initiatives such as the College Scorecard, Financial Aid Shopping Sheet, and other college rating systems are built on the logic that students have the luxury of shopping around for college; however, such initiatives frequently benefit the already privileged student populations (Espinosa, et al., 2014;

Morgan & Dechter, 2012). Ignoring the context of geography directly "ignores structural inequalities built into the postsecondary landscape and fails to prioritize one of the most important forces shaping opportunities for working-class students and students of color" (Hillman, 2016, p. 988).

Retention and Completion and Why They Matter

"Conversations are still ongoing about changing Oklahoma's Promise, Pugh said… SB639 passed the Senate after a report from the Legislative Office of Fiscal Transparency indicated more than half of Oklahoma's Promise recipients do not graduate within five years. Between 2004 and 2014, the average five-year graduation rate for Oklahoma's Promise students was 41%, which is still higher than 33% for other Oklahoma college students" (Forman, 2021).

Access, retention, and completion are all important metrics to gauge equitability and success in higher education but are not necessarily common vernacular for those outside of the field. Access is a student's ability to be admitted to and potentially attend higher education, meaning it is an option they could plausibly consider and pursue. Retention in its most simple definition is a metric that differentiates students who persist in school and those who withdraw; thus, a retention rate is the number of students continuing on their path to a degree. The final term that is sparked in conversations around Promise is completion. Completion is a metric to evaluate the number of students who finish and complete a degree. Frequently this rate has a time limit. For instance, the federal government requires data on six-year completion rates from institutions.

All three of these terms and metrics essentially give institutions and government systems a picture of how students are performing in higher education, but they are not interchangeable. Promise was established as an access program to make college affordable to students who likely

could have never plausibly considered it as an option. It did this purely on the basis of providing a portion of the cost. However, the program and the students involved are being measured on the basis of retention and completion—metrics most Promise students would never even be considered for without the program. A student who never had access to higher education can never be evaluated on retention or completion because the system never allowed them to try.

Retention and completion *do* matter. Institutions, state systems, and taxpayers should be concerned with the number of students who do not complete their degree. When disaggregated, these metrics can shed light at systemic inequities that cause students to drop out and not graduate. However, using completion metrics to evaluate the worthiness of access is a logical fallacy. The harm in believing this fallacy is it can eliminate the opportunity for students to consider college on the premise that not all of them succeeded previously in a system working against them. The issues surrounding college student retention and completion are complex and, while there are overlapping issues with access and completion, are different problems that require different solutions. In the following sections I will outline barriers to college student retention and completion—particularly as it relates to the population Promise represents—explain that the complexities of retention and completion are rarely solvable with a scholarship alone, and address the barriers that prevent motivated students from being retained or graduated.

Financial Barriers to Retention & Completion

In the previous section I provided a synthesis of literature on how finances create barriers to students' ability to access college, but finances also play a significant factor in students' ability to persist and finish college with a degree. This section will outline issues surrounding food and housing insecurity for college students as well as cost and student debt.

Food and Housing Insecurity. The issue of college student food and housing insecurity is one that has gone unaddressed on many campuses across the country. The efforts to make higher education more accessible have exhibited some success with more than 10 million Pell Grant recipients in colleges and universities; however, the conditions of poverty confronting students as they work persist through their degree program. Such conditions have been inadequately addressed by institutions, as well as, state and federal governments (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Available data suggests that the incidence of food and housing security is greater amongst college students than in society in general (Broton, et al., 2014). In a 2015 survey, more than 4,000 undergraduates at ten community colleges across seven states indicated that approximately half of the students are food insecure and 20 percent of those had gone hungry in the past month (Goldrick-Rab, et al., 2015). The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), reported 58,000 college students as homeless; however, this is likely an underestimate due to reporting requirements and stigma associated with homelessness (NAEHCY, 2014). The prevalence of food and housing insecurity is clearly an issue for students in higher education, but not always the narrative we hear when considering student needs. A Guillory (2009) study showed that American Indian and Alaska Native students saw the lack of financial resources to pay rent, buy food, or access childcare during college as a large deterrent to participants finishing.

Recognizing how these insecurities interfere with retention and degree attainment is central to solving the systematic barriers to the students' success. In Goldrick-Rab's 2016 study, following 3,000 students from low-income families in their first semester of college or university, nearly 90 percent of the students indicated they were concerned or upset about not having the money needed to attend college; 78 percent of the students said they struggled to pay

their bills. When Goldrick-Rab (2016) followed-up with the same students their second year, 27 percent reported not having enough money to buy food or ate less than they should in the last month; seven percent had recently gone without eating an entire day. To alleviate their concerns, students developed strategies to save money. Some of these strategies included cutting back on social activities, adjusting their food spending and eating habits, monitoring driving, working more hours, delaying paying bills, increasing their debt, postponing medical care, and many went without computers or textbooks for class (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Almost every one of those strategies could lead to negative retention outcomes, but many are necessary for the individual student to stay in college. This creates a cyclical dilemma where the student loses either way. When the student does not have enough funding, they are denied the fuel to sustain themselves such as basic needs like utilities, food, and medical care or a sense of belonging through cutting back social activities, driving less, and working more hours.

These destabilizing concerns do impact a student's ability to focus on learning. A study by Maroto, et al. (2015) connected food insecurity to students' GPA and, after controlling for other background factors, found that students struggling to get enough food to eat are 22 percent less likely to earn a 3.5-4.0 GPA rather than a 2.0-2.49 GPA. Considering other background factors is also significant. Students who experience food insecurity also represent a variety of other increased risk factors for withdrawal (Freudenburg, et al., 2011). In a study at the City University of New York, 39 percent of the students had experienced food insecurity in the previous year. Of those students: 56 percent reported fair or poor health; 55 percent with incomes under $20,000; 48 percent were Hispanic; 42 percent were Black; 46 percent were financially independent; and 44 percent were working 20 or more hours per week (Freudenburg, et al., 2011).

The compiled and overlapping risk factors are not inherently risky; meaning, for instance, that the students of color are not risky because of their race, but because of the compounding systemic conditions that prevent their success. The intersection of the multiple identities should be considered because it demonstrates that the challenges for these students go beyond financial shortcomings. These material hardships negatively impact the efforts that can be devoted to school; they not comprise students' opportunity to earn their degree, but also affect the institutions in which they enroll (Broton, et al., 2014; Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

Financial Aid Systems & FAFSA Application. Financial aid systems and FAFSA application processes affect both access and retention outcomes. For clarity, all financial aid and FAFSA barriers to access *and* retention are included in the previous section on access titled: "Financial Aid Systems and FAFSA Application."

Campus Climate Barriers to Retention & Completion

A students' sense of belonging and students feeling cared for and safe in their college environment is fundamental to student retention and completion (Braxton et al, 1995; Bray, 1985; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Glennon, et al., 1996; Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Holmes, 2000; McLean, 1999; Pearson, 2012; Tinto, 1993; etc.). Although sense of belonging has been extensively researched for over fifty years issues continue to remain in the area of campus climate and culture that prevent marginalized and underserved students from the opportunity for a sense of belonging or a safe learning environment.

Institutional Focus on Traditional Student Populations. The focus on traditional students does not stop in the admissions processes. When considering the area of student retention and how universities engage students, the priority of who is targeted for retention and who is not is made abundantly clear. Like most aspects of higher education, early retention

theories were built off of research conducted prior to demographic shifts in higher education and speak largely to only the kinds of students who were attending college then. Most retention studies relate to or stem from Vincent Tinto's (1975) seminal study on the model of student integration. Based on Tinto's (1975) study, institutions began building departments to support student retention (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Soon after more notable theories using Tinto's model emerged. Astin (1984) started looking at student involvement as it relates to student retention. Another prominent theorist, Bean (1980), started looking at background characteristics and student satisfaction in relation to retention. More specifically, Bean examined prior academic performance, distance from home, socioeconomic status, gender, etc. From these seminal studies the foundation of modern Student Affairs, Enrollment Management, and Student Support Service departments were formed with the intention to enhance the student experience and ultimately improve student retention through traditions and student engagement (Berger & Lyon, 2005). The fundamental problem with the development of these programs is that Tinto's original theory excluded students historically underserved by higher education and failed to consider the unique experiences students in the margin face. Tinto's model was built for a singular student type and the archetype it supports fails to work for any student that does not fit that exact mold. Stuart, et al. (2014) point out that Tinto's research (1975, 1993) and much of the initial scholarship related to it have been developed with research on full-time, 4-year residential, predominantly White, 18- to 23-year-old students.

The model of student integration poses that, in order for a student to integrate, the student must first separate from their past communities. Tinto (1988) says, "The first stage of the college career, separation, requires students to disassociate themselves, in varying degrees, from membership in past communities, most typically those associated with the local high school and

place of residence" (p. 443). Wolf-Wendel, et al. (2009) noticed this makes some dramatic demands of non-traditional students:

> Students who are not traditional in terms of race/ethnicity, age, and full-time enrollment status, the assumption is that in order to succeed in college, (i.e. to persist) students must become integrated into the college environment by abandoning their history, heritage, and outside interests. (p. 415)

Thus, the model of student integration is asking students to, in many ways, disaffiliate with their past to commit to their current institution.

This separation from the original community can be harmful to students from different ethnic and racial minorities (Huffman, 2008; Tierney, 1992, 1999). Studies have shown that, for Native students specifically, the students' ability to stay tied and connected to their tribal family and community is essential to retaining Native students (Guillory, 2009; Tachine, 2017). There is evidence to show that students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds are more successful when they embrace their cultural heritage. Deyhle (1995) noted in her research that Native American children who did not assimilate and were secure in their traditional identity were more academically successful than their counterparts. Many other categories of students are left out of this strategy such as students with dependents, veteran, older, commuter, online, part-time and international students. The fundamental problem with the failure of this theory for students from marginalized backgrounds is that the institution structures and programs built to support them were largely built on the back of its assumptions.

Hostile Learning Environments. Holistically considering the student and environments from which they come and of the institution they attend can have a great impact on the student experience. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954) is a good place to start to conceptualize how

these factors can influence a students' ability to succeed in college. Maslow (1954) created a five-level hierarchy of needs by observing students. Maslow recognizes that fundamental needs like food, clothing, and shelter are the most basic survival and physiological needs. According to Maslow, an individual cannot fully progress on the continuum to achieve higher levels of growth and development until each fundamental need is met (Hamel, et al., 2003). Higher level needs include: safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1954).

Self-actualization ultimately being the evolved individual who can recognize their own potential and develop the motivation to act upon it (Maslow, 1954). The state of self-actualization sounds a lot like the advertisements and sales pitch to encourage students to go to college. However, this theory underlines the point that, in order for higher education to connect students to their greatest potential, all previous stages need to be tended to—which is at the crux of many systemic retention and completion barriers within institutions. In other words, for a student to self-actualize they must have their basic needs met, live and learn in a safe environment, and have a sense of belonging within their community.

I reference Maslow (1954) because I think this is a simple and foundational framework to think about the ultimate effects of a learning environment when students' safety, security, and identity are challenged. Through this lens we see that, to achieve learning and growth, institutions have a responsibility to establish safe living and learning communities for their students. Negligence in these areas could lead to negative effects from withdrawal to acts of violence.

As college campuses become more diverse (Musu-Gillete, et. al, 2017), researchers are studying how the college experience differs for students from different racial backgrounds.

Amongst these studies, discrimination has appeared among the most significant key stressor affecting academic outcomes for these students (Hill & Tores, 2010; Jackson & Reyolds, 2013; Syet, et al., 2011). Studies that combine all ethnic or racial backgrounds into one group find higher prevalence of discrimination overall than studies that looked at the differences between races (Stevens, et al., 2018). Discrimination has shown up in the form of microaggression from faculty and peers (Bluem, et al., 2012; Harwood, et al., 2012; Nadal, et al., 2014) and general campus climates that make students of racial and ethnic minorities feel socially isolated or unwelcome (Oxendine, 2015; Pieterse, et al., 2010; Strayhorn, 2012; Strayhorn, et al., 2016). In the case of Native students, one primary form of discrimination is exclusion and rendering Native students "invisible" (Brayboy, 2004; Fryberg & Stephens, 2010). Stevens, et al. (2018) found that Black students had the greatest reporting of discrimination, while Hispanic and Asian students reported the most significant connection between discrimination and their academic performance. These acts of discrimination also extend to the LGBTQIA2s+ student population who also experience increased experiences of discrimination (Iconis, 2010).

This information is important when considering systemic barriers to access and completion because it signifies the environment in which some students are expected to learn, while others are not. Kayoko Peralta (2016) explains this important difference, *"*One of the most significant privileges of being White is that White students can choose when and whether to think about race. In contrast, students of color consider race on an almost daily basis" (p.183). These barriers, amongst others, affect student experience and outcomes.

Gender-Based Violence. When considering the role safety plays on a campus climate, student safety, and student persistence, the topic of gender-based violence plays a significant role in students' experiences. The systemic and integrated culture of misogyny that allows for gender-

based violence is a well-researched barrier in higher education that occurs at alarming rates of persistence across sexual orientation, gender identity, and race and ethnicity (Black, et al., 2011; Kilpatrick, et al., 2007). Underserved and historically marginalized groups experience greater rates of sexual violence (Black et al., 2011) and have more barriers to report and resources to recovery (Fisher, et al., 2000; Grant, et al., 2011). A cross-sectional study by Wiscombe (2012) found that 36.3% of participants reported at least one form of sexual victimization since entering college. Banyard, et al. (2007) reported that 19.6 percent of women and 8.2 percent of men experience some form of unwanted sexual contact while in college. Shenoy, et al. (2010) surveyed a racially diverse sample of college women and found that 35% of participants experienced sexual assault in their lifetime. Sixty-three percent of those women indicated the most recent incident occurring in college. There is limited research on sexual assault among minority students and specifically at-risk populations., However, there is some evidence indicating e specific targeted populations may be at further risk such as lesbian and bisexual women, sorority women, and students with existing histories of victimization (Fedina, et al., 2016).

Keeping in mind that the danger acts of violence present to victims is the most significant barrier and cause for alarm. Beyond the acts alone there are outcomes to access and retention because of these acts. Doss, et al. (2017) performed a quantitative study to see how reported crime on campuses affect student enrollment. They found statistically significant correlations between assault crimes versus enrollment.

This threat to students' safety has resulted in some positive legislation and policy to improve conditions on college campuses. New federal guidelines forced institutions to prevent, report, and address crimes that had often gone without intervention or resources. In 1990 the

Campus Security Act, later named the Clery Act, was a product of the parents of a victim lobbying for safer college campuses and more transparency on campus crime after their daughter was murdered in her residence hall by another student her freshman year (Kiss & Feeney White, 2016). In 1994, the Violence Against Women Act was signed into law, which gave institutions access to funds to reduce crimes and improve response to dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault (National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Against Women, 2013). Following the Clery Act, the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights issued guidance documents connecting sexual harassment and discrimination to Title IX and required institutions to have grievance procedures and preventative measures to stop the proliferation of such acts (Gersen & Suk, 2016). In 2011, the *Dear Colleague Letter* addressed new requirements related to sexual harassment and to connect Title IX requirements to sexual violence (Jessup-Anger, Lopez, & Koss, 2018). In 2013, the Campus SaVE Act amended the Clery reporting requirements, obligating colleges and universities to adopt training requirements to prevent sexual assault and strengthened victim's rights (American Council on Education, 2013). A step backward happened in 2017 when, under the Trump administration, the Office for Civil Rights issued a new *Dear Colleague Letter that rescinded the* 2011 guidance and suggested new guidance may be forthcoming (Jackson, 2017).

First-Generation Student Barriers to Retention & Completion

First-gen students face challenges not only in applying and enrolling in college, but also in efforts to stay and complete their degree. A considerable body of research identifies barriers for first-gen students succeeding academically once they enroll in college and complete their undergraduate degree (Choy, 2001; Ishitani, 2006; Pascarella, et al., 2004; Stephens, et al., 2012; Woosley & Shepler, 2011). As mentioned earlier, first-gen students often represent other

enrollment and demographic characteristics associated with higher drop-out rates. The layered challenges of being first-generation coupled with other identities such as low-income status intensifies the challenges presented to first-gen students leading to higher dropout rates within the first two years of college compared to their peers (Chen & Carrol, 2005; Choy, 2001; Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Ishitani, 2006; Kuh, et al., 2006; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Warburton, et al., 2017). The most common barriers identified are: academic unpreparedness, unmet costs of attendance, challenges with maintaining employment through enrollment, childcare, and sense of belonging (Chen & Carrol, 2005; Horn & Premo, 1995; Mangan, 2015; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013; Terenzini, et al., 1996).

The dropout rate is unlikely caused by lack of effort by this student population. Jehangir's (2010) and Orbe's (2004) research shows they enter higher education with unique skills and elevated levels of academic motivation that often derive directly from their identity as being the first in their family to attend college. However, the system built around traditional student populations frequently creates additional barriers for first-gen students they have to tackle before being on an even footing with their peers. In regards to succeeding academically, the same barriers that prevented college access could be at play in retention and completion. Many first-gen students do not have the same academic opportunities in the PK-12 system as their non-first-gen peers (Brown & Burkhardt, 1999; Riehl, 1994). Likely, this could be the reason why first-gen students are more likely to be enrolled in remedial classes when they enter college (Chen & Carrol, 2005; Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Ishitani, 2006). Remedial classes can delay a students' timeline for graduation and are not financially covered by Promise. Students who are required to take these courses must do so at their own expense, creating an additional financial

burden on the student without signaling direct progress towards a degree. Financial balance, employment, and enrollment isolate many first-gen students who frequently report feeling alone at college and feel forced to choose between student engagement activities and their financial and family obligations (Jehangier, 2010; Pascarella et al, 2004).

Transfer Student Barriers to Retention & Completion

Promise students are able to transfer from one in-state public institution to another and keep their scholarship, making community college a practical first step for many participants. Transfer students present an interesting challenge for Promise because the scholarship has a five-year eligibility cap. This is to say that the scholarship will pay for five years of undergraduate study or a bachelor's degree, whichever comes first. Transfer students frequently have delays in transfer that can offset their graduation timeline significantly. One or two slip ups could push a Promise participant's scholarship eligibility out of focus and prevent them from continuing on to finish their degree. This section will outline what is currently understood in literature about transfer students. I have not included literature surrounding student-athlete transfer experiences despite how common it is and the likely overlapping populations because student-athlete academic timelines are often sport-specific and would move the topic too far out of focus for Promise. Student-athlete transfer should be considered in future research on Promise.

Community colleges are the college of choice for many Americans. This is especially true for first-gen, low-income, and other historically underserved students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016; College Board, 2011). Eighty percent of transfer students hope to earn a bachelor's degree when they begin community college, but only 33 percent of those students ultimately transfer to a four-year institution within six years (Giancola & Kahlenberg, 2016).

While there is robust research on the barriers to transfer student success, a vast majority of it uses a deficit framework to frame community colleges and their students (Peña & Rhoads, 2019). There are a host of studies identifying what's wrong with transfer students, the cultures they come from, or the community colleges they attend that prevent them from earning their degree (Alfonso, 2006; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Clark, 1960; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Dougherty, 1987, 1992; Doyle, 2006; Grubb, 1989; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Townsend, 2009). Townsend (2007) explains that all of these studies and most research in general on transfer students fail to consider the reasons students choose community college in the first place. Community college is a great choice because it is less expensive, affords students the option to live at home and attend an institution close by, offers smaller class sizes with more flexible schedules. In addition, many students may be too academically under-prepared to attend a four-year institution after high school (Townsend, 2007). Townsend (2007) went as far as to say, "researchers need to stop selling community college students short by implying that they make a poor choice in deciding to attend the community college rather than a four-year school" (p. 35). The result of this modality in research and in practice is the talents and strengths that transfer students bring are often overlooked even when designing programs to serve this population (Katrevich & Aruguete, 2017). his modality is based on myth as research indicates that transfer students perform just as well, if not better, than their non-transfer peers even at the most selective universities (Alexander, et al., 2009; Dougherty & Townsend, 2006; Falconetti, 2009; Kintzer, 1996; Tonswend & Wilson, 2006).

Since 2010, researchers have extended studies to be more culturally aware and to study more underserved transfer student populations (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Harris & Wood, 2013; Jackson, 2013; Jain, et al., 2011; Laanan, et al., 2010; Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2016).

Packard, et al. (2011) studied the community college transfer pathway for women in STEM majors. The women who successfully earned their degree attributed their success to the supportive, nurturing, and student-centered culture at their community college. Peña and Rhoads (2019) studied the experience of Latino men transfer students and found that the lack of cultural knowledge played a huge role in how Latina/o student choices were understood by institutions and researchers. The study ultimately found four key findings to support Latino men retention in their transfer journey: (1) support help-seeking behaviors which can go against Latino cultural norms, (2) addressing the timeline and sometimes arduous journey to transfer, (3) support systems for work burdens and financial constraints as many of the men keep at least part-time employment, and (4) incorporate culturally responsive practices (Peña & Rhoads, 2019). Ultimately, understanding the culture and context from which students are attending an institution is key to student success.

Miller (2013) conducted two studies examining best practices at both two-year and four-year institutions with success records in transferring and graduating low-income transfer students. The two-year institution study found that the common characteristics between the successful two-year institutions is they had structured academic pathways, a student-centered culture, and culturally sensitive leadership (Miller, 2013). The findings of the four-year institution study were far more complex. Miller (2013) learned that, to understand what it takes to retain and graduate transfer students at this level, everything from an institution's mission and culture must be considered. Ultimately, Miller (2013) found that very few of the challenges presented at the four-year level were necessarily transfer-specific but the intersection of challenges associated with low-income, nontraditionally aged students, and first-generation.

Consistent with most persistence data, financial reasons are the most significant cause for delay of transfer or withdrawal (Packard, et al., 2012).

There are some salient transfer-specific barriers, however. Lichtenberger and Dietrich (2017) outlined three elements that contribute to the challenges for transfer students to adjust to their new institution: latecomers, pull factors, and lack of bridge programs. The latecomer status (Handel, 2011) is the phenomenon that transfer students walk into a community already established by their peers who have been able to form relationships with fellow students, faculty, and staff and have a history of distinguishing themselves academically (Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2017). The pull factors are the elements of life that pull transfer students away from campus such as family responsibilities, employment, or remote living arrangements that prevent them from integrating fully (Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2017). The last element is the lack of bridge programs for transfer students. Many of the onboarding programs designed to help students navigate campus bureaucracy and develop support networks are dedicated to freshmen; transfer students do not receive the same depth of information when entering the institution (Lichtenberger & Dietrich, 2017). Chin-Newman and Shaw (2013) identified finding childcare, moving to a new location, and transferring course credits to be transfer-specific obstacles. Women community college students are more likely to experience delays to transfer due to family-oriented factors such as becoming a parent or becoming a caretaker (Packard, et al., 2012).

Lastly, many four-year institutions make transfer an incredibly arduous process for students. Dougherty (1992) noted some of the significant issues surrounding transfer student baccalaureate attainment include four-year university practices of only accepting transfer students to fill gaps in enrollment, denying credits upon acceptance and forcing students to

complete additional coursework when they transfer. Community college students have reported struggling to adapt to a larger university campus because of the confusing bureaucratic environment and the difficulty finding the information they need (Allen, et al., 2014). These students also frequently miss out on first-year programming developed to help students navigate the university system. Transfer students also consistently report feeling stigmatized by their peers and faculty because of their academic history at a community college. This can affect their sense of belonging at the new institution (Laanan, et al., 2010; Shaw, et al., 2019).

Oklahoma Economy & Changing Demographics

"Access to higher education is necessary for a community's economic well-being. The regents hope to strengthen Oklahoma communities, particularly in those rural areas, and help them become more economically competitive. Increasing the education level of our citizens will bolster Oklahoma's work force and help attract high-paying industries to the state." – OSRHE Chancellor Hans Brisch (Potts, 1998)

Brain Drain & Oklahoma's Workforce Demands

Brain drain is the phenomenon where educated or skilled individuals leave a region due to lack of professional opportunities, educational opportunities, economic instability and other factors (Beine, et al., 2008; Gibson & McKenzie, 2011). Brain drain has been an ongoing issue in Oklahoma for more than two decades. This is alarming because education is among Oklahoma's leading exports. College graduates leave the state in masses every year without fulfilling critically necessary jobs and positions within the state. The Kansas City Federal Reserve analyzed Oklahoma's brain drain in 2019 and found that about 5,300 college graduates left the state each year (Wilkerson & Shupert, 2019). While that is only a small portion of the Oklahoma general population, about 0.2 percent, it is more than the annual number of bachelor's

degrees awarded at either of the state's two largest research institutions: the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University (Wilkerson & Shupert, 2019). See Figure 1 in Appendix B for longitudinal data on Oklahoma's net migration. Losing college graduates from the state at any age is not ideal, but Oklahoma is losing graduates during their prime working ages—25 to 54—at alarming rates. See figure 2 in Appendix B on Oklahoma's net migration by age. The issue is not attracting college graduates to the state, but keeping college graduates in the state (Wilkerson & Shupert, 2019).

Most research on domestic brain drain centers on skilled job shortages as the key necessity to keep graduates within a state (Artz & Yu, 2011; Hansen, et al., 2003; Vazzana & Rudi-Polloshka, 2019). However, in Oklahoma the problem is reversed; thousands of jobs go unfulfilled because businesses are not able to find skilled workers with the education and training they need (McNutt, 2017).

College degrees are more important than ever for employability in the US. Since the end of the Great Recession in 2011, 99 percent of the 11.6 million jobs added have been taken by people with some level of postsecondary education (Carnevale, et al., 2016; Jobs for the Future, 2018). The demand for credentialed employees is also on the rise in Oklahoma. Bi-Annually, the Oklahoma Office of Workforce and Development creates a list of Oklahoma's 100 most critical occupations (Oklahoma Works, 2020). Using longitudinal data, the Oklahoma Works program compiles a list of industries predicted to grow and need employees and throws out positions that earn a median hourly wage less than $15 or jobs with no formal education and a median hourly wage below $20 per hour. Of the 2020-2022 critical occupations list, 50 percent of the positions will require at least a Bachelor's degree for entry into the field and another 14 percent will require some postsecondary experience (Oklahoma Works, 2020). Included within the 50 percent

that require a Bachelor's degree, six positions required a Master's and five needed a doctoral or professional degree to enter the field (Oklahoma Works, 2020). Only 24.8 percent of the Oklahoma population over the age of 25 attained a Bachelor's degree compared to the 30.9 percent national average (see Figure 5 in Appendix B).

Research by the Southern Regional Education Board (2018) on Promise found that Promise recipients were more likely to seek employment in Oklahoma after graduating than their peers by more than three percentage points at 88.5 percent. Investments into equipping Oklahomans to access the credentials necessary to earn meaningful employment within the state not only benefits the students in Promise, but also bolsters the Oklahoma workforce. Legislative arguments surrounding the ROI and Promise students and fiscal conservatism are not based on the best economic insights from Oklahoma's own state agencies and experts on workforce and economy, leaving those arguments baseless and ignorant at best and blatantly discriminatory at worst.

Poverty

Oklahoma's poverty rates matter because it gives a snapshot of the number of students who undoubtedly do not or will not have access to higher education without financial support or loans. Census data shows Oklahoma's poverty rate remains higher than the national averages year after year. More than 15 percent of Oklahomans live below the federal poverty line, which is $26,200 for a family of four—that's one in seven Oklahomans (Phillips, 2021). Approximately half of Oklahoma's high school graduates were eligible for free and reduced lunches and almost a quarter of Oklahoma children live in poverty (Kids Count Data Center, accessed in 2021). These numbers do not reflect the downturn in economic conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which may show more significant downward trends. Oklahoma's poverty rates

demonstrate that the need for programs to support financial access to college are more necessary now than ever for both Oklahoma families and to lift the state as a whole from conditions of poverty.

Oklahoma's Changing Demographics

Oklahoma, like many states, is undergoing changes in population demographics. Considering equity in education policies should always be a priority amongst policymakers. As Oklahoma's population shifts, questioning the intended and unintended consequences of the colorblind nature of Promise's current policy and practice is more of an imminent need than ever. Figure 8 in Appendix B shows population growth in nearly every racial group, other than White. Figure 7 shows the demographic shifts in the under 18 population from 2010 and projected out to 2035 where BIPOC will make up roughly 55 percent of Oklahoma's population.

Oklahoma & Tribal Nations

Like all states within the US, Oklahoma was built on Native peoples' land, but Oklahoma has an especially unique history with Tribal Nations as it was built on designated Indian Territory (Oklahoma Historical Society, see Figure 3 in Appendix B). In 2020, a landmark decision by the US Supreme Court case *McGirt v Oklahoma* most of Eastern Oklahoma was confirmed as Indian Reservations (Casteel, 2022; Liptak, 2022). A full map can of reservation boundaries can be found in Appendix B, Figure 4. The maps show the physical intertwining of Tribal Nations and Oklahoma, but this dynamic is also true of citizens within the state. Many Oklahomans are also citizens of one or more tribes and navigate the intricacies of the different governing systems daily.

Collectively, Oklahoma has 39 individual Tribal Nations, each with their own unique history, governing structure, and relationship to the state of Oklahoma. The individual details of

these tribes are beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, a general of Oklahoma's unique history and existing connection to Tribal Nations is an essential component in understanding Oklahoma infrastructure, funding, governing structures, as well as education policy. The tribes fill voids in Oklahoma general infrastructure in so significantly that lawmakers from both sides of the aisle recognize Oklahoma could not replace the efforts without them (Forman, 2019). They provide *billions* of dollars in economic impact to Oklahoma through hospitals, health centers, roads, food pantries, commerce development, employment opportunities, etc. all without relying on Oklahoma state tax dollars (Denwalt, 2020, 2019; Lackmeyer, 2020, *The Oklahoman*, 2017). Despite the fact Oklahoma is on Native land, directly benefits from tribal contributions, and is asked for no financial retribution in return; the state has a history of working in direct opposition of tribal leaders (Ellis, 2019), and developing policy to undermine tribal success (Ellis, 2020).

This dynamic exists within Oklahoma education policy and funding as well. For instance, in 2017 alone the tribes paid $1.3 billion to education and another $198 million exclusively to additional educational supports such as scholarships and classroom purchases for Oklahoma students and schools (Denwalt, 2017). However, Tribal Nations representatives are not brought in to discuss statewide education policy and reforms. Not only were all Oklahoma colleges and universities built on Indian Territory, currently ten of the twenty-four public institutions have main campuses on current Indian Reservations. There is no elected or appointed position in the Oklahoma Capitol, or the OSRHE to work directly with Tribal Sovereign Governments on education policy despite the system's evident dependence upon them.

Oklahoma & Education Policy

Oklahoma education and state lawmakers have had a cantankerous relationship over the past several years. Oklahoma has historically undercut funding to schools for decades, leading to declines in support for students and educators for years. This dysfunctional relationship extends from the PK-12 environment all the way to higher education. Some of this disjointed clashing of values may stem from Oklahoma's large population associated with fundamentalist religious beliefs, which will be detailed in the section on distrust in education. The manifestation of lawmakers' lack of investment in public education is detailed in the sections on PK-12 environment and higher education environment.

PK-12 Environment

This issue made national headlines in 2018 when a statewide teacher walkout forced 200 school districts to close, amounting to about half of the school districts in the state (Pasquantonio, 2018).

The teacher walkout is an important marker in PK-12 policy because it symbolized the ultimate climax of Oklahoma educators' pleas to lawmakers as well as the beginning of Oklahoma's critical teacher shortage. At the time, Oklahoma teachers were the lowest paid in the U.S. and had not received a raise in a decade (Pasquantonio, 2018). Teachers were making well below the median household income for the state. Journalists reported stories of teachers using food pantries and donating plasma to support their families (Pasquantonio, 2018). One of the biggest hot topics of the walkout was the declining support for classroom materials, teachers using their own income to source students with necessary supplies, and duct tape holding together outdated textbooks (Pasquantonio, 2018). The teachers were striking because they wanted an "overhaul of the system" (DenHoed, et al., 2018). Education funding had been cut by

twenty-eight percent between 2008 and 2018, manifesting into the largest education cuts of any state in the U.S. (DenHoed, et al., 2018). The walkout forced the hand of politicians: resulting in a $6,000 pay raise to teachers, a $1,250 raise to school support staff, and $50 million in additional funding to education (Pasquantonio, 2018). These measures fell short of the teachers' original demands for a $10,000 pay increase over three years for every teacher, a $5,000 increase for support staff and $200 million in additional funding for schools (Pasquantonio, 2018).

The state's lack of investment in PK-12 education has led to a critical teacher shortage in the state as approximately 30,000 teachers left the state between 2012 and 2020 (Martinez-Keel, 2020). In order to meet the needs for public education the state began hiring emergency certified teachers as an acceptable alternative. Emergency-certified teachers have no teaching license in their grade level or their subject matter and frequently have no traditional teacher training (Martinez-Keel, 2020). The number of emergency certification positions has skyrocketed. In 2011 there were only 32 emergency certified teachers in the entire state of Oklahoma, but since 2018 the state has averaged more than 3,000 emergency certification requests each year (Martinez-Keel, 2020).

The environment surrounding PK-12 policy in the state cannot be cleanly separated from the education environment for Oklahoma higher education. The considerations surrounding access to and completion in higher education, this is the system Oklahoma students are coming from. Promise participants are frequently being taught by unqualified and uncertified teachers in overcrowded classrooms with outdated or unsupplied text books. They are then expected to get admitted into a college and successfully obtain a degree in a timely manner without remediation or failure.

Higher Education Environment

Higher education has not been spared from the lack of investment over previous decades. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reported that Oklahoma was one of six states to cut higher education funding by more than 30 percent between 2008 and 2019. This led to the third largest percentage decrease in higher education funding in the country (Jackson & Saenz, 2021). During that time higher education allocations were cut 35.3 percent, which amounts to about $3,515 per student (Jackson & Saenz, 2021).

In 1988, more than 74 percent of the budget for higher education came from state appropriated dollars, but in 2019 only 27.2 percent of that funding came from the state (OSRHE, 2019). This decline can be seen in Figure 9 in Appendix B.

The decline in funding has resulted in increases in tuition and fees at the institution level, making higher education less affordable for many Oklahoma families. The average cost of attendance at an Oklahoma public college or university costs the average Black household 41 percent of their average income, the average Latinx household 32 percent of their average income, and the average White household 26 percent of their average income (Hamby, 2021). The decline in funding also led to a reduction of faculty and staff at public institutions, disproportionately affecting two-year colleges who rely most on state funding (Fine, 2019).

The other way this funding decline has negatively affected students' and institutions is through concurrent enrollment. Concurrent enrollment allows high school juniors and seniors in the state who meet college admission criteria to take college courses tuition-free. In Oklahoma, the students are admitted and enrolled and the state reimburses institutions for the tuition. However, over the past decade the state has failed to hold their end of the bargain. For instance, in 2018 state institutions needed $10.5 million to cover the cost of concurrent students. The state,

however, only gave them $2.8 million. This forced the colleges and universities to come up with the additional $7.7 million (Fine, 2019).

Oklahoma Promise Bills

Every legislative session since Promise was enacted (1992) lawmakers have introduced bills to adjust and change the policy in some way. In the last nine years alone, there were seventy-nine bills submitted that directly addressed Promise. Of those, twenty-two bills submitted could be considered predatory to the marginalized students involved. Figure 10 in Appendix C shows all bills submitted between 2013 and 2019 that could be dangerous for Promise participants. Lawmakers have suggested everything from limiting the institutions Promise recipients can attend, turning the program into a predatory loan, sets spending caps, etc. In 2021, the program saw the biggest threat yet with Senate Bill 639 (SB639). This Bill included a claw back provision where students would have to pay back the scholarship if they did not finish their degree. This bill made it through the Senate and almost entirely through the House before being amended in a House Committee prior to being passed into law; however, author Sen. Pugh has already publicly commented that the claw back provision will come back next legislative session. Pugh said, “Good bills take a long time to get to the right spot… We got peoples’ attention for a program that I think is really good that can be made a lot better” (Forman, 2021). The basis for Pugh and other supporters of the bill was Promise’s college completion rates. A fellow voter for SB639, Sen. Pederson, was quoted saying, “I think at some point in time, you gotta take responsibility for what you do… and I think that if you start a process, you’d be silly not to finish it” (Ewald, 2021).

Theoretical Grounding

In the process of reviewing literature surrounding policy addressing access to and retention in college for low-income students it became apparent that almost all research and policy is written from a binary perspective. Considering the needs, problems, questions, and even solutions through the lens of one standard aspect of a students' identity. Much of my literature review contains literature written from this perspective. For example, how certain students of color experience racism on campus may affect their retention and completion in college. There is much to be said for and against studies that isolate one identity marker to address or understand a problem related to that community. However, to understand the breadth of a statewide policy and program aimed at addressing the unique needs of low-income students, it is essential to understand that those students' income status is only one of many contributing factors that uniquely help determine their route to and through college. For this reason, this study will utilize an intersectional framework (referred to as intersectionality) to acknowledge and account for the complexity of low-income student experiences.

Foundations of Intersectionality

Intersectionality at its core "is an adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power" (Cho, et al., 2013, p. 795). The theory and term were introduced by Crenshaw (1989) when she discussed Black women's experiences in three legal cases where Black women were not able to represent women nor their Black community in legal settings. Crenshaw's Intersectional Framework was born out of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and grew into within the field of Critical Race Theory (CRT) thought. Crenshaw claims CRT grew in the 1980s from dialectical "misalignment" (2011, p. 1259) where players saw themselves working towards *racial equality* but institutional conflicts

around race prevailed and ultimately created the conditions to frame racial power as a construct (Crenshaw, 2011). At the time the initiatives of CLS kept race in the peripheral of the movement and the dissatisfaction with CLS failure to reconcile the racialized state (Carbado, 2011). Some CLS scholars dispute Crenshaw's recollection of early work (Trubek, 2011) and Zuberi (2011) claims the work of CRT existed within the social sciences many years before the intellectual movement within the field of law. Regardless, the CRT work born out of the CLS work in the 1980s was a catalyst for much CRT theory used today.

A foundational work related to the formation of Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) is the work of the Combahee River Collective (CBC), a Black feminist lesbian organization formed in the 1970s (Taylor, 2017). In their 1977 CBC Statement, the organization introduced the world to the concepts of *interlocking oppression* and *identity politics*, both foundational the concept of intersectionality (Taylor, 2017). Although CBC did not develop the term *intersectionality* nor directly apply it to law, they did lay the groundwork for the analysis on multiple subjugations reinforcing one another to create new groupings of oppression (Taylor, 2017). The organization recognized they Black women were not being recognized fully within the activism of Black movements nor feminist movements:

> It was our experience and disillusionment within these liberation movements, as well as the experience and disillusionment within these liberation movements, as well as experience on the periphery of the white male left, that led to the need to develop a politics that was antiracist, unlike those of white women, and antisexist, unlike those of Black and white men (CBC, 1977, p. 211).

The collective movements from CLS to CRT and the foundational work of the CBC all ultimately laid the foundation for Crenshaw's (1989) theory.

This theory of intersectionality challenges the one-dimensional and binary thinking about marginalization and privilege and challenges social norms we have related to those extremes (Shields, 2008). In her discussion, Crenshaw (1989) said, “Race and sex, moreover, become significant only when they operate to explicitly disadvantage the victims; because the privileging of Whiteness or maleness is implicit, it is generally not perceived at all” (p. 151). This framework is ideal to study policy as it relates to marginalized communities because it also addresses the power dynamics associated with complex identities and how they interact with institutionalized racism, classism, sexism, etc. by acknowledging that all identities are not equally valued (Anthias, 2014; Leung, 2017). Finding the connective tissue amongst race, class, and gender allows theorists and researchers to interrogate “the inter-locking ways in which social structures produce and entrench power and marginalization, and by drawing attention to the ways that existing paradigms that produce knowledge and politics often function to normalize those dynamics” (Carbado, et al., 2013, p. 312). Intersectionality as a critical social theory and framework “theorizes the social world from the perspective of people who are subordinated” (Collins, 2019, p. 84) instead of the perspective of the oppressive forces of racism, sexism, classism, etc. In this context, marginality can be used as a tool, place, and position of *resistance* to speak against colonization, exploitation, and oppression (hooks, 1989).

Identity and Intersectionality

Identity plays an important role in intersectional work. Because this study focuses on the any scholars make in this area is that intersectional identities are not additional in nature, identities are not layered or compiled. Instead, intersectional work is about the unique location of the intersecting of these identities that cannot be predicted (Anthias, 2014; Cho, et al., 2013; Clark & McCall, 2013; Leung, 2017). Additionally, identity is not a fixed constant or even a set

of fixed characteristics, but a "constantly shifting process of *positioning*" (Collins, 2019). The movement of that positioning shifts identifications, moving the concept of identity further from a static finished state of being to a process of shifting (Hall, 2017). In other words, through an intersectional framework the concept of identity is not simply historical; rather, it can connect back to one's community and "roots." As communities and people change, individuals become more themselves—as do their identities.

Relativity, Social Class, and Intersectionality

A particular benefit to using this framework is the distinctive approach to problem solving that prompts researchers to focus on analysis to attend to race, class and gender as particular categories of analysis (Collins, 2019). This approach focuses on the relationality that shapes heterogeneous intersectional studies and pulls focus from the distinct characteristics of each category of analysis and moves it to the interrelated and connected attributes of the categories (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006). However, class has been largely ignored by intersectional researchers (Acker, 1999) with debate on whether Marx's Social Class Theory should stand alone and adopt an intersectional lens (Collins, 2019). There is also robust criticism of continuing to expand intersectionality by continually expanding categories of inclusion at risk of diluting the work and that simply adding one category into another is likely an insufficient form of analysis (Collings, 2019). However, Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) make a case for the inclusion of class within intersectional critical social theories. They observe that "class, gender, and race may be dependent on different existential locations, but they are not manifestations of different types of social relations within distinct causal bases within distinct systems of domination" (1992, p. 109). Collins (2019) explains "the logic of segregation can

only take intersectionality so far" (p. 231) and there is no such thing as an independent race, class, or gender and isolating these things from one another.

Political and Structural Intersectionality

In its origin, intersectionality was centered on gender and how it is situated within other social identities (Shields, 2008). As Crenshaw (1991) continued to develop intersectionality she explained that political intersectionality focused on the conflicting policy needs of intersectional identities, such as the conflicting needs within policy for women in relation to Black people. For example, in Crenshaw's (1989) analysis of the *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors* case she explains the limitations of Title VII and protected classes of employees. In the *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors* case there was a company policy that prohibited Black women from being employed at General Motors before 1964. When the company started seniority-based layoffs during the recession in the 1970s, all of the Black women were laid off. The judge ruled that Black women could not be considered their own separate class protected within the law; therefore, they were not protected by policy developed for women nor Black individuals. These conflicting policies left Black women discriminated against in policy. Further development of structural intersectionality casts a lens on how an individual's social needs oppress them through intersectional identities (Shields, 2008).

Political intersectionality considers the needs and goals, perhaps different and sometimes conflicting, that the different groups to which an individual belongs (Shields, 2008). Political intersectionality also focuses on identities relevant to political strategies and how political strategies relate to a single identity axis rarely are neutral to other identities (Verloo, 2013). For example, Promise policy and strategy focus entirely on the axis of financial need, while considering none of the other identities student participants encompass. Intersectionality and

policy analysis is a partnership that works well in research (Cho, et al., 2013). Verloo (2013) explains that the reactive approach of intersectionality, when applied to policy, illuminates how policies that are designed to address interfering inequalities fail to do so and exposes the marginalizing aspect of policy.

Quantitative Research and Intersectionality

Intersectionality can be used not only as an epistemology, but as a conceptualization for methodology to decolonize knowledge (Collins, 2019). Using quantitative methods, which has a historical connection in the oppression of marginalized populations, can also be a radical tool to demonstrate systems of oppression (Zuberi, 2001). By using epistemic resistance and not using colonized systems of methodology, but instead using the tools of quantitative methods to turn colonization, racism, sexism, and classism on its head, can "make relationships of epistemology, methodology, and power relations more transparent" (Collins, 2019, p. 144). In fact, using Westernized methodological approaches are suspect because they rest on the premise of colonization (Smith, 2012). Gilborn, et al. (2018) explain, "quantitative methods are well placed to chart wider structures, within which individuals live their everyday experiences, and to highlight the structural barriers and inequalities that differently racialized groups must navigate" (p. 160). To study critical work through quantitative methods the researcher must reject traditional positivist and post-positivist frameworks in recognition that no research methodology is *objective.* The research must also take a principled ambivalence to the numbers (Crawford, et al., 2019; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008).

Intersectional policy research and critical quantitative inquiry are natural partners in research as they both reject the notion that statistical research is value-free and politically neutral (Crawford, et al., 2019; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Historically, quantitative research in

higher education has been used to study achievement gaps and to develop accountability policy in education. This type of research exacerbates the opportunity gaps and long-held systems of oppression systematically marginalizing certain groups of people (Houston, et al., 2021). However, using quantitative research to study education policy in conjunction with an intersectional framework can demonstrate how policy addresses power dynamics, impacts individuals from different intersecting identities, and how some of these overlaps can lead to some individuals experiencing increased marginalization (Houston, et al., 2021).

Methodology

This study used existing statewide longitudinal data to critically evaluate the reach of Promise and the practice of using retention and graduation as logical outcomes of the program's efficacy. This chapter will address the research methodology and procedures used to address the stated research question through six sections: Research Questions; Research Design; Sample; Measures, Procedures & Materials; Data Management; and Data Analysis.

Research Questions

1. Who is being served by Promise and to what extent do people of color, women, students from low-income high schools, and rural communities participate in Promise?
2. When do students exit the program and what variables predict the time of that exit?
3. What factors relate to the likelihood of degree completion?
    a. What factors relate to the likelihood of attaining an associate's degree relative to no degree?
    b. What factors relate to the likelihood of attaining an associate's then bachelor's degree relative to only an associate's degree?
    c. What factors relate to the likelihood of a attaining bachelor's degree relative to no degree?

Research Design

To answer the established research questions, this study is situated as critical quantitative research with intersectionality as the analytical framework within the critical epistemology. Stage and Manning (2016) explain that the characteristics of this epistemology are: (1) the research purpose can be used to critique political, cultural, and social systems and transform structural systems of oppression; and (2) the findings can be used for transforming unjust power

structures. This study aims to address the power structures at play with Promise policy and access to higher education at-large in the state of Oklahoma. Quantitative methods are the primary tool in which Promise policy and practices are considered and the only ongoing means of assessment of the program as a whole. Therefore, this study will use the same methods and data used by the State but will use an intersectional lens to analyze in an effort to show that the same tools used to oppress can also illuminate inequities.

Sample

This study used the total population of Promise participants who enrolled in an Oklahoma college or university between the years of 2010 and 2021 to use the scholarship. The sample is made up of 49,575 individual participants over this timeframe. Scholarship eligibility limitations restrict participants to Oklahoma residents from families with a federal adjusted gross income of $55k per year or less. The participants' high school graduation years range from 2010 to 2020 and includes individuals presumably ranging from 19 to 30 years old today, but records begin at approximately 17/18 to 20/21 years old for most participants. The participants as a whole represent 531 mutually public, private, homeschool, and high schools across the state; all five federally defined racial/ethnic categories, including affiliation with almost 40 sovereign tribes; and all 77 of Oklahoma's individual counties. They collectively attended all 26 of Oklahoma's public higher education systems, as well as around a dozen private institutions within the state. Research Question I specifically address the unique characteristics of the sample, thus demographic characteristics will be outlined in the Findings chapter. Additionally, Figure 11 in Appendix E displays the frequency of participants by each variable.

The sample was sourced from a records request to the OSRHE and included no personal identifiable information that could lead researchers to any individual subject. The time span of

ten years was selected because the OSRHE agency only keeps student-level record data available for ten years and the data was requested in 2021. This large sample was selected as the ideal method to answer the research questions because of the ability to give the clearest and most generalizable picture of Promise across the Oklahoma higher education system, specifically because it comprises the total population as opposed to a smaller sample group. There are limitations to this sample. It does not give information on Promise participants who did not enter the Oklahoma system; thus, students will not be represented in the data if they attended a college out of state or did not attend college at all. This limitation does not interfere with the central purpose and understanding of this study. Promise can only be used at in-state institutions and, therefore, cannot be considered a tool for students who choose out-of-state institutions. Further research is necessary for Promise participants who do not pursue a degree at all. Because of the limited data available, the scope of this study is limited to Promise participants who pursued a college education within the state of Oklahoma.

Measures, Procedures, & Materials

Data Sourcing

Archival data was used to conduct this study; thus, no survey or existing instrumentation was employed in the process of this research. This method was ideal for this research as it offers the opportunity to get the full picture of Promise participants and there is no convincing reason for re-collecting already existing data available upon request. Beyond the individual participant-level data provided by OSRHE, additional archival data was obtained by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) on information related to participants' high schools. NCES is the primary federal entity for gathering and processing education data. Their database was used to collect information on high school demographic and population information, Title I status, Free

and Reduced Lunch Program eligibility, school type, and location. Connecting the OSRHE data to the NCES data allowed for a more robust understanding of the larger community in which each participant came from. Finally, OSRHE public online dashboards and Kids Count Census data were used in analysis as comparison tools to measure results against statewide trends in college-going rates, demographics, and family income thresholds.

Procedures

There are no direct procedures for participants as they were not contacted or worked with directly because of the use of archival data. The study underwent an Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects and was determined to not meet the criteria for human subject's research as it contained no personal identifiable information and would not directly impact the participants of the study. Participants were not contacted as they were not personally identifiable within the data.

Materials

IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used to assist in data analysis. Details on how the software was used and for what can be found in the data management and data analysis sections.

Data Management

The dataset from OSRHE was originally sent in about twenty unique spreadsheets spanning the ten-year sample. Once obtaining it, all twenty spreadsheets were compiled into a single document containing the participant's unique identifying number, demographic information, high school of origin, high school graduation date, semester by semester college attendance information, and any and all degrees earned up until a bachelor's degree.

Data parameters were put into place to narrow the information within the parameters of policy and the study. Specifically, student enrollment that was qualified as non-degree-seeking, concurrent, or graduate studies were not included in the data. Summer semesters were not included in the retention analyses to prevent participants engaging in a Summer break to be counted in the exit data. Specific details of what parameters were established and why are outlined below.

Non-Degree-Seeking

Enrollment information related to semesters where the participant was considered "non-degree-seeking" were not included in the data. This removal would affect questions I and II so that a participant is not measured for their progress towards a degree they are intentionally not pursuing.

Concurrent Enrollment

The next parameter set was to not include semesters earned concurrently, or while the student was in high school, as part of the semester by semester data and analysis. This was done for three primary reasons. First—the scholarship is not utilized for concurrent work. While Promise participants are encouraged to take courses concurrently, the cost for these courses do not deplete from their scholarship award nor does it count towards the total semesters given to a student to earn a degree. Meaning, a student could earn the equivalent number of credits to almost award an Associate's Degree while in high school concurrently, but could then still take the full five years to earn their Bachelor's Degree within the Promise policy.

Second—Oklahoma has a long history of gatekeeping concurrent enrollment from marginalized student populations. When the Concurrent Enrollment Policy was rolled out in 1980 (The Oklahoman, 1980) the program was built for "exceptional students" (The Oklahoman,

1982, p. 101). High school counselors and college admissions officers were able to gate keep who received information about who had access to the opportunity. By 1988, new legislation was enacted prohibiting higher education institutions from denying students who were qualified for the concurrent enrollment from attending (The Oklahoman, 1988). Although policy was enacted to remove language surrounding "exceptional students" more than thirty years ago, the sentiment remains within K-12 and postsecondary systems. In fact, it can occasionally be found in OSRHE agendas and documents from time to time within the last five years (OSHRE, 2017). The legacy of exclusion continues to persist.

Third—concurrent is not affordable to all students equally. All Oklahoma high school juniors and seniors that can meet college admissions standards can take college courses concurrently, tuition free. However, the costs of books, fees, and transportation are not covered. Students who participate in this program must be able to financially take on the burden of the other expenses as they are not yet eligible for any financial aid as high school students. Some well-resourced K-12 schools assist students by providing the books, fees, technology, and support to make these programs more accessible to more students, but this is not standard practice across the state. Promise participants already fall into the low-income category and, presuming all Promise participants have equal opportunity to access the concurrent programs, would bake-in privilege to the analysis and affect performance outcomes in a way that would reinforce the already existing benefits for students from resourced communities.

Graduate Degrees

Graduate degrees were not included in the research because the Promise scholarship is limited to only fund up to a Bachelor's Degree or five years of college attendance, whichever is

accomplished first. Therefore, for the purpose of this study information beyond the scope of the scholarship policy parameters were not included.

Urbanicity

A students' hometown urbanicity was initially collected using NCES public data from the students' assigned public high school or the geographic location of the participants' private school if applicable. NCES uses twelve individual urbanicity categories, that I collapsed into five and in addition to consolidating categories, I cleaned the data to accurately reflect current population trends in the state. NCES reporting uses 2010 US Census Bureau data, which in some cases may be outdated. Specifically, in suburbs around the two large Oklahoma metropolitan areas: Oklahoma City and Tulsa. At the time of the 2010 census many of Oklahoma's now very large suburbs were considered rural areas twelve years ago. In the process of data cleaning, if a school showed up sending multiple dozens of students through the Promise program but were labeled under the *rural* category they were double-checked and frequently moved into the *suburban* or the *fringe* categories depending on their proximity to a city. While some participant data is captured in 2010 and would be accurately reflected according to the 2010 census data, the Oklahoma metro areas have been growing rapidly since that time and are better reflected in under newer and more updated labels.

Tribal Affiliation & Race/Ethnicity

The data provided by OSRHE included information on participants race/ethnicity as well as a category for tribal affiliation. Both of these categories are self-selected categories. OSHRE data is collected from the individual institutions, all of which have different collection methods and verification methods within their own process. Most likely, participants were offered a selection menu or a write-in option to indicate their tribal affiliation as part of an admissions

process. Tribal affiliation does have a connection to many individuals' racial/ethnic identity, at minimum all tribal affiliated individuals have Native and/or Freedman ancestry but to be a member of a tribe is a political and citizenship affiliation beyond race/ethnicity. For this purpose, I cleaned the data keeping both variables which did not perfectly correspond to each other.

The challenge with reporting tribal affiliation data without verification of tribal citizenship is there is a chance a portion of respondents are misidentifying their affiliation. There is a well-documented practice of White people misappropriating Native identities (Deloria, 1998; Green, 1988; Root, 1996; Springwood, 2004; Strong & van Winkle, 1996). However, the accuracy of tribal affiliation could not be determined through the data I received. I ultimately chose to keep tribal affiliation as its own category and not automatically override all tribally affiliated individuals directly into the American Indian/Alaskan Native category because: 1) The *Morton v Mancari* (1974) Supreme Court decision that upheld that the special treatment of tribal governments is non-racial but a political decision. This case and other landmark cases are what continue to uphold sovereignty amongst Tribal Nations in US courts of law. The confluence of race and political affiliation in research, as well as rhetoric, have been used in attempts to diminish sovereignty in a way I do not choose to support in my own work. 2) I err on the side of supporting self-identification of participants. More details regarding the sensitivity of these findings, as well as, implications for this choice can be found in the limitations and recommendations for future research sections of the paper.

Framing Retention and Completion Data Within Promise Scholarship Guidelines

To study research questions two and three, decisions about what constituted an 'exit,' the timeline to attend an institution, and the timeline to receive a degree were all set by the boundaries of the Promise policy and eligibility guidelines at the time the participants were

actively using the scholarship. A full description of these guidelines can be found in the Oklahoma's Promise section on page 26 of this paper and a full definition of what constitutes an exit event can be found in Appendix D, page 169.

Data Analysis

This section will address the statistical tests used to address the research questions for the study and will be broken out into individual research questions.

Research Question I

Research Question I: Who is being served by Promise? Theory suggests that policy written under a single-identity axis for a marginalized population primarily works to serve the most privileged individuals within that group (Verloo, 2013). Following this logic, it could be presumed that White men from high-income high schools would be the largest benefactors of the Promise scholarship. To analyze this question, I used descriptive statistics to analyze the participant population. Descriptive statistics are used to analyze the characteristics of a dataset, highlight particular relationships, and to analyze the makeup of each individual variable (Lomax & Hahs-Vaughn, 2012). Additionally, I used geographic coordinates of each participants' high school to do spatial mapping and indexing of participants' hometown.

Independent Variables. The following independent variables were used to address this question and all following questions. Full definitions can be found in Appendix D at the end of the dissertation: Gender; Race/Ethnicity; Tribal Affiliation; High School County; High School Type; High School Charter Status; High School Urbanicity; High School Title I Status; High School Latitude and Longitude; Percentage of High School Students Eligible for Free & Reduced Lunch (FRL) Program; Percentage of High School Students Representing Persons of Color (PoC).

Research Question II

Research Question II: When do students exit the program and what variables predict the time of that exit? To answer this question, I used Cox's Proportional Hazards (CPH) model to conduct a survival analysis. CPH is a multivariate regression model and a method for examining the effect multiple variables have on the time a specific event takes to happen (Luke & Homan, 1998; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). It is most frequently used in medical research to study the impact of covariates on the survival of subjects (Kamphorst, et al., 2022). It is widely recognized tool to establish when participants (1) continue to 'live' in the study, (2) 'fail' in the study, or (3) decide to no longer participate in the study, at which point their exit from the study becomes a 'censoring' event (Kamphorst, et al., 2022). CPH specifically takes the data of those who did not finish the experiment or study into account. The primary benefit of using the CPH model over other survival analysis and regression models is that the relative risk of two events is continual over time and it simplifies to a linear model for the log of the hazard ratio. It also does not assume any particular parametric model for the baseline parametric model for the baseline hazard function (Kamphorst, et al., 2022). This framework has been highly successful in identifying health risk factors for patients, but it is also increasingly being used in other fields and in studies with smaller risks (Moolgavkar, et al., 2018). The measurement of the relative risk of two events over being constant over time is an ideal method for determining predictive covariates of exit for Promise.

I used the model to measure the impact race/ethnicity, gender, high school characteristics, and hometown characteristics have on predicting when a student exits the Promise program. To analyze the intersection of a participants' unique racial/ethnic and gender identities, they were separated out to analyze individually. The exit event was coded at the first semester in which a

participant did not appear in the semester data at any point after their first semester enrolled until the tenth semester after enrollment (when eligibility for Promise is no longer available) and did not return. An exit event does not discreetly mean that a student has withdrawn or dropped out of a degree program. It may mean they transferred to an out of state institution or that they have left temporarily with the intention of returning after the eligibility window.

I analyzed 29 variables against six individual reference variables respectively to find what aspects of a students' identity, high school, and hometown might predict a participants' likelihood of exiting the scholarship within their eligibility window. A drawback of this method is that it requires a reference group to measure against. Therefore, all participants that fit into one category are measured against another group of participants. For instance, to study the gender/race/ethnicity variables all groups were measured against White men as a reference group. It is recognized that putting any gender/racial category as a reference group may reinforce existing stereotypes that establish White men as the "norm" and thus situates them into a power position in terms of data analysis. To systematically choose a reference group amongst variables without establishing any one "model" group, the last group within each variable was selected as the reference group for each covariate. The list of reference groups amongst covariates is: White men; Tribal Sovereign Citizens; regular public high schools; Title I high schools; charter high schools; high schools city hometowns; high school FRL eligibility >75 percent; and high school percentage PoC >75 percent.

Variables Specific to Research Question II. The following independent variables were used to address this question and full definitions can be found in Appendix D at the end of the dissertation: Exit Event; Exit Semester; Return Event; Semesters Exited.

Research Question III

Research Question III: What factors relate to the likelihood of degree completion? Specifically, what factors relate to the likelihood of attaining an associate's degree relative to no degree; an associate's then bachelor's degree relative to only an associate's degree; and a bachelor's degree relative to no degree? To answer these questions, I used a multinomial logistic regression. This type of regression is ideal to study degree acquisition amongst Promise participants because it models a predictive relationship between one or more nominal independent variables and a binary variable. The multinomial logistic regression was performed to determine if gender, race/ethnicity, Tribal Affiliation, hometown, and high school characteristics are predictors of degree acquisition. Similar to CPH used in question two, a reference group must be established within the variables to compare against. In the complex variables such as the intersection of race/gender, White men remained the reference group for consistency in explaining the findings of research question two and how the same exact groupings resulted in the analysis of this question. The presence of fourteen unique groups within the one intersecting gender/race/ethnicity variable proved simpler to analyze and explain with consistency in the analysis between questions. However, in the simpler groupings with less categories, the first group listed in the variable was used as the reference category. The reference categories for this analysis were: White men; Tribal Sovereign Citizen; religiously affiliated private school; not-Title I high school; rural hometown; high school FRL >75 percent; and high school PoC >75 percent.

Variables Specific to Research Question III. The following independent variables were used to address this question and full definitions can be found in Appendix D at the end of the dissertation: Associate's Degree; Associates to Bachelor's Degree; and Bachelor's Degree.

Findings & Analysis

Findings of all research questions are outlined and described within this chapter. Prior to displaying findings, it must be addressed that while this study is connecting participation, retention, and completion to different aspects of participants' identities, these identities are not the *cause* of any outcome. It is an inherent fallacy to assume any aspect of a participants' identity could be the cause of any outcome in this study. It can be reasonably assumed that most individuals who enroll in Promise, meet the high school standards, meet the college admission requirements, and enroll in an institution have the aptitude to be academically successful in college and are motivated to access higher education. All enrolled participants in Promise are "high achieving." This is not a study of achievement gaps, but it is a study of opportunity gaps. Therefore, the findings illustrate patterns across race/ethnicity, gender, tribal affiliation, high school, and hometown that can assist in illuminating potential systemic barriers to access, retention, and completion for Promise participants.

Research Question I

Research Question I: Who is being served by Promise and to what extent do people of color, women, students from low-income high schools, and rural communities participate in Promise? Intersectional theory posits that when a policy is developed for a marginalized group without consideration of the multiple identities within that group it, by default, privileges one subpopulation over the others. This rings true amongst the participants in Promise in a variety of ways that are outlined below. Graphs and charts related to the research question can be found in Appendix E.

Race & Ethnicity

Hispanic and Latino participants comprise the second largest racial/ethnic population amongst Promise participants, at 13 percent. However, this population is significantly underserved in the population. The Hispanic/Latino population of 18-24-year-old persons in the state of Oklahoma has steadily grown from about 12 percent to 14 percent in the last ten years, but the Promise population has lagged just a percentage point or so behind the total population each year. It's the only racial/ethnic population that has had less participants proportional to the state demographics for all ten years. This trend does not align with Hispanic/Latino college-going rates within the state; there has been a 99.6 percent increase in Hispanic college-going rates over the past ten years. This population also has the greatest room to grow; there is a vast separation between Hispanic/Latino students financially eligible for Promise and those that participate. More than 60 percent of Hispanic/Latino individuals 14-24 lived less than twice below the federal poverty level from 2010 to 2019. As for why this community is specifically underserved, this data does not tell us. However, it can be inferred that the Promise scholarship is not addressing the larger barriers to access for this community.

The third largest racial/ethnic group in Promise is the American Indian/Alaskan Native population, comprising about 12.5 percent of the total Promise population. This is also the only community of color to have declining numbers of participation between 2010 and 2020. Over the ten years studied, Promise consistently had a larger Native population than the proportional Native population of Oklahomans 18-24 years old. Meanwhile, statewide college-going rates for this community have decreased 44.8 percent. This rapid decline should still sound alarms. The financial need for the American Indian/Alaska Native population has remained consistent over that time. More than 50 percent of that community are from families that live twice below the

federal poverty level. The reason for the declining participation cannot be explained in this study, but—similar to the Hispanic/Latino population—the decline does illuminate an unmet need of the community that Promise is not addressing in relation to access to higher education for this community in the same way it is other racial/ethnic populations.

Black or African American participants have grown significantly over the past ten years. Black participants makeup about 9.5 percent of all Promise participants studied. This population has grown incrementally every year since 2010 where the population representation was below the general population of that category percentage to well over it in 2019. This does not echo college-going rates as a whole for the Black/African American community, which observed a 29 percent decrease in attendance over the past decade. This community, like other populations mentioned, does have a significant portion of the young adult population twice below the national poverty rate, at 62 percent; proportionately the largest poverty population in the study. The reason why Black/African American populations are increasing in Promise but decreasing statewide is unknown and cannot be answered by this study. It does raise the question if Promise is addressing access to higher education for this community. Given the absolute financial need as a whole, much higher participation would be expected if the program was significantly reducing barriers to entry and participation for this group.

Participants with two or more races or ethnicities have grown dramatically in the last decade. In all, participants with multiple racial identities makeup about ten percent of the Promise participants for this study. In 2010 they only represented about five percent of the Promise population. By 2019, they encompassed more than 12 percent of the population. This is a growing population statewide, but tops out at about seven percent of the total population of individuals 18-24 years old in 2019. There was a 140 percent increase in participants with two or

more races/ethnicities in Promise, but statewide the college-going rates for this population has increased 456 percent in the same time span. More than 49 percent of individuals 18-24 years old, representing two or more races/ethnicities live double below the federal poverty line. The increased participation in Promise is hopeful but is not mirroring college-going trends in general for this population in Oklahoma.

Less than one percent of the Promise population was Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. The numbers of the population were so low that none of the information could be meaningfully generalizable. For that reason, this specific population will not be included in any of the discussion, but did exist within the population and were included in the data.

Asian or Middle Eastern participants comprise about four percent of Promise participants. The Asian or Middle Eastern population of individuals between the ages of 18-24 has stayed around 2-3 percent for the past ten years, but has seen a 12.6 percent growth in college going rates during the same time period. Similar to the college-going rates, participation in Asian/Middle Eastern participation in Promise has almost doubled in size in that time. The increased participation in this population both in Promise and college-going rates could be an encouraging sign that both Promise and access to higher education in general is becoming more available to this community.

White participants account for 51 percent of the total population. This number is not entirely outrageous given Oklahoma's general population of young adults between 18 to 24 years old have comprised about 62 to 55 percent of Oklahoma's total population in that age group. Those statistics alone may lead one to think the White population is being underserved; however, when financial need is considered this is not the case. When financial need is considered, Promise is excelling at serving this specific population. The U.S. Census Bureau published

results of the American Community survey, which calculated the percentage of young adults between ages 14 to 24 living in families whose income was less than twice the federal poverty level; in 2019, that was families of four with less than $51,853 household income annually (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Any student within that income bracket would, by default, be financially eligible for Promise. The percentage of White Oklahomans whose income was less than twice the poverty level represented a smaller percentage of the population than White Oklahoma Promise participants. The declining White population in Promise mirrors the Oklahoma general population. The Small separation between those two populations that does currently exist can almost entirely be explained by those White students not demonstrating financial need or choosing not to participate in the program. White participants showed up in every subsection of the data. They were represented in 513 of the 532 high schools with a Promise participant, in every county represented, and every geographic area from big cities to the most rural areas of the state. Without question, White students across the state are aware of and participating in Promise at remarkably high rates.

Gender

Women comprise more than 60 percent of the Promise participants studied and outnumbered their men counterparts in every racial/ethnic group and amongst Tribal Sovereign Citizens. White women alone make up almost a third of the total participants, making them the single largest subpopulation in the study. The large portion of women participants follows national higher education trends since the 1980 and nearly each year since (NCES, 2020). National trends show that enrollment has remained steady for White men and increased in number for men of color, except for Hispanic/Latino Men (King, 2006, 2010). This is not true within Oklahoma over the past ten years. White men have declined 28.7 percent in the last ten

years, American Indian/Alaskan Native men decline 48 percent, and Black/African American men decline 32.1 percent. Conversely, men who are two or more races/ethnicities have increased in college-going rates 474.3 percent over the past ten years; Asian/Middle Eastern men increase 14.4 percent; and Hispanic/Latino men have increased 87.1 percent. Accordingly, men Promise participants have increased in the Asian/Middle Eastern, Hispanic/Latino, and two or more races in the same time window while men overall have been on the decline in the program. The same participation trends are present for women just at different rates of change. The same racial/ethnic populations are declining or increasing correspondingly to both genders, but at different rates.

The gap between men and women participation sits around 20 percent for almost all the racial/ethnic categories and is only slightly larger than the gap between men and women for the college-going rates statewide for each of these populations. There are two exceptions to this: Asian/Middle Eastern participants who only have a 9.5 percent difference between the genders, similar to the statewide college-going data and Black/African American participants where there are almost 40 percent more women from that community than men. This does not mirror statewide trends within the Black/African American community where Black/African American men comprises about seven percent less of the total annual headcount for Black/African American students over the last ten years.

Tribal Affiliation

Almost 19 percent of Promise participants are members of Tribal Nations. This group is separated from race/ethnicity because tribal membership is more like a political affiliation than it is a race or ethnicity. Although Tribal Sovereign Citizens have historical connections to Native and Indigenous communities, many Tribal Sovereign Citizens do not identify as Native today.

Almost sixty percent of Tribal Sovereign Citizens in Promise identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, whereas almost 96 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native participants identified themselves as a member of a tribe. Almost 30 percent are two or more races/ethnicities and about five percent are White. There is not a great deal of information on this population as a whole outside of the racial/ethnic alignment with Native populations. For this reason, identifying if this community is being served equitably cannot be discerned in this study. However, this should, without question, be studied in the future.

High School

Promise participants in the data represented every single regular public high school in the state (469), nine other public education schools, and about 50 private schools. More than 98 percent of the participants attended a regular public high school, less than two percent went to a private high school, and less than one percent were homeschooled. Less than four percent attended a charter or magnet school, but almost 13 percent of all Hispanic/Latino participants attended a charter or magnet school. Many of these participants all came from the same high school.

Most Promise participants do not come from a Title I high school. Only about 38 percent attended a Title I high school, but 57.5 percent of Black/African American and 51 percent of Hispanic/Latino participants attended Title I schools. Similarly, only about 16 percent of participants came from high schools with 75-100 percent eligible students for free and reduced lunch Twenty percent of American Indian/Alaska Native, 23 percent of Black/African American, and 33 percent of Hispanic/Latino participants came from these high schools.

Hometown

Promise does appear to be equitable geographically. As mentioned previously, participants represent every public high school in the state and represent every city, suburb, town, and rural community. The two biggest counties in the two biggest cities send more students to Promise than any other county in the state, but the largest total population are participants from rural: distant and remote areas (27.7 percent). Those are census-defined areas that are more than 10 miles from any urbanized area. Almost 42 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native participants, 40 percent of Tribal Sovereign Citizen participants, 34 percent of White participants, and 25 percent of two or more races/ethnicity participants come from areas like this. Cities and towns were the next largest groups with about 21 percent of participants coming from each of those communities. The cities make up almost half of the Asian/Middle Eastern, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino participants. Promise participants were least likely to come from a fringe town or rural area, but still more than ten percent of participants come from those communities. This is an area that Promise appears to be highly successful at supporting the state equitably. Participation from every high school, county, and area of the state demonstrates Promise is successful at communicating the program to all of the different communities within the state, regardless of where a student is from geographically.

Research Question II

Research Question II is: When do students exit the program and what variables predict the time of that exit? About 31 percent of Promise participants exited the scholarship not to return within the timeline of the scholarship. Those participants were coded and will be identified as exiters of the scholarship. These participants may have transferred to an out of state institution, left with the intention of coming back at a later time, decided they were not interested

in pursuing a degree, or hit a barrier that prevented them from continuing to pursue their degree. Most of the analysis for question two is focused specifically on exiters, not the participants who took a leave of absence. Graphs and charts related to research question two can be found in Appendix F.

Consistent with national trends, the third semester is the most severe stopping point for Promise students with 26.2 percent of them exiting, but still below the 30 percent national dropout average for college students (Hanson, 2021). Participants who make it through their second year were more likely to persist. Exit event percentages after semester five were in the single digits and persisted at far higher levels.

Exit Event Predictors

The survival analysis found several predictors tied to race and ethnicity. Asian/Middle Eastern men and women were 56 and 61 percent less likely to have an exit event than their White men counterparts and are the least likely of all racial/ethnic and gender groups to have an exit event. Black/African American women were 11 percent less likely to have an exit event; Hispanic/Latino men were 11 percent less likely to have an exit event; and Hispanic/Latina women were nine percent less likely to have an exit event than their White men peers. Ultimately, participants of color were far more likely, in general, to persist in enrollment than their White peers.

The model also revealed that a participants' hometown characteristics had significant predictors of exit and retention. Participants from cities tended to persist at higher rates than the other geographic identifiers. Participants from fringe areas were ten percent more likely to have an exit event, town five percent, and rural areas 16 percent respectively.

High school characteristics also signaled predictive factors, most notably in the eligibility for FRL. As the number of FRL eligible high school students increases so does the significance of a student exiting. Thus, the participants who come from schools where many of their peers were in increased levels of poverty were negatively predicted to persist. The model also revealed significant results within the school type category, indicating participants who came from a private religious high school were less likely to have an exit event. Private Christian school students were 34 percent less likely and private Islamic school students were more than 222 percent less likely to have an exit event than their public-school peers. The results of the school type category should be considered with caution as more than 98 percent of participants attended a regular public high school and the private school population was relatively very small. Tribal affiliation and high school racial/ethnic diversity were not predictive indicators for student exit and persistence.

Research Question III

Research Question III: What factors relate to the likelihood of degree completion of an associate's degree relative to no degree; an associate's then bachelor's degree relative to only an associate's degree; and a bachelor's degree relative to no degree? In total, 29.1 percent of participants earned a bachelor's degree, 12 percent an associate's, and 58.9 percent did not earn a degree within the Promise eligibility window.

Because Promise was never intended to be an access policy or program, there is no outlined desired outcome for participants to earn any specific degree in particular. Policy language alludes to an interest in participants acquiring a bachelor's degree given the parameters of the eligibility window are five years or until a bachelor's degree is earned, but there is no limit on the number of associate's degrees. It is valuable to analyze both degree pathways in this study

for a variety of reasons. The access, proximity, and affordability many two-year colleges make higher education possible for low-income students and provide transfer pathways for students who intend to continue on to a baccalaureate-level program. Additionally, an associate's degree may be some Promise participants' ultimate intended outcome of pursuing higher education. This study cannot address participant motivations in degree pathway choices; therefore, both degree paths have been analyzed and included.

Associate's Degrees

For the purpose of this study associate's degrees are limited to a participant who earned an associate-creditable toward a bachelor's degree such as an Associate in Arts, an Associate in Science program, or an associate-not wholly creditable toward a bachelor's degree such as an Associate of Applied Science program within the eligibility window for Promise. More than 23 percent of Promise participants earned an associate's degree using their scholarship. Eight percent of those participants went on to earn a bachelor's and 15.2 percent earned an associate's degree as their final degree in the Promise scholarship.

A multinomial logistic regression was used to study the predicting factors of a student acquiring only an associate's degree in relation to earning no degree. A full index of results of this regression can be found in Appendix G. The results of the regression reveal Asian/Middle Eastern, Hispanic/Latina, and White women were all more likely to earn an associate's degree compared to their White men peers at 158.9 percent, 58.2 percent, and 34 percent respectively. Alternatively, Black/African American women and men, American Indian/Alaska Native men, and men from two or more races were less likely than their White men peers to earn an associate's degree at -36.8 percent, -121.2 percent, -28.2 percent, and -82.5 percent respectively. Tribal Sovereign Citizens were 73.4 percent more likely to earn an associate's degree than no

degree at all than their non-tribally affiliated peers to acquire an associate's. Participants from towns were 13 percent more likely to acquire an associate's degree than their rural and remote hometown peers. High schools with the least amount of eligible FRL students were 52 percent less likely to acquire an associate's degree than participants from high schools with the highest number of eligible FRL students.

Variables that were not identified as significant predictors of positive or negative associate's degree obtain can be interpreted as results similar to the reference group's associate's degree obtainment. In the intersection variable American Indian/Alaska Native women, two or more races/ethnicities women, and Hispanic/Latino men were all about as likely to acquire an associate's as their White men peers. City, suburb, and fringe groups were about as likely as their rural and remote peers. Title I and non-Title I high school participants were about equally as likely to acquire an associate's degree. Participants from high schools with 26 to 75 percent of FRL eligible students were about as likely as their peers from more than 75 percent FRL eligible high schools to earn an associate's. Finally, participants from high schools with 51 to 75 percent PoC students were about as likely as participants from high schools with 76 or more percent PoC students in the high school.

It is unknown if participants who acquired an associate's degree had any intention of earning a bachelor's degree. An associate's alone may be many participants' ultimate goal. Eight percent of the 23.2 percent of participants who acquired an associate's degree in Promise went on to acquire a bachelor's degree within their eligibility window. Asian/Middle Eastern men were 48.3 percent more likely to acquire both an associate's and a bachelor's degree in Promise. Hispanic/Latina women were 22.4 more likely than their White men peers for an associate's degree to be their terminal degree in the program. Participants from suburbs were 21.5 percent

more likely than their rural and remote hometown peers to acquire an associate's degree as their terminal degree in the program.

Bachelor's Degree

For the purpose of this study, a Bachelor's Degree is an undergraduate baccalaureate degree acquired within the eligibility window for Promise. More than 32 percent of participants acquired a bachelor's degree within the Promise eligibility window. A multinomial regression was used to find predictors of degree attainment and a full list of all variables tested can be found in Appendix G, as well as corresponding graphs and charts.

Asian/Middle Eastern women, White women, and Asian/Middle Eastern men were all more likely to acquire a bachelor's degree in Promise than their White men peers at 43.7 percent, 18.4 percent, and 98 percent respectively. Black/African American women and men, American Indian/Alaska Native men, Hispanic/Latino men, and men who are two or more races were all less likely to acquire a bachelor's degree in promise than their White men peers at -36 percent, -93.4 percent, -34.4 percent, -32.1 percent, and -31.2 percent respectively.

Hometown markers were identified as a predictor of bachelor's obtainment, city participants were 18.6 percent more likely to acquire a bachelor's than their rural peers, and town participants were 16.5 percent more likely. Bachelor's degree attainment did show significant predictors related to high school characteristics as well. As high school percentage of students eligible for FRL decreases the likelihood for a bachelor's degree increases, which is opposite of the associate's degree attainment predictors. The schools with the lowest poverty rates amongst the total student population are far more likely to acquire a bachelor's degree. Schools with 25 percent or less FRL eligible students are 74.5 percent more likely to acquire a bachelor's degree. The same pattern happens with high schools that are highly diverse. The fewer White students

there are, the less likely the participants will acquire a bachelor's degree. The participants from the least diverse schools in the state are 80.8 percent more likely than the most diverse schools in the state.

Limitations

There are some limitations to this study. Firstly, the Promise data is limited only to students who participated in the program and attended an Oklahoma college or university. It does not contain information on students who participated in Promise that chose to go out of state or who chose not to go to college at all. The data does not include the total college-going population to use as a comparison tool for Promise students; meaning, it is impossible to know from the data provided how Promise participants compare to non-Promise participants from similar class, racial, ethnic, and gender backgrounds. The sample data is restricted to Oklahoma high school students, which provides a limitation to the generalizability to the findings. Additionally, it is unknown specifically how and in what ways the demographic data is gathered from participants. It is clear that participants self-select their own demographic information, but specifically it is unknown if the tribal affiliation information is verified. Therefore, Tribal affiliation cannot be assumed as it may reflect White misappropriation of Native identities (Deloria, 1998; Green, 1988; Root, 1996; Springwood, 2004; Strong & van Winkle, 1996) and should be considered carefully.

Discussion

Promise programs, by the nature of their intention to serve low-income students, make positive impacts in the localities they reside. Promise is no different. About fifty thousand low-income students went to an Oklahoma college or university on the scholarship over the ten-year span studied. Almost twenty-one thousand of those students earned an associate's and/or bachelor's degree using the scholarship. Promise programs do good, but may also have potential to do better. Reframing policy and practice to engage student populations from underserved communities and identities has potential to only further contribute to student success for all students, but it requires policymakers and practitioners to go beyond "low-income." Neglecting to ask critical questions about race, class, and gender in policy and practice development of any public policy built to support populations in the margins may neglect to serve them adequately (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2019). Hooks defines the term "margin" as:

> "[The] site of resistance [that] is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination. We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle. We know struggle to be that which is difficult, challenging, hard and we know struggle to be that which pleasures, delights, and fulfills desire. We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world" (p. 23).

It is in these spaces, the margins, where students are in the crux of opportunity gaps. Promise programs could benefit resistance efforts affect liberation by giving voice and opportunity to those that live there.

Policy Framing, Outcomes, and Expectations

It is not uncommon for promise programs to be created with little attention to how policy language and program design could affect student outcomes (Andrews, et al., 2010; Bartik, et al., 2015; Carruthers & Fox, 2016; Miller-Adams & Timmeney, 2013). Yet, at least in the case of Promise, these outcomes are how they are measured and evaluated. The one-note, low-income, olive branch state governments are offering to families is not long enough to reach all communities equally. The findings in this study demonstrate it is failing to reach many students in the margins.

Promise participation findings demonstrate the program is successfully reaching low-income White students. White participants showed up in every subsection of the data. They were represented in 513 of the 532 high schools with a Promise participant, in every county represented, and every geographic area from big cities to the most rural areas of the state. Without question, White students across the state are aware of and participating in Promise at remarkably high rates. When measured against statewide population rates for White individuals between the ages of 18-24 over the past ten years and controlling for the percentage of that group double below the poverty line, Promise is reaching them adequately and proportionately. Particularly, White women make up about a third of all participants in the study. However, every other racial/ethnic and gender category appears to be underserved by the Program. High school participation did not lead to enrollment at an Oklahoma public college or university. Black/African American women and men; Asian/Middle Eastern women and men; and women and men from two or more races/ethnicities participation was rising, but historically have been underserved by the Program. American Indian/Alaska Native women have been declining in

participation over the past decade. Hispanic/Latina women have consistently remained significantly underserved without exception.

Tribal Sovereign Citizens represent almost one-fifth of Promise participants. It is unknown if that is more or less than the general population of Oklahoma college-goers between the ages of 18 and 24 because there is no published information about tribal members as a whole and their college-going rates. There is also no information on any explicit strategy to work with tribal governments to support Tribal Sovereign Citizens in Promise. This seems a missed opportunity to work and collaborate across governing bodies to layer support for tribal members in the program. Oklahoma has 39 Indigenous Nations and each supports their citizens' transitions to college socially and economically (Tennell, 2021). By this standard alone, tribal governments are arguably as invested in Oklahoma higher education as is the state. An intentional plan or policy to work alongside tribal sovereign governments to layer support and share information could directly benefit Tribal Sovereign Citizens involved in Promise at no extra cost and minimal effort of either government entity.

It is no surprise that Promise's race-, gender-, class-ambivalent policy serves some communities more than others. Policies intended for marginalized groups that are built on a single-identity-axis inherently privilege one group over others (Crenshaw, 1989; Verloo, 2013). In Promise, this is White participants. The lack of consideration in policy to consider the other oppressive forces that affect low-income men and women of color accessing the program and enrolling in college go unaddressed by policy and largely by practice. The promotional materials for Promise offer no insight to recruiting or targeting any specific group or subgroup, White participants included, outside of resources and materials available in the Spanish language (OSRHE, 2022). However, the largely colorblind and genderblind strategy is benefitting White

men and women disproportionately. Strangely, the single-identity-axis framework did not benefit students from Title I high school students or students from high schools with more than 75 percent of students eligible for FRL, which would logically be first stops in recruiting participants to a low-income access program, but it appears not to be the case. Promise relies on family and high school engagement to promote the program (OSRHE, 2022), which may shed light on where this disparity in engagement stems.

Promise is successful in recruiting participants in different kinds of communities when under the lens of Oklahoma's geographic landscape. Equitable participation has been successful in this context as every single high school in the entire state has had a Promise participant in the last ten years. Rural communities, towns, and cities are amongst the highest participants in the program, revealing that students from rural areas and urban areas alike are both aware of Promise. This demonstrates that Promise is capable of communicating and recruiting effectively to different types of schools and communities, but chooses to use that energy on geographic equity. It is the only subcategory in which equity is pursued directly and obviously, despite no directives to consider it in regards to any other aspect of a students' identity which may identify racial, ethnic, gender, or income bias. In fact, leadership at the OSRHE even went as far as to discuss equity in terms of the types of civic communities a student would come from in the infancy of the program. Chancellor Hans Brisch said, "Access to higher education is necessary for a community's economic well-being. The regents hope to strengthen Oklahoma communities, particularly in those rural areas, and help them become more economically competitive. Increasing the education level of our citizens will bolster Oklahoma's work force and help attract high-paying industries to the state" (Potts, 1989). Chancellor Hans Brisch laid a framework that led to fruition, rural and remote students do comprise the largest group of Promise participants.

Perhaps this is because Promise is incentivized to pursue equity across the landscape of Oklahoma. Each town offers a legislative representative that can positively or negatively impact Promise policy. In fact, Representatives want to see that people like them and their neighbors are benefitting from Promise. However, when your representatives are almost all White men it may be dangerous to pursue equity that would reveal that their families and their neighbors should not always be the priority benefactors of the social programs they create. If the argument of legislative representation at a local level incentivizes Promise to recruit across districts, logic would follow that it could also account for the racial/ethnic disparities in recruiting. Currently, White men and women comprise 96 percent of all state and federal legislative positions in Oklahoma and White men are in 115 of the 149 legislative positions.

Another theory could be that the strategy to equally and equitably share information to schools is the priority of the policy. In practice, the onus of recruiting students to participate and information sharing happens at the K-12 level and all information is equally and equitably across schools, but it is not making to different students within those schools at similar rates. High school teachers, counselors, and administrators could be gatekeeping scholarship information. Evidence of racial and ethnic bias in college messaging amongst high school faculty and administration has been shown in literature (Hill, 2008; Martinez & Deil-Amen, 2015; McDonough, 1997; Perna et al., 2008). Another issue is the lack of diversity in the teacher workforce. Studies have shown teachers of color close achievement gaps, including postsecondary access gaps for students of color (Chapman & Brown, 2020; Carver-Thomas, 2018; US Department of Education, 2016). Lastly, putting the responsibility of recruiting for Promise on the shoulders of high schools adds another administrative burden on K-12 educators. In a recent study on Promise, Bell and Smith found that bureaucratic discretion affected

democratic outcomes for the program and for the participants (Bell & Smith, 2019; Bell, et al., 2021). Perhaps the logic that Promise is reaching all students by sharing with high schools equally could be an equitable strategy, but—given the infrastructure of K-12 education—this strategy should at best be one of a stratified approach to reach students.

When policy gives no guidance on how equity across race, class, and gender should be established, there is no legislative incentive to address inequity amongst race, class, or gender categories. There are no stated strategies or goals to address equity beyond the physical geographic communities in the state. The lack of connection between stated policy intention to serve low-income students and the context of the individuals who comprise "low-income students" limits the reach of the program. Without incentivization, stated strategy, and tangible structures to reach students from underserved communities, promise programs lack the political and social capital to truly contribute meaningfully to all low-income students. Until those strategies are included in promise policy language and practice, using outcome metrics without the consideration of race, class, and gender as tools for evaluation become a fallacy because only a portion of low-income students are being reached through the program at all and inequity is perpetuated.

The "Dropout" Narrative

For Promise, legislators used retention and completion rates to not only evaluate the program, but to lobby to determine the worthiness participants were of the award. Narratives about "accountability" and Promise "dropouts" come alive every legislative session, but this study found that narrative to be a total fabrication. Almost 70 percent of all participants never exited the program without coming back. Oklahoma's *first year* retention rate for all public higher education students over the past eight years was 75.9 percent and Promise participants in

this study's first year rate was 78.9 percent. The dropout and deficit narrative about Promise students is not only problematic, it is entirely inaccurate. They are out-persisting their non-Promise classmates and demonstrating incredible resiliency in the effort to do so. This in context of who the participants are and the well-researched barriers to persistence for low-income students, students of color, and students from different genders is exceptional.

The results of this study found that students from high schools with 76 percent or more of the student population eligible for FRL were as likely to be retained as participants from high schools with less than 25 percent of the student population eligible for FRL. When this is put into the context that low-income students rarely receive enough funding to persist (Hoxby, 2004; Luna, 2006; St. John, 2006); obtaining the extra funding and scholarships requires more steps for these students (Cochrane & Hernandez-Gravelle, 2007; Cochrane, et al., 2010; Long, 2010; Mostafavi, 2010); many low-income students are food and housing insecure while in college (Goldrick-Rab, et al., 2015); and are frequently attending classes without the necessary textbooks, supplies, or technology needed (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Many are also working part-time or full-time through school and some are supporting families (Chen & Carrol, 2005; Horn & Premo, 1995; Jehangier, 2010; Mangan, 2015; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella et al., 2004; Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013; Terenzini, et al., 1996). All Promise participants fall into the low-income category and many students are facing these challenges daily in their pursuit to and through higher education.

When race/ethnicity and gender are brought into consideration, the students *most* likely to persist are Asian/Middle Eastern women and men; Hispanic/Latina women and men; and Black women; which is distinctly different than reported retention outcomes for similar populations in literature and in national statistics (Banks & Dohy, 2019; Duranczyk, et al., 2004; Keels, 2013).

Every other racial/ethnic and gender group was equally likely to persist and be retained in the program. This means, specifically for students of color, that they are persisting not only in the face of many of those low-income barriers, but also racial/ethnic and gender barriers that influence college persistence. Literature is clear that, historically, college and university retention models and initiatives exclude students of color (Tierney, 1992, 1999; Huffman, 2008) and establish a precedent to separate students from their origin community which is damaging for many if not all racial/ethnic groups (Deyhle, 1995; Guillory, 2009; Huffman, 2008; Tachine, 2017; Tierney, 1992, 1999). Students of color experience increased levels of discrimination in their journey in higher education (Hill & Tores, 2010; Jackson & Reyolds, 2013; Stevens, et al., 2018; Syet, et al., 2011); are likely to experience micro- and macro-aggressions from faculty, staff, and peers on campus (Bluem, et al., 2012; Harwood, et al., 2012; Nadal, et al., 2014); frequently feel isolated or unwelcome on campus (Brayboy, 2004; Fryberg & Stephens, 2010; Oxendine, 2015; Pieterse, et al., 2010; Strayhorn, 2012; Strayhorn, et al., 2016; Stevens, et al., 2018).

Promise has participants are persisting amongst high levels of gender-based violence we know occurs on campus, about 36 percent of college students reported at least one form of sexual victimization since entering college in Wiscombe's 2012 study which is consistent with other literature on the topic (Banyard, et. al, 2007; Shenoy, et al., 2010). Underserved and historically marginalized groups experience greater rates of sexual violence (Black et al., 2011) and have more barriers to report and resources to recovery (Fisher, et al., 2000; Grant, et al., 2011; Shenoy, et al., 2010). The prevalence of this violence has demonstrated to affect student retention and exit rates in literature (Doss, et al., 2017).

The “dropout” insinuation also neglects to acknowledge the context proximity has on low-income students’ ability to continually enroll in coursework. Students in cities were most likely to be retained. This aligns with all existing literature on the power proximity has on student access and retention and how affordable and reasonable physical access to places of employment, childcare, existing family structures, racial/ethnic communities, and higher education options privilege more metropolitan communities (Briscoe & De Oliver, 2006; Dillon & Smith, 2013; Roscigno, et al., 2006; Shaw et al., 2009; Tate, 2008).

Promise participants not only outperform their wealthier statewide peers, but they are doing so against increased odds. They are persisting despite financial disparities such as racism, bias and prejudice, violence and harassment, and an entire system built without them in mind. In whole, Promise is not a “dropout” narrative. That is not the story the data nor research is telling of these students. Instead, it is showing that low-income men and women of color are less or equally likely to exit than their White low-income peers in Promise and collectively Promise students are more likely to persist than their non-Promise peers.

The “So, why aren’t they graduating then?” Narrative

The next metric by which promise programs are frequently evaluated is graduation data. In Promise, this appears as bills and legislation and claw-back clauses requiring participants to return their “debt” to taxpayers and maintain “accountability” for not finishing their degree (Forman, 2021), but Promise participants do get degrees. In fact, about 41 percent of participants earned any degree within *five years* of starting college and 31 percent acquired a bachelor’s degree within the five-year span. This is about eleven percentage points behind the Oklahoma public institutions *six-year* bachelor’s degree graduation rates for first-time full-time freshmen from 2010 to 2019. It is unknown how Promise participants' degree outcomes would appear if

they were given an extra year to graduate in the program and these two metrics could be compared directly. Statewide percentages of students acquiring associate's degrees are not publicly reported.

Policy language that establishes the eligibility timeline (five years or a bachelor's degree, whichever comes first) prioritizes the baccalaureate degree over an associate's degree. This may be why Promise participants are less likely to acquire associate's degrees than bachelor's degrees in the program. Promise participants are more than half as likely to acquire an associate's degree than a bachelor's degree despite the fact that statewide over the past decade associate's degrees made up more than 65 percent of all non-professional degrees conferred. More than 23 percent of Promise participants earned an associate's degree while using their scholarship, eight percent of those participants went on to earn a bachelor's, and 15.2 percent earned an associate's degree as their final degree in the Promise scholarship.

Women Promise participants from almost all racial/ethnic backgrounds were significantly more likely to acquire an associate's degree, as were Tribal Sovereign Citizens, which may be an indicator that two-year programs may be an accessible if not preferred choice for these populations. Community colleges are incredibly accessible to historically underserved communities and affordable to low-income students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016; College Board, 2011) they may be the institution of choice for many Promise freshmen; however, current Promise participants in general are less likely to pursue these options. This could potentially be because the transfer process itself can delay a students' progress towards a degree with repeated coursework (Dougherty, 1992), confusing bureaucratic burdens on transfer students (Allen, et al., 2014), and alienation from the four-year institution community (Laanan, et al., 2010; Shaw, et al., 2019). Hispanic/Latina women were more likely

to earn an associate's, but not a bachelors; whereas, Asian/Middle Eastern men were likely to use a transfer pathway to go on and also earn a bachelor's degree. Black women and men, American Indian/Alaska Native men, and men from two or more races were all less likely to earn an associate's degree at all. It is unknown if they chose an associate's degree only or an associate's degree to bachelor's degree pathway. Undoubtedly, navigating the transfer process for students who hope to earn a bachelor's degree is more challenging logistically in the program. Currently, Promise students who choose a two-year institution first with the intentions of acquiring a bachelor's degree are facing these challenges with no direction from the program, but with a relatively small length of time and very little margin for error. If completion of a baccalaureate is the new required measure of worth, reconsidering the length of the eligibility window and/or providing more direct transfer support services and degree pathway preparation to participation is absolutely necessary. By nature, the policy and timeline privileges participants who go directly to a four-year institution and does not consider the benefits of two-year programs for low-income students of all kinds.

More than 31 percent of participants receive a bachelor's degree in the program. The findings of the bachelor's degree obtainment versus no degree obtainment model revealed that, despite participants of color being either significantly more likely to persist than their White men peers or equally as likely, they are significantly less likely to acquire a degree in the program. For instance, Black women and Hispanic men are more likely to persist, but less likely to acquire a bachelor's degree. Black/African American women and men, Hispanic/Latino men, American Indian/Alaska Native men, and men from two or more races were all significantly less likely to obtain a bachelor's degree than their White men peers. In general, men of color were less likely to earn bachelor's degrees. Convergently, these are the same populations that tend to be

underserved in participation in Promise overall. Degree achievement gaps amongst men and women of color are well documented in the literature (Banks & Dohy, 2018; Buchmann, 2009; Lott, et al., 2021). The documented barriers for men and women of color to graduation are very similar to the barriers to persistence. Hostile campus environments (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hill & Tores, 2010; Jackson & Reyolds, 2013; Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009; Stevens, et al., 2018; Syet, et al., 2011) are likely to experience micro- and macro-aggressions from faculty, staff, and peers on campus (Bluem, et al., 2012; Cuyjet, 2006; Gardenhire & Cerna, 2016; Harwood, et al., 2012; Nadal, et al., 2014). The diversity of participants' high schools were also predictors of graduation; the likelihood of bachelor's degree obtainment decreases as the percentage of PoC students from their high school increases. Additionally, the likelihood of bachelor's degree obtainment decreases as the percentage of FRL eligible students from their high school increases, showing an important overlap that class plays in degree obtainment. Race, gender, and class were predictors of gender obtainment for Promise participants. It cannot be determined exactly why any one of these groups of participants are more likely to persist, but less likely to obtain degrees. It does reveal that for Promise participants from less wealthy and more racially diverse communities, Black women, and men of color, with the exception of Asian men, the scholarship is not significantly reducing the barriers for graduation even if they are more likely to persist.

Asian/Middle Eastern men and women were the most likely of any group to earn a bachelor's degree. They were less likely to have an exit event than their White men peers, more likely to have an associate's and a bachelor's degree than all of their peers. More than 62 percent of Asian/Middle Eastern women and 58 percent of Asian/Middle Eastern men acquired some type of degree on the scholarship, more than any other racial/ethnic and gender category. Despite the success of Asian/Middle Eastern participants in Promise, the results should be read with

caution. Historically, interpreting the achieved success on outcomes such as these have led to the "model minority" narrative that displaces the Asian community out of policy that addresses marginalization or communities in need of support (Chao, et al., 2010) and neglects the experiences of the 30 or more ethnic groups within the category who have achievement disparities (Hu, 1989; Lee, 2001; Takaki, 1998). The success of this community does not correlate to less need to be considered in how Promise is or is not equitably serving this community. Further research on how it reaches and serves the many and various ethnic groups within the Asian/Middle Eastern population is needed.

If Promise is to be interpreted as a completion or graduation program, it is evident that it currently does not have the structure in place to facilitate that for all students. While the scholarship may assist participants in persisting in college, it is not reducing the barriers enough to significantly reduce the barriers for completion. To do that, the policy would have to, at minimum, consider: extending the eligibility window for students to pursue their degree for longer; provide academic supports for students navigating a transfer process; provide sufficient social and academic supports to mitigate hostile learning environments; and provide full funding towards a degree to allow the student to have a secure living environment, food stability, and the textbooks and laptops required to be a student.

Until or unless the policy changes are accounted for completion and graduation outcomes should stay out of the conversation for Promise. The fact that the students least likely to graduate were as likely, if not more likely, to be retained than the students who did demonstrates sometimes graduation timelines are out of students' hands. Something like a medical emergency or the loss of a family member causing a participant to withdraw for a semester could push participants outside of the eligibility window. Students lacking food and housing security may be

put in the position of deciding to enroll for a semester or sufficiently care for their human needs, but we see here that they are continuing to come back. That is powerful and meaningful and should not be reduced to a metric to explain how they are failing to be "accountable" or demonstrating the failure of an access program. Not only is the rhetoric demeaning and oppressive, it is ignorant of the students these programs serve. Once again by removing the context of class, race, and gender from the public policy conversation about Promise programs it shortfalls the impact it could make on the targeted community. The context of individual student experiences is lost to shallow statistics that do not clearly explain what the program is doing, who it is serving, how it is impacting them, and what still needs to be done. When these things are removed from policy context it only leaves racist, sexist, and classist archetypes for politicians to pontificate about in the name of ROI; ultimately, risking the benefit of students, low-income or otherwise, economies, workforces, and taxpayers all for fear that anyone *might* get more than White wealthy men like them. This again displays the challenge of connecting student performance outcomes to vague and one-dimensional policy to address student barriers. The path to degree completion is complicated and a tuition-only scholarship cannot alone sufficiently reduce the barriers enough to demand total completion of all participants.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This study illustrates opportunity for Promise programs to incorporate a few specific strategies for policy and practice to address inequitable gaps in service, and also addressing the narratives our programs and legislation shape about low-income students.

Explicitly Addressing Intersectional Identities in Policy Language

The first and most evident alignment of the findings in this study to policy practice is directly considering intersecting identities in policy language. Without specifically addressing

the overlap between low-income students and other underserved communities, programs like Promise have the potential to perpetuate systemic oppression instead of liberating students out of systems of poverty; or less altruistically, incorporating them into the gaps in educated workforce demands. The lack of direction and acknowledgement of these overlaps inherently privileges White student and middle-class low-income students over others. When inclusivity and equity are incentivized explicitly through policy functions, as was demonstrated by the hometown outcomes in this study, equity and inclusivity is addressed. Promise programs have outstanding potential to impact students' and their families' lives, institutions for higher education, democratic functions, and economies but for the programs to function to their full capability it requires policymakers to holistically address who low-income students are, what distinct barriers they face to accessing higher education, and aligning policy to researched best practices and real feedback and inclusion from the local communities the programs serve. This includes framing policy around those intended communities with consideration and respect of the additional barriers beyond financial need. Explicitly identifying equity across intersectional identities in the policy also allows for a more thorough assessment process to hold policymakers, promise practitioners, and institutions accountable against discrimination and invites the opportunity for the same entities to reconsider practices to directly elicit inclusion.

Aligning Policy Objectives to Program Practice and Assessment Reporting

Alongside policy language being explicit in areas of service, it is also fundamental that promise program practitioners remain aligned in language, practice, and assessment to the objectives of the policy. In the case of Oklahoma's Promise, legislators used retention and completion metrics to shift narratives away from meaningfully considering the program for its stated objectives and the communities it served. Centering all program and assessment language

specifically to *access* strategies and outcomes closes the door for policymakers to overextend arguments into areas beyond the objectives of the program. To that end, it also facilitates the conversation about the need for additional services and programs to support retention and completion efforts for low-income students when they are in college.

Collaborating Across Communities to Layer Targeted Programs of Service

Previous research indicates promise programs alone cannot solely service the multiple ways the systems work against them, nor the individual cultural needs of each specific community and identity (Boyd & Lubbers, 2017; Kanter & Venkatesan, 2020). In the specific case of Oklahoma's Promise, offering free tuition for five years to low-income students to any public college or university within the state can *significantly* help low-income students but alone may not be enough to comprehensively support financial access for low-income students, and certainly cannot address the non-financial institutional barriers that impact college retention and completion. It is reasonable to say the expectation for Promise to meet the intersectional needs of every low-income student in the state to address access is beyond the capabilities of the program alone, at least in its current iteration. However, working alongside local, cultural, governmental, and institutional community partners to overlap services and to meet the needs of the diverse community that makes up low-income students is possible and could meaningfully impact students in positive ways. For instance, almost twenty percent of Promise participants are Tribal Sovereign Citizens, many tribes offer specific outreach to their citizens enrolled in college; or the Oklahoma flagship institution offers their own localized promise program to waive fees to the institution for incoming Promise participants, etc. It may not be within the scope of promise programs to facilitate all low-income initiatives, but statewide programs could facilitate collaboration and bring local stakeholders to the table to ensure efforts are diverse and targeted.

Offering seats at the table to discuss the many ways low-income students and promise program students impact students would open the door to facilitating new local initiatives, identify gaps in service, and develop two-way communication to the program itself to identify areas for improvement and needs for further legislation. A community of access, retention, and completion initiatives facilitated but not supported by the state could collectively drive legislative agendas around student funding instead of reactively taking hits every legislative session.

Culturally Competent Practices and Procedures

While not all promise programs use the same methods for outreach to participants around the country, Promise relies heavily on the transfer of information to come from the local high school counselor which has been found to affect the democratic outcomes for participants (Bell & Smith, 2019; Bell, et al., 2021). In alignment with working with community partnerships and explicitly outlining who promise programs are intended to serve, using culturally competent means of reaching those students is essential. Providing documents and information in multiple languages; considering FAFSA as a barrier to promise program application completions (JBL Associates, 2010; Kane & Avery, 2004; Kantrowitz, 2009a, 2009b, 2011; King, 2004, 2006; Kofoed, 2012; Long, 2008; McClure, 2011; The Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2008a, 2008b; and Sallie Mae Fund, 2003); or considering ways to engage with parents and guardians across multiple cultures respectfully. Considering processes and procedures and how they impact the communities the program services is essential to developing equitable practices in promise program.

Recommendations for Future Research

A great deal more research needs to be done in the national conversation about promise programs to understand the discrete benefits they provide. Programs vary greatly, but research on their efficacy of supporting low-income students and with critical critique of their leverage on students' outcomes in regards to race, class, and gender is incredibly limited. There is little to no information on Tribal Sovereign Citizens and their unique positionality in terms of promise programs, access, retention, or completion outcomes.

Particularly in the findings presented in this study, further research needs to be done on the barriers to Hispanic/Latino men and women, and Black/African American men's limited participation in the program, and declining participation from American Indian/Alaska Native students. Further research is necessary to understand the distinct barriers for Black/African American women who were among the most likely to persist, but the only group of women less likely to obtain an associate's or a bachelor's degree. A more robust analysis on the Asian/Middle Eastern participants with disaggregated data on what Asian communities they come from to obtain a clearer picture on how they are being served by Promise. The limitations of this study prevented answering the question of whether Promise addresses access equitably.

Lastly, the confluence of reduced Native participation, increased two or more races/ethnicities participation, and the racial/ethnic diversity amongst tribal affiliated students requires more attention as to how individuals self-report ethnic information, particularly in a state like Oklahoma with a large tribal presence and a history of Native land ownership given the well-documented phenomenon of White individuals appropriating Native identities when convenient for them (Deloria, 1998; Green, 1988; Root, 1996; Springwood, 2004; Strong & van Winkle, 1996).

Conclusions

As promise programs continue to gain traction across the country, policymakers must consider the complex identity of the group they hope to serve is fundamental to the effectiveness of the Policy and the program itself. Laying out strategies to engage students and families across race, class, and gender lines not only creates an effective plan to serve the community, but also develops a method for evaluation of the program. Without discernible objectives and goals to move the lever on opportunity gaps, it by default privileges certain groups within the target population providing more services to some and far less to others. If promise programs are to be effective, to build economies and workforces, and to educate communities it is imperative to be inclusive in those efforts. If left to the systems to decide, prejudice will prevail by default because our systems and structures were built to oppress. Policy that is envisioned to work with those in the margin, need to work with, hear from, and better understand the people in the margin. It will be the only way to radically change opportunity for the marginalized students in higher education.

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Appendix A

Relevant Definitions

Access	Access is most simply defined for this study as a student's ability to access higher education, meaning it is an option they could plausibly consider and pursue.
Retention	Retention in its most simple definition is a metric that differentiates students who persist in school and those who withdraw, thus a retention rate is the number of students continuing on their path to a degree.
Completion	Completion is a metric to evaluate the number of students who finish and complete a degree, frequently this rate has a time limit, for instance the federal government requires data on six-year completion rates from institutions. This study is only considering completion within the five-year time line given by Promise policy.
Education Desert	Geographic areas where there is no institution of higher education within a feasible commuting distance from the students' home.

First-Generation College Students	**S**tudents whose parents did not attend a higher education institution.
Survival Time	The time elapsed between the start of an observation period and the occurrence of the terminating event (Wright, 2000).

Appendix B

Literature Review Charts, Tables, & Graphs

Figure 1 (Wilkerson & Shupert, 2019).

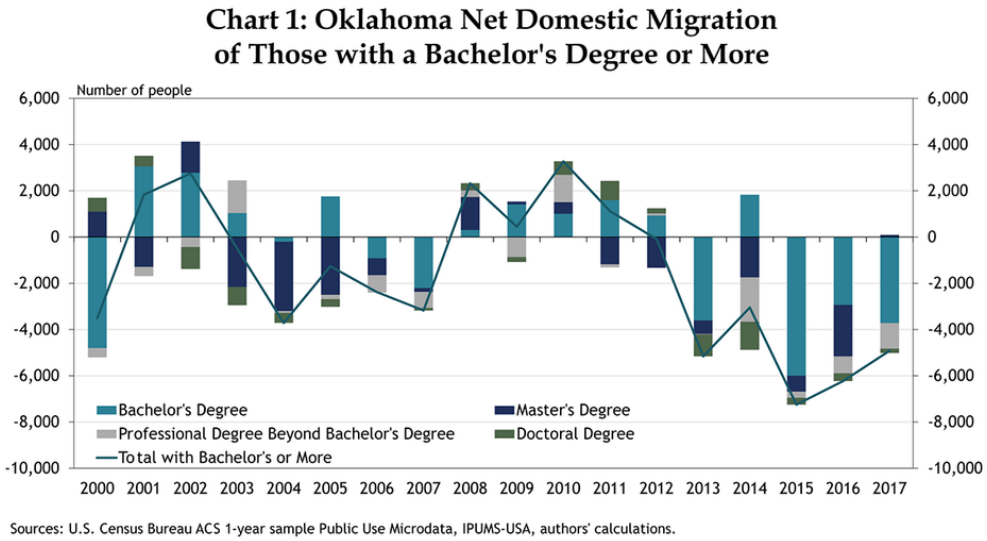


Figure 2 (Wilkerson & Shupert, 2019).

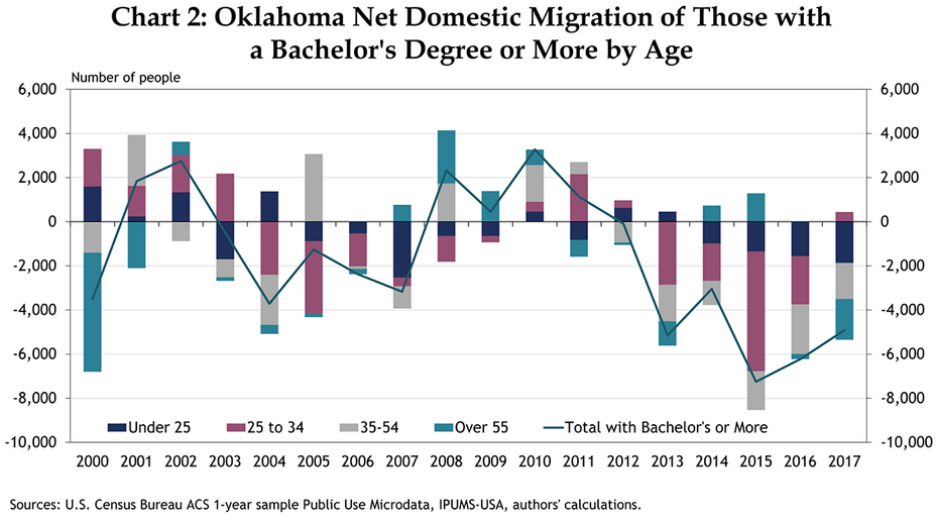


Figure 3 (The Oklahoma Historical Society)

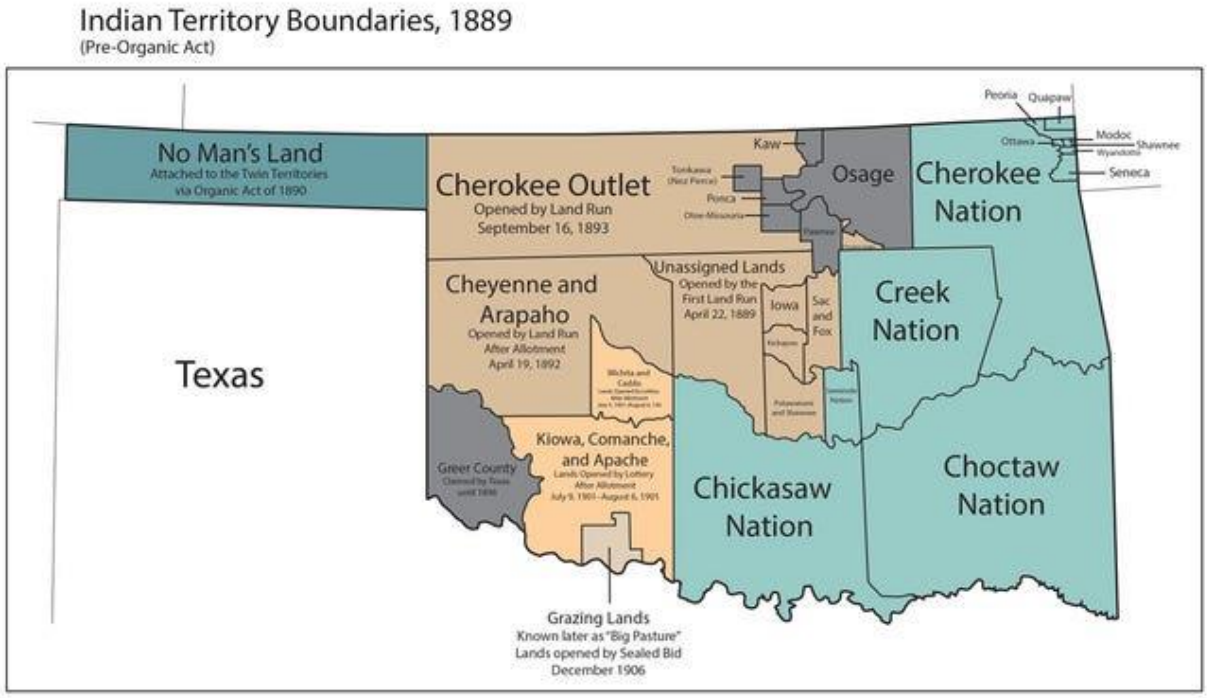


Figure 4 (Casteel, 2022)

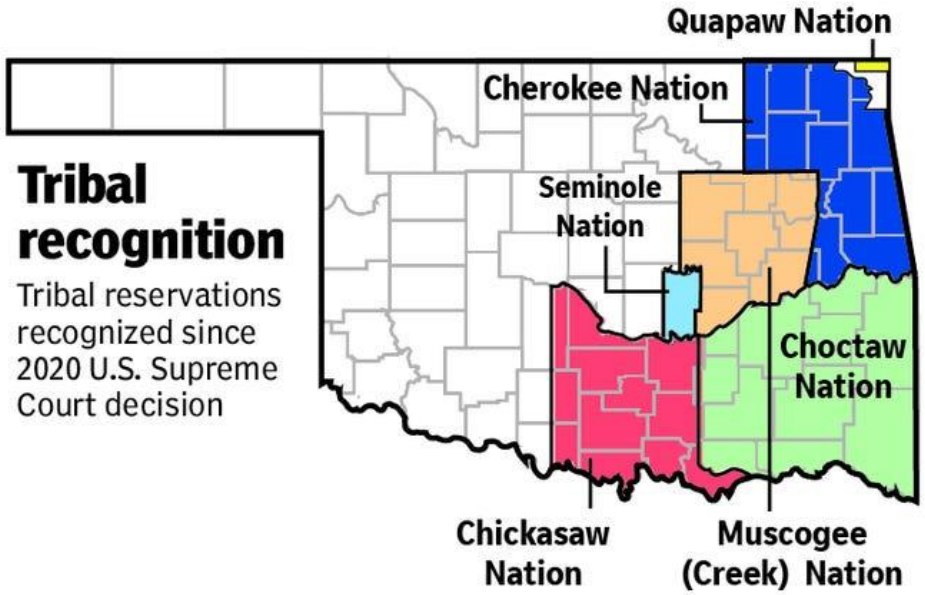


Figure 5 (Wilkerson & Shupert, 2019).

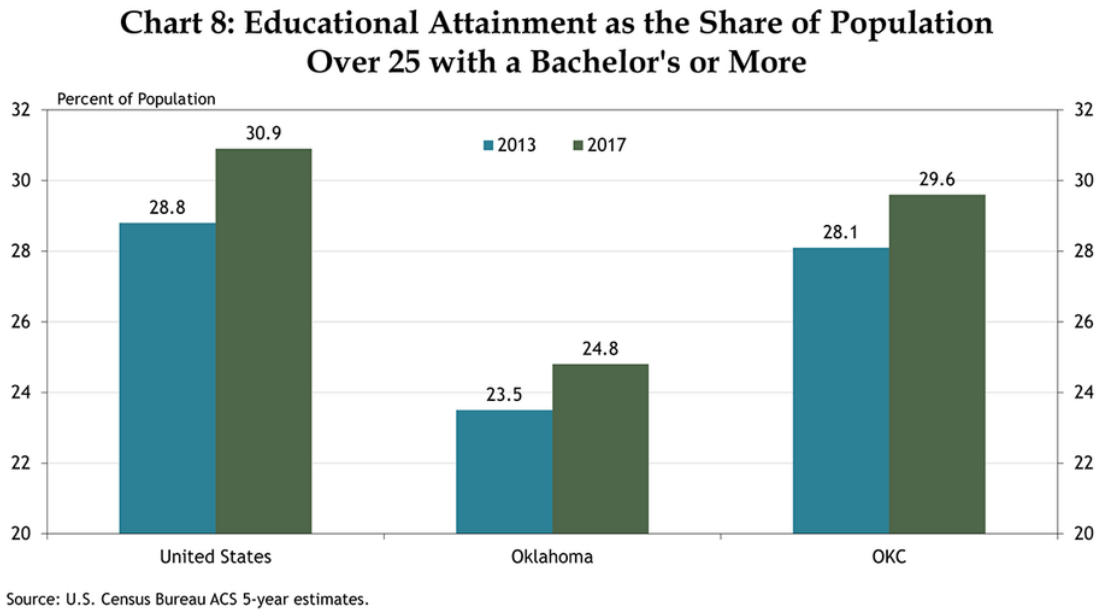


Figure 6 (Phillips, 2021).

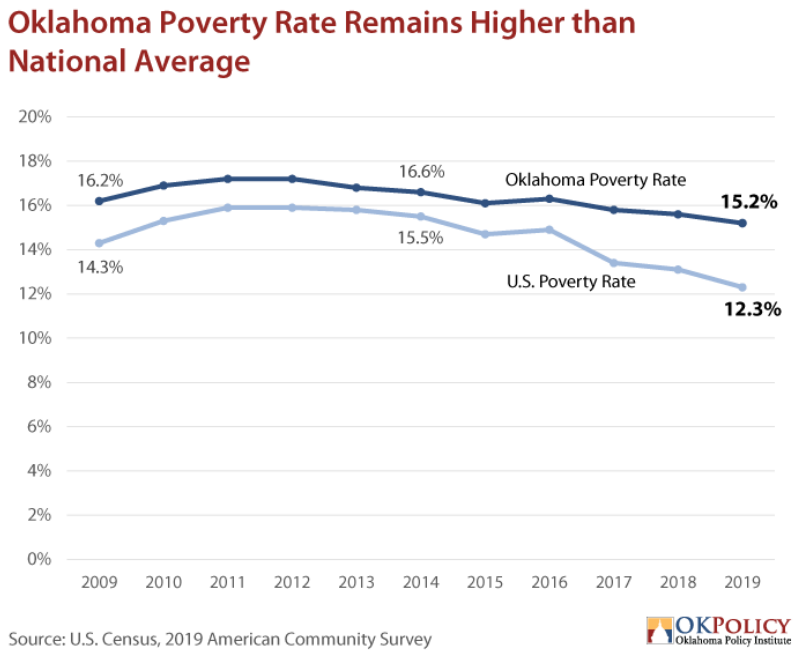


Figure 7 (National Kids Count Data, 2020)

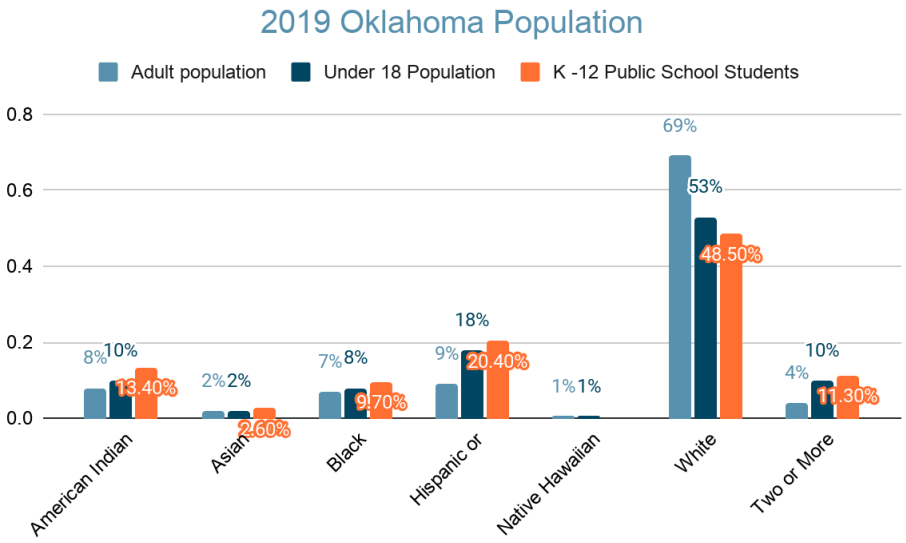
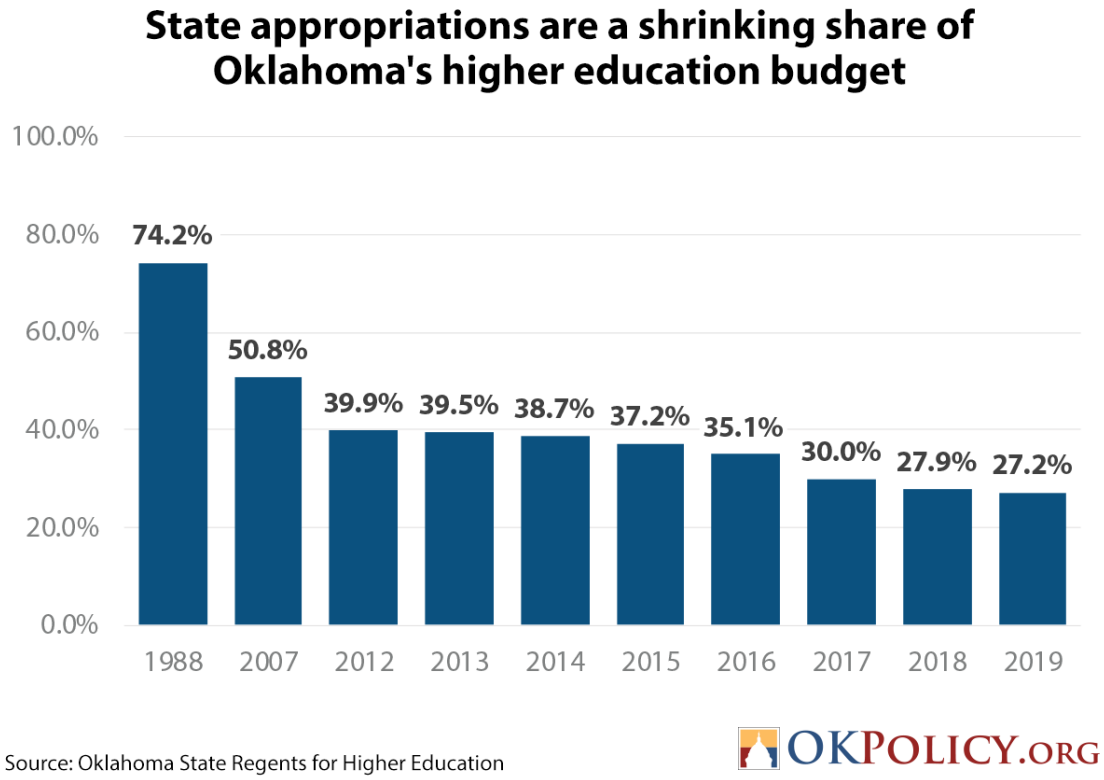


Figure 8 (Kids Count Data Center, 2020)

Race/Ethnicity - Under 18 Population by Year	Hispanic or Latino	American Indian or Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	White
2010	120,491	86,284	14,284	77,709	1,136	111,460	524,415
2011	126,680	84,885	14,544	77,950	1,379	117,627	522,146
2012	131,703	84,610	14,881	76,465	1,323	122,328	519,940
2013	136,762	85,519	15,173	75,707	1,526	124,664	519,310
2014	143,071	87,250	16,116	75,712	1,454	126,275	518,991
2015	148,747	87,558	16,538	74,701	1,522	127,867	518,744
2016	152,608	88,315	17,494	74,728	1,622	126,988	518,114
2017	157,181	88,196	17,742	75,175	1,833	128,056	516,396
2018	161,190	87,543	18,140	76,520	1,105	127,734	514,079
2019	166,444	88,059	18,709	76,057	1,548	129,549	511,833
2020	171,390	88,530	19,379	75,913	1,503	130,695	509,586
2021	176,255	88,933	19,958	75,948	1,485	131,513	507,339
2022	181,028	89,217	20,505	76,058	1,454	131,747	505,092
2023	185,259	89,100	20,999	76,201	1,417	132,528	502,845
2024	189,961	89,263	21,538	76,548	1,342	133,248	500,776
2025	194,913	89,445	22,063	76,659	1,361	134,256	498,537
2026	199,716	89,717	22,619	76,708	1,345	135,151	496,306
2027	204,472	89,962	23,175	76,770	1,347	135,976	494,090
2028	209,190	90,161	23,721	76,895	1,311	136,537	491,880
2029	213,821	90,282	24,259	77,107	1,279	137,310	489,682
2030	218,545	90,466	24,797	77,235	1,258	138,084	487,491
2031	223,276	90,647	25,337	77,372	1,240	138,887	485,283
2032	228,030	90,887	25,886	77,502	1,226	139,677	483,079
2033	232,774	91,082	26,433	77,624	1,208	140,456	480,875
15 Year Projected Percent Change (2018 to 2033)	**93.2%**	**5.6%**	**85.1%**	**-0.1%**	**6.3%**	**26.0%**	**-8.3%**
2010 Race/Ethnicity Composition	**12.9%**	**9.2%**	**1.5%**	**8.3%**	**0.1%**	**11.9%**	**56.0%**
2018 (Current)	**16.3%**	**8.9%**	**1.8%**	**7.8%**	**0.1%**	**13.0%**	**52.1%**
2035 (15 Year Projected Estimate)	**22.2%**	**8.7%**	**2.5%**	**7.4%**	**0.1%**	**13.4%**	**45.8%**

Figure 9 (Fine, 2019)



Appendix C

Figure 10

Promise Legislation

Highlighted cells indicate the outcome of legislation would potentially change scholarship, eligibility, or requirements and could negatively impact Promise participants if passed.

Year	Measure	Description as Introduced as it affects Promise	Passed Version as it affects Promise	Last Action
2022	HB3350	Requires repayment of received awards from Promise, unless the student completes an alternative payback program. Which includes 1 hour of community service per credit hour.	TBD	TBD
	HB3253	Allows students who do not take the high school preparatory pathway diploma to qualify for Promise to use it at a Career Technology Center.	TBD	TBD
	HB3759	Allows children of Oklahoma teachers qualify for Promise even if their income exceeds the current eligibility threshold.	TBD	TBD
	SB1274	Requires high school students who enroll in Promise, beginning in the 2022-2023 school year, obtain a composite score of 22 or higher on the ACT test. (Higher than the college admission standard for but 3 Oklahoma public	TBD	TBD

		colleges and universities).		
2021	SB639	Extends Promise to include more Career Technology programs		Approved By Gov
	SB663	Changes Promise to a forgivable loan, allows students attending private schools or those "educated by other means" to apply. Requires the student to graduate within 5 years and remain a resident of the state for 5 years after graduation for the loan to be forgiven.	Removed claw back provision in House Education Committee. Final version requires OSRHE to administer a survey to any participant who withdraws from any Oklahoma college.	Referred to Ed (S)
2020	HB2018	Allows children of Oklahoma teachers qualify for Promise even if their income exceedes the current eligibility threshold.		General Order (H)
	HB2227	Allows high school juniors and seniors to apply for the program.		Referred to Ed (S)
	HB2293	Allows for an adult with physical custody to enroll a child in Promise.		Referred to Rules (H)
	HB3189	Expands Promise to pay for fees but would require participants to use their scholarship for concurrent enrollment courses. Additionally, would restructure state funding model for		Referred to AP-EDU (H)

		Promise to make it less stable.		
	SB1092	Changes family's income threshold to a minimum of $75k annually.		Ref to Appropriations (S)
	SB80	Allow homeschool students to be eligible.		General Order (S)
2019	HB2018	Allows children of Oklahoma teachers qualify for Promise even if their income exceeds the current eligibility threshold.		General Order (H)
	HB2293	Allows for an adult with physical custody to enroll a child in Promise.		Referred to Rules (H)
	SB80	Allow homeschool students to be eligible.		General Order (S)
2018	HB3591	Requires that award only be granted after all other grants and scholarships received by an eligible applicant are exhausted		General Order (H)
	HB3592	If a student withdraws from a class in which they've received Promise funding, the funds will remain available for the student up to five years and if it goes unused the funds will be available for other Promise students	If a student withdraws from a class in which they've received Promise funding, funds will be returned to the Promise program and this will only apply if the withdraw is prior to the add/drop period	Approved By Gov

	SB1036	Sets a cap on the amount of the award to $4,300 per person per academic year for two years.		Ref to Ap-edu (S)
	SB1201	Changes Promise to a forgivable loan which includes payment of an amount equivalent to resident tuition for the first semester of enrollment		Ref to Ap-edu (S)
	SB877	Directs the State Board of Equalization to make determination on how much funding Promise should get annually but the number cannot exceed $75 million		Ref to Ap-edu (S)
2017	SB391	Allows participants to be funded to the statewide average tuition rate.		Ref to Ed (S)
	SB516	New law requiring the State Auditor and Inspector to perform performance audits every five years		General Order (S)
	SB529	Extends options to use Promise at career technology centers, requires OSRHE to establish a maximum limit on the number of courses Promise will apply, sets household income limit to no more than $65,000 per year, establishes that Promise students' parents' income cannot exceed $100k per year at any time during college/career tech enrollment	Extends options to use Promise at career technology centers; removes the college GPA eligibility requirement to admissions requirements for the higher education institution; removes payment for any remedial coursework; sets income requirement to no more than $55k per year starting in 2017-18, $69k per year	Approved by Gov

			starting in 2021-22; establishes that Promise students' parents' income cannot exceed $100k per year at any time during college/career tech enrollment	
	HB2180	Requires participants to enroll in a minimum of 30 credit hours per academic year; extends application eligibility to eleventh grade		Died in Conference
	HB2330	Changes the award amount to equivalent to the average resident tuition of all regional institutions based on the last two years		Ref to Ap-edu (S)
	HB2493	Changes award to the first and second years of enrollment after the first semester of postsecondary enrollment at the amount equivalent to the average resident tuition of all community colleges in the Oklahoma state system based on the last two years plus $200; subject on the availability of funds, the award for the 3-5 years of enrollment at		Ref to Ap-edu (H)

		the average resident tuition of all comprehensive institutions in the Oklahoma state system based on the last two years plus $200.		
	SB1046	Requires participants to use an award at a two-year public institution, private institution, or career technology center unless they scored a 24 or higher on the ACT in which case they can choose any institution in the state; establishes the maximum household income at $75k per year		Ref to Ed (S)
	SB1266	Requires participants to use award at a two-year institution		Ref to Ed (S)
	SB872	Revokes scholarship upon conviction or entry of plea of guilty of a misdemeanor offense involving alcohol, drugs, sexual assault, or domestic violence; guilty of any felony		Ref to Ed (S)

2015	HB2180	Requires participants to enroll in a minimum of 30 credit hours per academic year; extends application eligibility to eleventh grade		Ret to Cal/Sa's (H)
	SB137	Removes disability compensation from consideration of financial need	Removes disability compensation from consideration of financial need	Approved By Gov
2014	HB1281	Repealing OHLAP		Ref to approp (H)
	HB2778	Requires student to repay cost of course if a student withdraws after add/drop deadline		Ref to Ed (S)
	HB3211	Requires students to enroll in a minimum of 15 credit hours per semester		Died in Conference
2013	HB1281	Repealing OHLAP		Ref to approp (H)

Appendix D

Descriptions of Model Variables

Gender

In the data gender is separated into two categories: male or female. Students self-select their gender when applying for Promise, enrolling in college, and filling out the FAFSA. Unfortunately, the state-level data acquired is not inclusive of genders beyond the binary and is limited to only two categories.

Race/Ethnicity

In the data race/ethnicity is separated the five federally defined racial/ethnic categories: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Middle Eastern, Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, White, or two or more races. Race/ethnicity data can be complicated in a variety of ways, but specifically for those from Hispanic origin or from any member of an Indigenous tribe. Because the concept of race is separate from the concept of Hispanic origin, individuals who are Hispanic and any other race/ethnicity only get counted as Hispanic. Similarly, those from a federally recognized Indigenous Tribe are technically part of a sovereign nation, and citizenship of that tribe is connected to bloodlines does not mean that individuals within that tribe do not consider themselves primarily apart of another racial category. For the purpose of this study, we are using the established federal definitions of race/ethnicity in recognition that there is limitation to the complex understanding to all of the participants' individual racial and ethnic identity.

Tribal Affiliation

Tribal affiliation represents the participants' affiliation with one of the US' 574 federally recognized tribes.

High School County

The geographic county in which the participants' high school is located.

High School Type

(NCES, 2022)

School Type	Definition
Regular schools	A public secondary school that does not focus primarily on vocational, special, or alternative education.
Special education schools	Public secondary school that focuses primarily on the following: hard of hearing, deaf, speech-impaired, health-impaired, orthopedically impaired, mentally retarded, seriously emotionally disturbed, multi-handicapped, visually handicapped, deaf and blind, and adapts curriculum, materials or instruction for students served.
Vocational/technical schools	Public secondary school that focuses primarily on vocational education, provides education in one or more semi-skilled technical operations.
Alternative School	A secondary school that addresses the needs of students which typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, and falls outside of the categories of regular, special education, vocational education.
Private: Secular School	A private K-12 school without a religious affiliation.
Private: Christian School	A private K-12 school with a Christian affiliation.
Private: Islamic School	A private K-12 school with an Islamic affiliation.
Home School Programs	Programs and compacts built for families who choose to home school.

High School Charter Status

Denotes if a high school is considered a charter, magnet, or enterprise high school. To qualify as a charter, magnet, or enterprise high school the school must be public, and have the autonomy to have flexibility in management, curriculum, and funding models within the school. These schools typically afford parents *options* in their public school and typically have an admissions policy for individuals to qualify as students.

High School Urbanicity

(NCES, 2022)

Locale Type	Definition
City: Large & Small	Large City: Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population of ≥250,000. Small City: Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population of ≤100,000. Examples Large: Tulsa Union High School, Tulsa Small: Eisenhower Senior High School, Lawton
Suburb: Large & Mid-Size	Large Suburb: Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population of ≥250,000. Mid-Size Suburb: Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population <250,000 and ≥100,000. Examples Large: Broken Arrow High School, Broken Arrow Mid-Sized: Norman High School, Norman
Fringe: Town & Rural	Town Fringe: Territory inside an urban cluster that is ≤10 miles from an urbanized area. Rural Fringe: Census-defined rural territory that is ≤5 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is ≤2.5 miles from an urban cluster. Examples Fringe Town: Claremore High School, Claremore Rural Fringe: Tahlequah High School, Tahlequah
Town: Distant & Remote	Distant Town: Territory inside an urban cluster that is <10-35 miles away from an urbanized area. Distant Remote: Territory inside an urban cluster that is <35 miles away from an urbanized area. Examples: Distant Town: Bartlesville High School, Bartlesville

	Remote Town: Enid High School, Enid
Rural: Distant & Remote	Rural Distant: Census-defined rural territory that is >2.5 miles from urban cluster, >5 miles from an urbanized area. Rural Remote: Census-defined rural territory that is >10 miles from urban cluster, >25 miles from an urbanized area. Examples: Rural Distant: Elgin High School, Elgin Rural Remote: Antlers High School, Antlers

High School Title I Status

Denotes if the public school qualifies for Title I funding. Schools or entire districts can become eligible for Title I funds if though targeted assistance or parent applications. Title I funds are offered at different qualifying levels, but to receive the basic grant which is what is evaluated for this study, a school must have at least 10 children in poverty and the number of children in poverty must exceed two percent of the school's population. Poverty is assessed by targeted assistance programs or parent applications, specifically eligibility for the free or reduced lunch program.

High School Latitude and Longitude

High school's geographic latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates.

Percentage of High School Students Eligible for Free & Reduced Lunch Program

The qualification for National School Lunch Program (NSLP) known in this study as the Free and Reduced Children in households with incomes below 130 percent of the poverty level or those receiving SNAP or TANF qualify for free meals. Those with family incomes between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty line qualify for reduced-price meals. The family income rates are adjusted annually, but in 2021 the family income chart for eligibility ranges from $23,606

annually for a family of one to $81,622 for a family of eight. Chart provided below (Perkins-Tryon Public Schools, 2021).

FEDERAL ELIGIBILITY INCOME CHART for School Year: *2021*					
Household Size	Yearly	Monthly	Twice Per Month	Every Two Weeks	Weekly
1	23,606	1,968	984	908	454
2	31,894	2,658	1,329	1,227	614
3	40,182	3,349	1,675	1,546	773
4	48,470	4,040	2,020	1,865	933
5	56,758	4,730	2,365	2,183	1,092
6	65,046	5,421	2,711	2,502	1,251
7	73,334	6,112	3,056	2,821	1,411
8	81,622	6,802	3,401	3,140	1,570
Each additional person:	8,288	691	346	319	160

I used NCES high school population data to arrive at the percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch. Those percentages were separated into categories: 0-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, and 76-100%. A school that fell into the 0-25% category would mean that the total number of students eligible for program Free and Reduced Lunch was ≤25% of the entire student population.

Percentage of High School Students Representing Persons of Color

I used NCES high school population data to arrive at the percentage of students of Color. Those percentages were separated into categories: 0-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, and 76-100%. A school that fell into the 0-25% category would mean that the combined percentage of students from the American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian/Middle East, Hispanic/Latino, Black/African American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or Multiple Races/Ethnicities ≤25% of the entire student population.

Associate's Degree

For the purpose of this study an Associate's Degrees is limited to a participant who earned an Associate-creditable toward a Bachelor's Degree, such as an Associate in Arts or an

Associate in Science program, or an Associate-not wholly creditable toward a Bachelor of Science, such as an Associate of Applied Science program, within the eligibility window for Promise.

Bachelor's Degree

For the purpose of this study a Bachelor's Degree is an undergraduate baccalaureate degree earned within the eligibility window for Promise.

Exit Event

An exit event indicates if a student is no longer present in the data for one or more semesters after enrollment in an Oklahoma college or university. Thus, presumably has exited use of the scholarship for that period of time. A student may exit the scholarship because they withdrew from degree progress permanently, temporarily stopped out, or they attended an institution out of state. Exit events are only measured within the Promise eligibility window.

Semester

For the purpose of this study, semesters are limited to Fall and Spring. Summer semesters were reduced from the parameters of the data to avoid mislabeling students as exited if they took a Summer vacation. Participants' enrollment in Summer semesters therefore do not affect the outcome of any retention analyses.

Exit Semester

The exit semester represents the numerical and sequential semester in which a student's exit event occurs. The sequence is measured from the first semester a student is enrolled until the first semester the participant exits from the data.

Return Event

A return event indicates if a participant reappears in the enrollment data following an exit event within the Promise eligibility window.

Semesters Exited

Semesters exited represents the number of sequential semesters a participant is not present in the data between an exit event and a return event.

Appendix E

Research Question I: Charts, Tables, & Graphs

Figure 11

Sample Population Frequencies by Variable

		N	Percent	Valid Percent
Race/Ethnicity & Gender				
	American Indian/Alaskan Native-Woman	3505	0.3%	7.8%
	Asian/Middle Eastern-Women	923	0.1%	2.1%
	Black/African American-Women	2785	0.3%	6.2%
	Hispanic/Latino-Women	3457	0.3%	7.7%
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander-Women	29	0.0%	0.1%
	Two or More Races/Ethnicities-Women	2566	0.2%	5.7%
	White-Women	14063	1.3%	31.5%
	American Indian/Alaskan Native-Men	2166	0.2%	4.8%
	Asian/Middle Eastern-Men	763	0.1%	1.7%
	Black/African American-Men	1475	0.1%	3.3%
	Hispanic/Latino-Men	2102	0.2%	4.7%
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander-Men	26	0.0%	0.1%
	Two or More Races/Ethnicities-Men	1628	0.2%	3.6%
	White-Men	9186	0.9%	20.6%
	Unknown/Missing	4901	0.5%	
	Total Observations	44674		
Tribal Affiliation				
	Tribally Affiliated	8950	0.9%	18.7%
	Not Tribally Affiliated	38890	3.7%	81.3%
	Unknown/Missing	1735	0.2%	
	Total Observations	47840		
Urbanicity				
	City	9737	0.9%	20.7%
	Suburb	8856	0.8%	18.9%
	Fringe	5539	0.5%	11.8%
	Town	9784	0.9%	20.8%
	Rural	13025	1.2%	27.7%
	Unknown/Missing	2634	0.3%	
	Total Observations	46941		
HS Type				
	Tech Center	7	0.0%	0.0%
	Alternative/Other School	14	0.0%	0.0%
	Private: Secular	35	0.0%	0.1%
	Private: Christian	750	0.1%	1.6%
	Private: Islamic	46	0.0%	0.1%
	Home School Programs	2	0.0%	0.0%
	Regular Public School	46087	4.4%	98.2%
	Unknown/Missing	2634	0.3%	
	Total Observations	46941		
HS Charter Status				
	Charter/Magnet School	1764	0.2%	3.8%
	Not Charter/Magnet School	44324	4.2%	96.2%

Unknown/Missing	3487	0.3%	
Total Observations	46088		
HS Title I Eligibility			
Title I Eligible	18557	1.8%	40.3%
Not Title I Eligible	27462	2.6%	59.7%
HS Not Applicable	3475	0.3%	
Unknown/Missing	80	0.0%	
Total Observations	49494		
HS % Population FRL Eligible			
HS FRL = ≤25%	2082	0.2%	4.5%
HS FRL=26-50%	17609	1.7%	38.2%
HS FRL=51-75%	18933	1.8%	41.1%
HS FRL=≥76%	7433	0.7%	16.1%
Unknown/Missing	3518	0.3%	
Total Observations	46057		
HS % of Population PoC			
HS PoC = ≤25%	2630	0.3%	5.6%
HS PoC=26-50%	21447	2.0%	46.1%
HS PoC=51-75%	17141	1.6%	36.8%
HS PoC=≥76%	5341	0.5%	11.5%
Unknown/Missing	3023	0.3%	
Total Observations	46552		

Sample Total: 49, 575

Figure 12

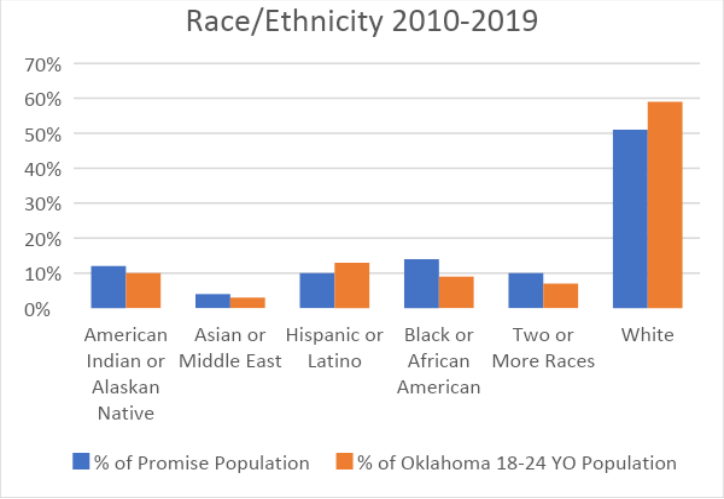


Figure 13

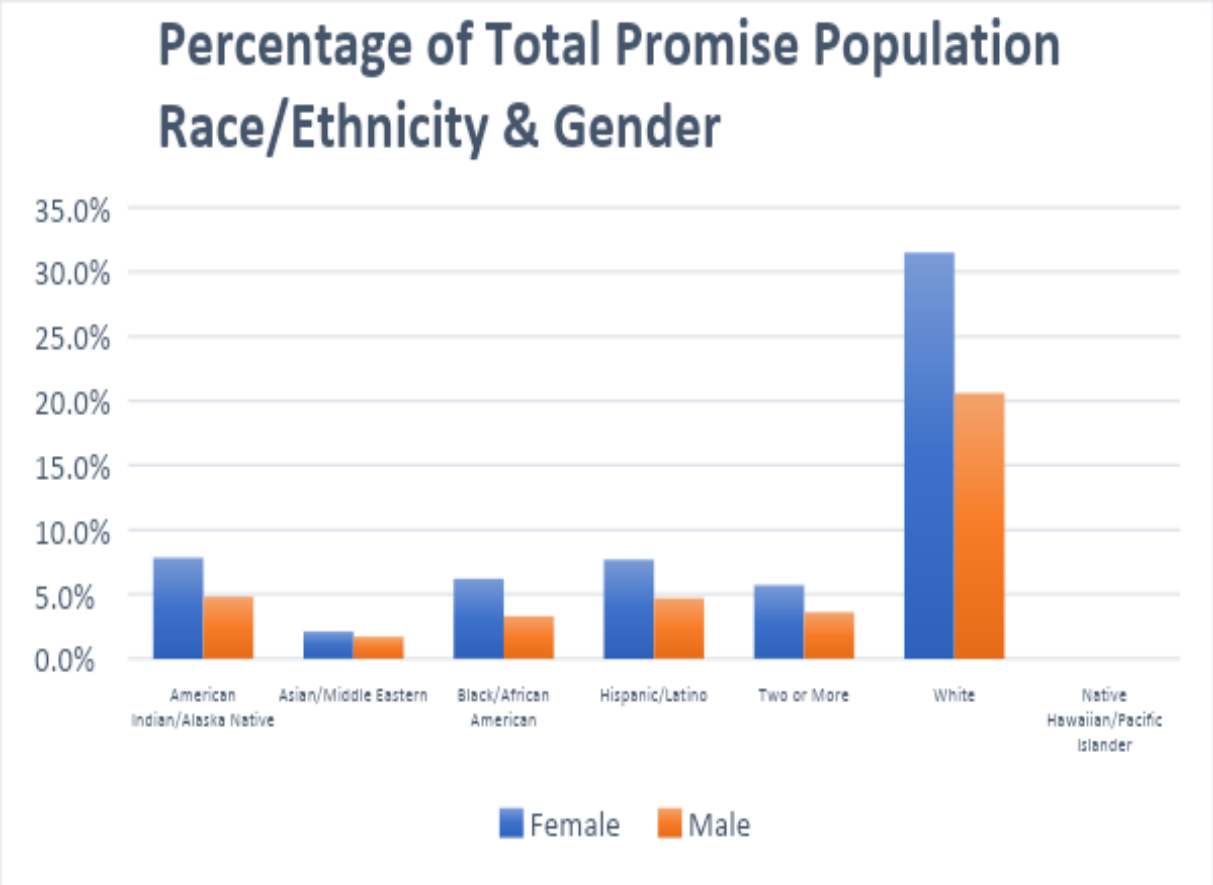

Percentage of Total Promise Population
Race/Ethnicity & Gender
35.0%
30.0%
25.0%
20.0%
15.0%
10.0%
5.0%
0.0%
American Indian/Alaska Native
Asian/Middle Eastern
Black/African American
Hispanic/Latino
Two or More
White
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
Female
Male

Figure 14

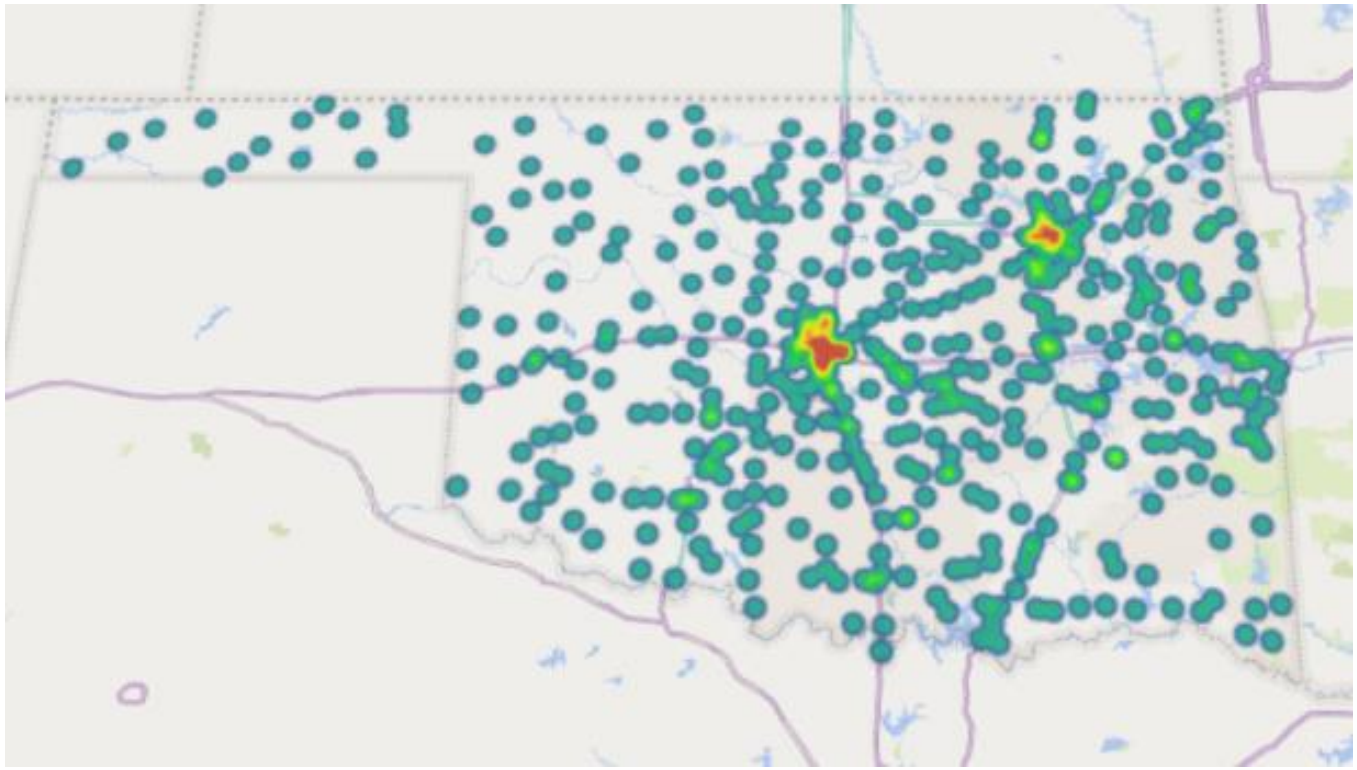


Figure 15

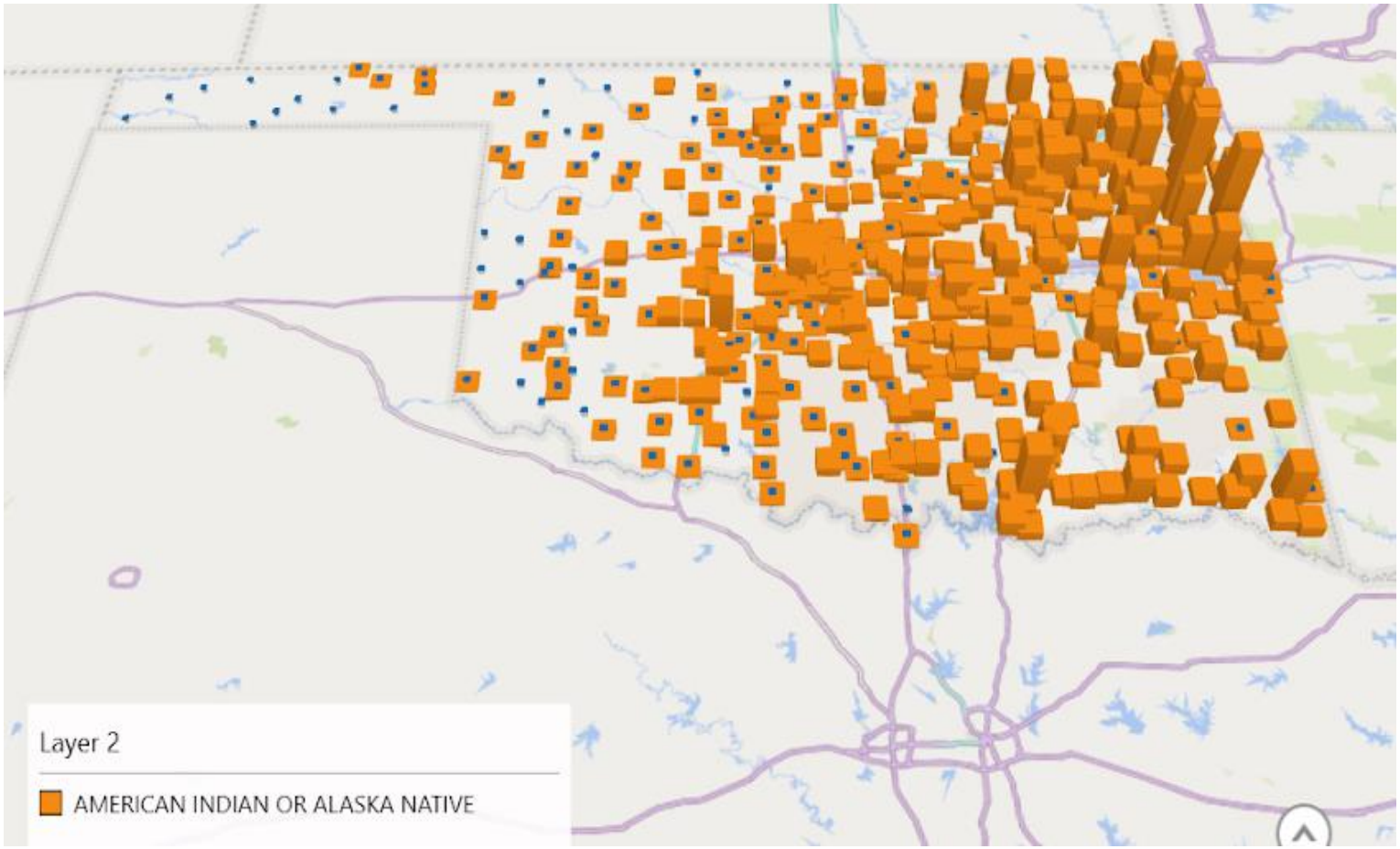


Figure 16

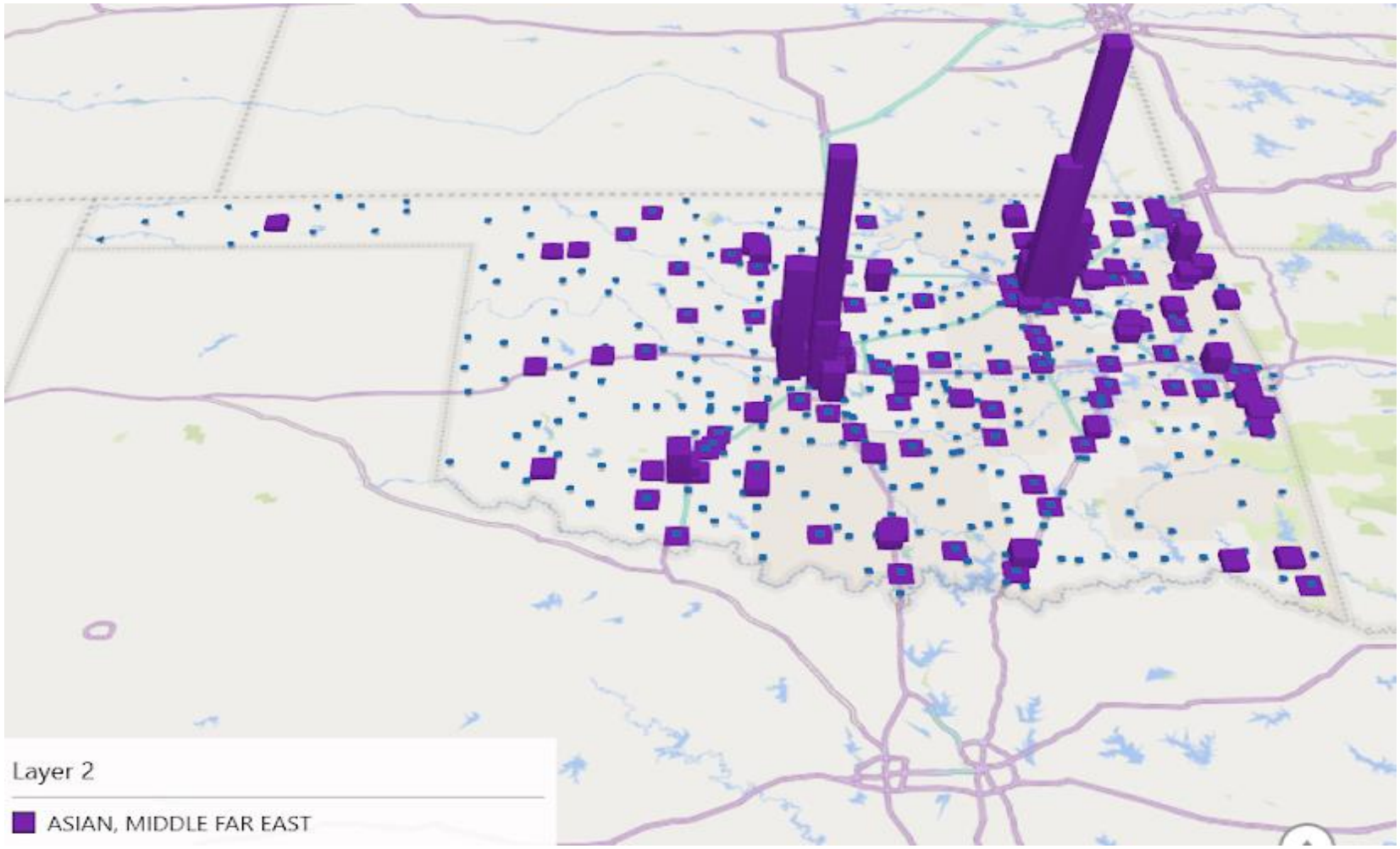


Figure 17

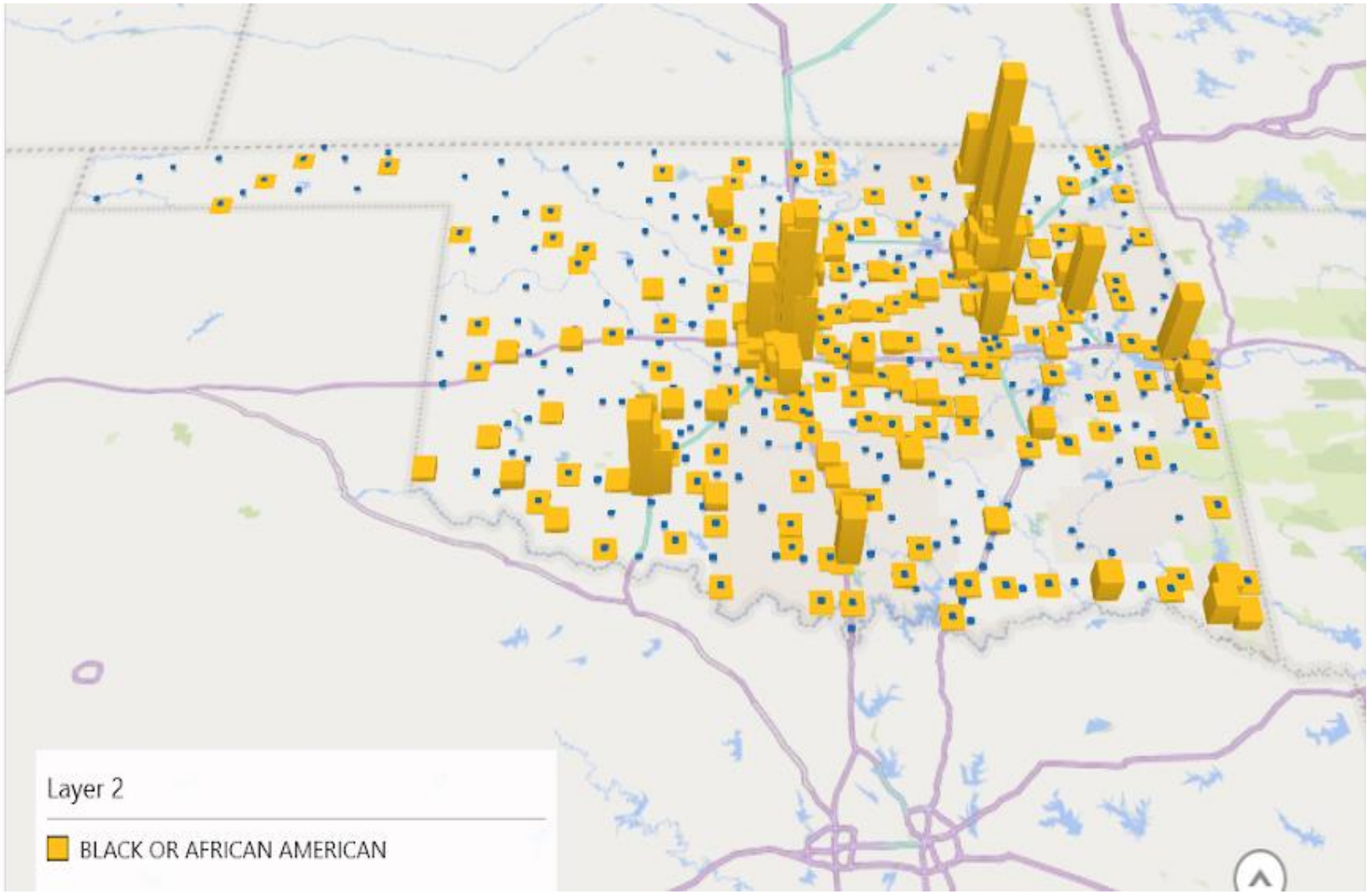


Figure 18

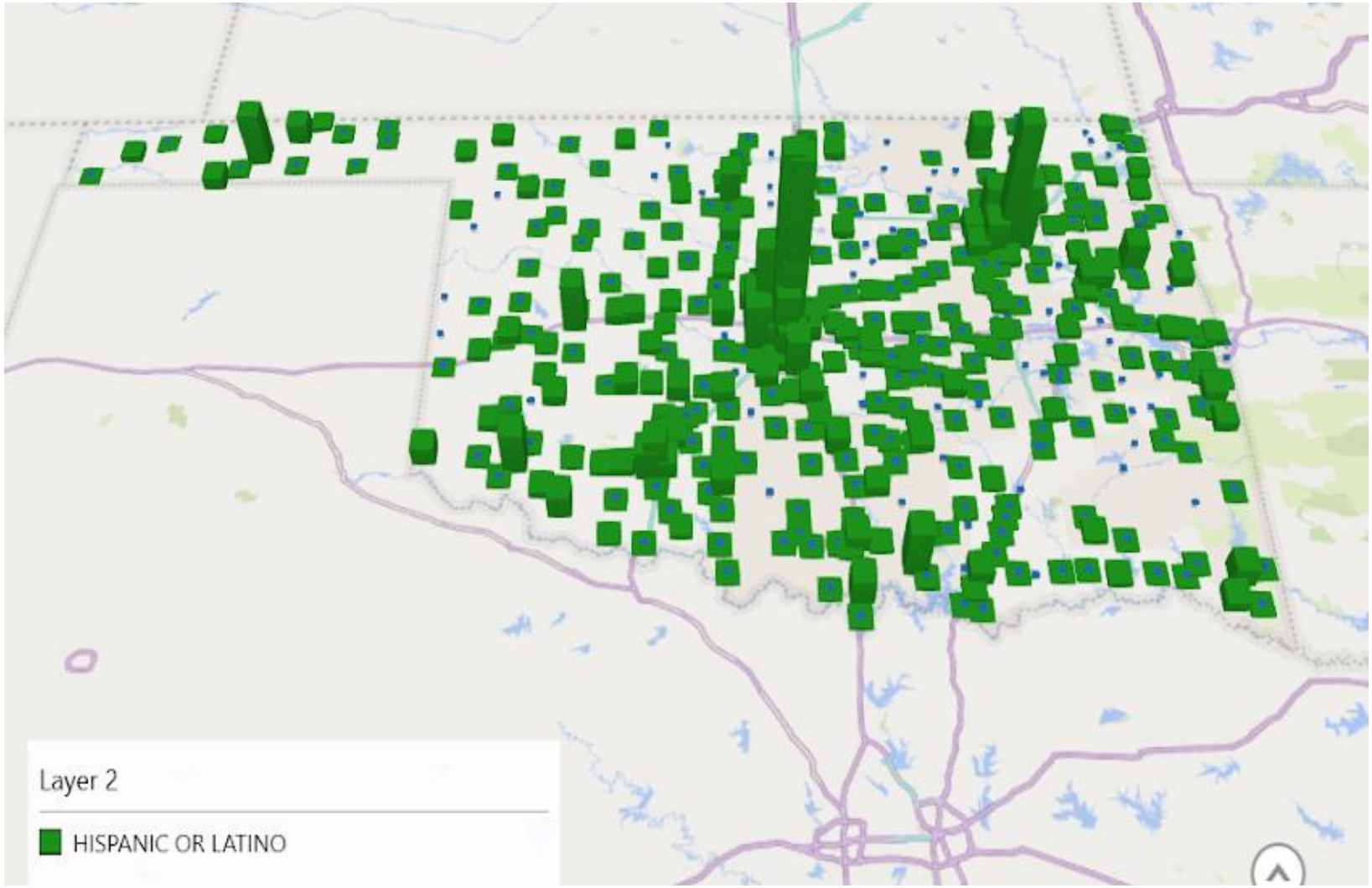


Figure 19

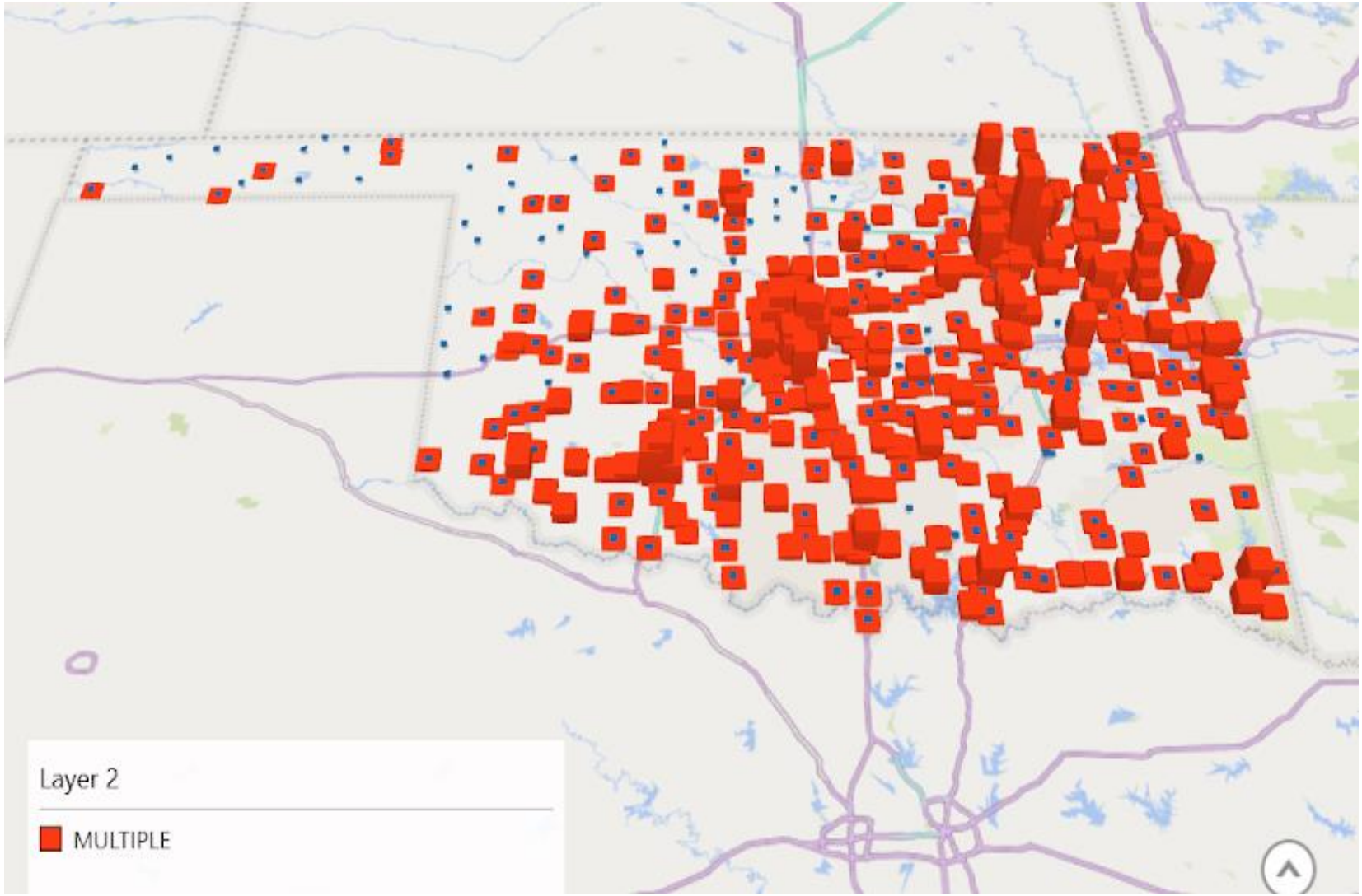


Figure 20

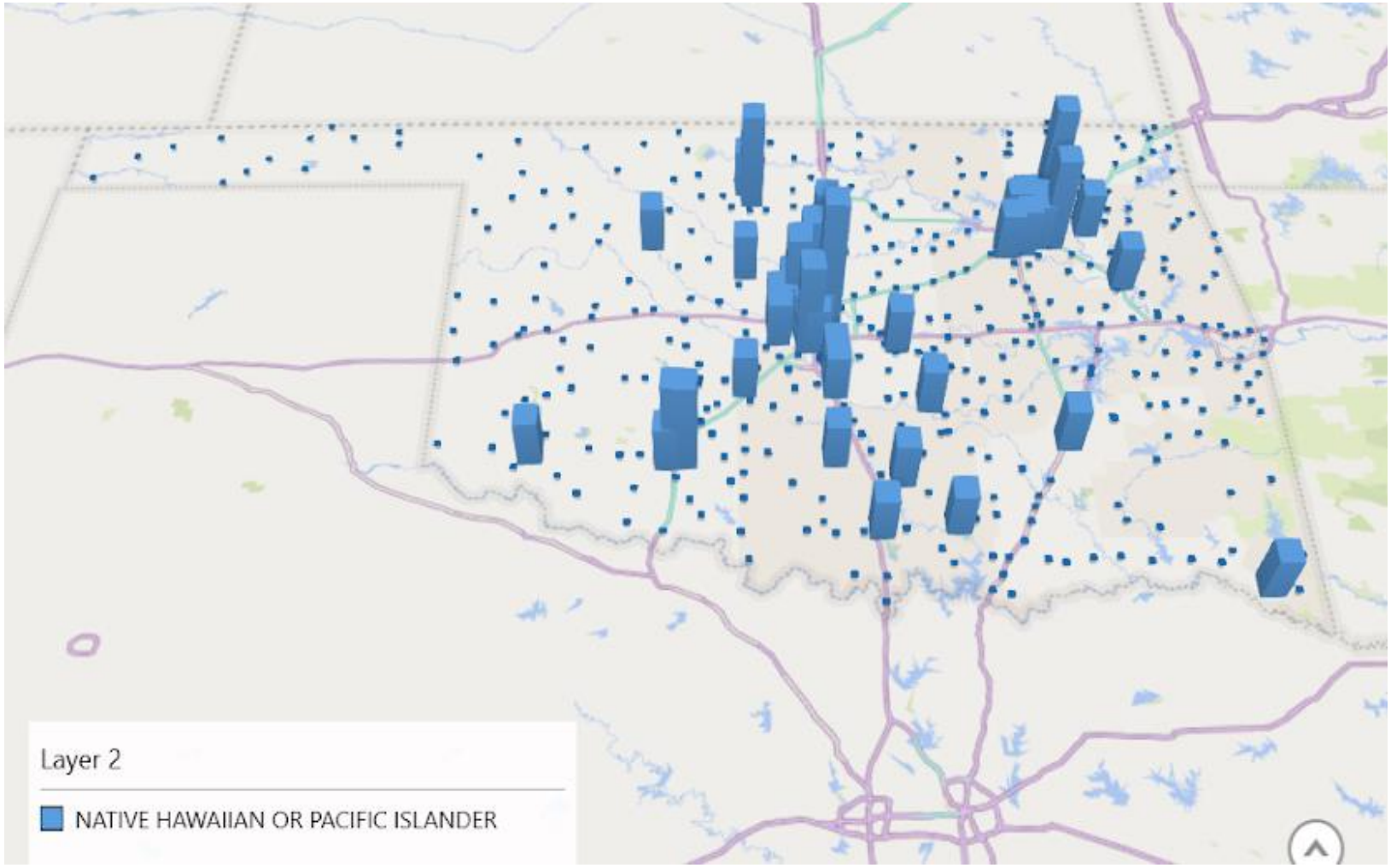
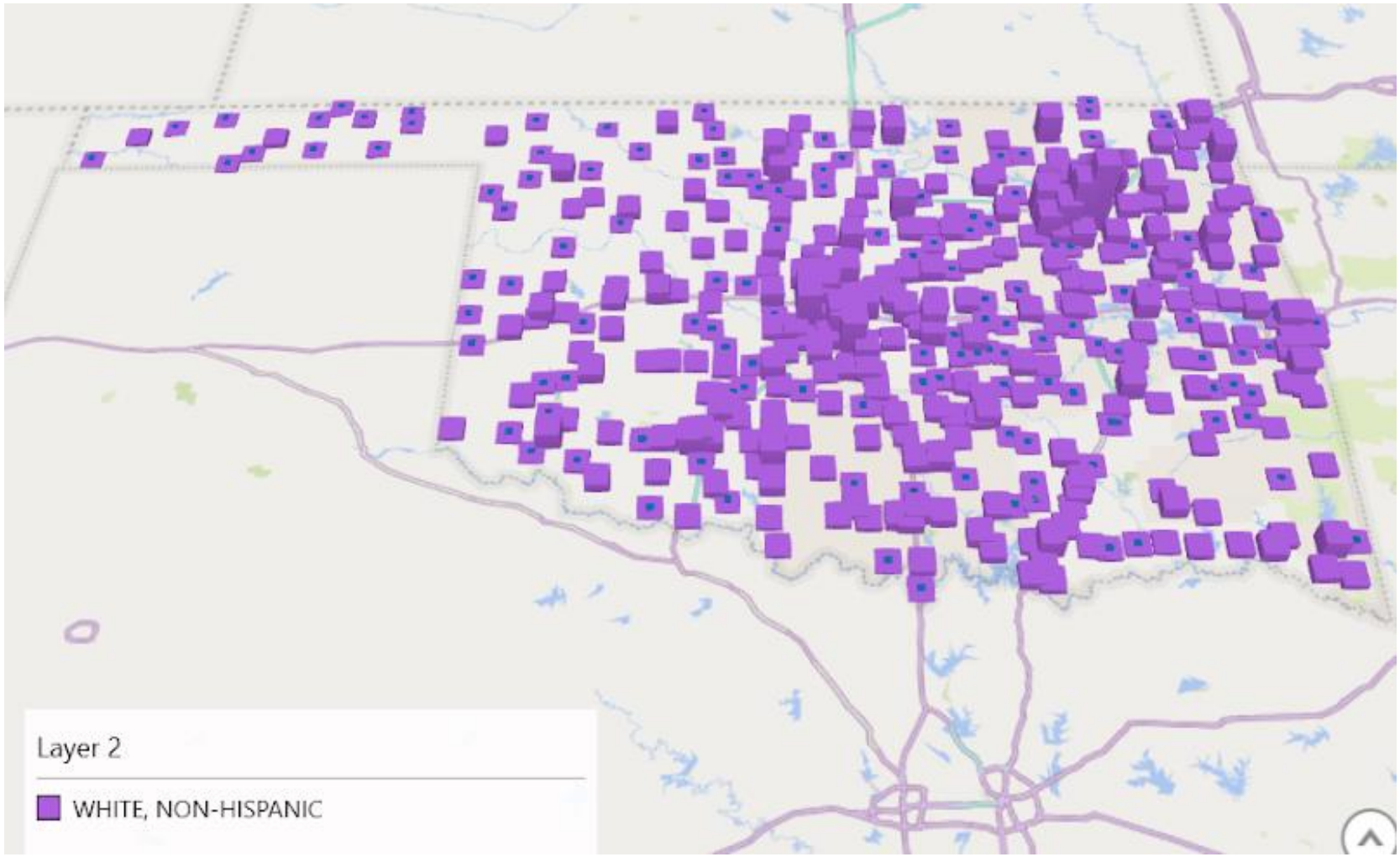

Layer 2
NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER

Figure 21



Appendix F

Research Question II: Charts, Tables, & Graphs

Figure 22

Exit Events by Semester

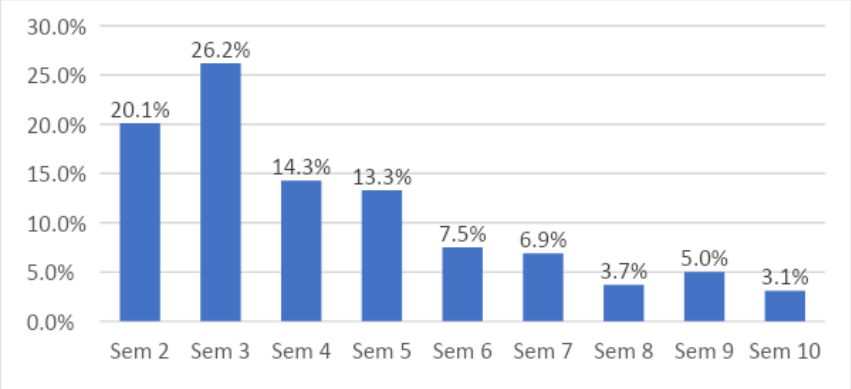


Figure 23

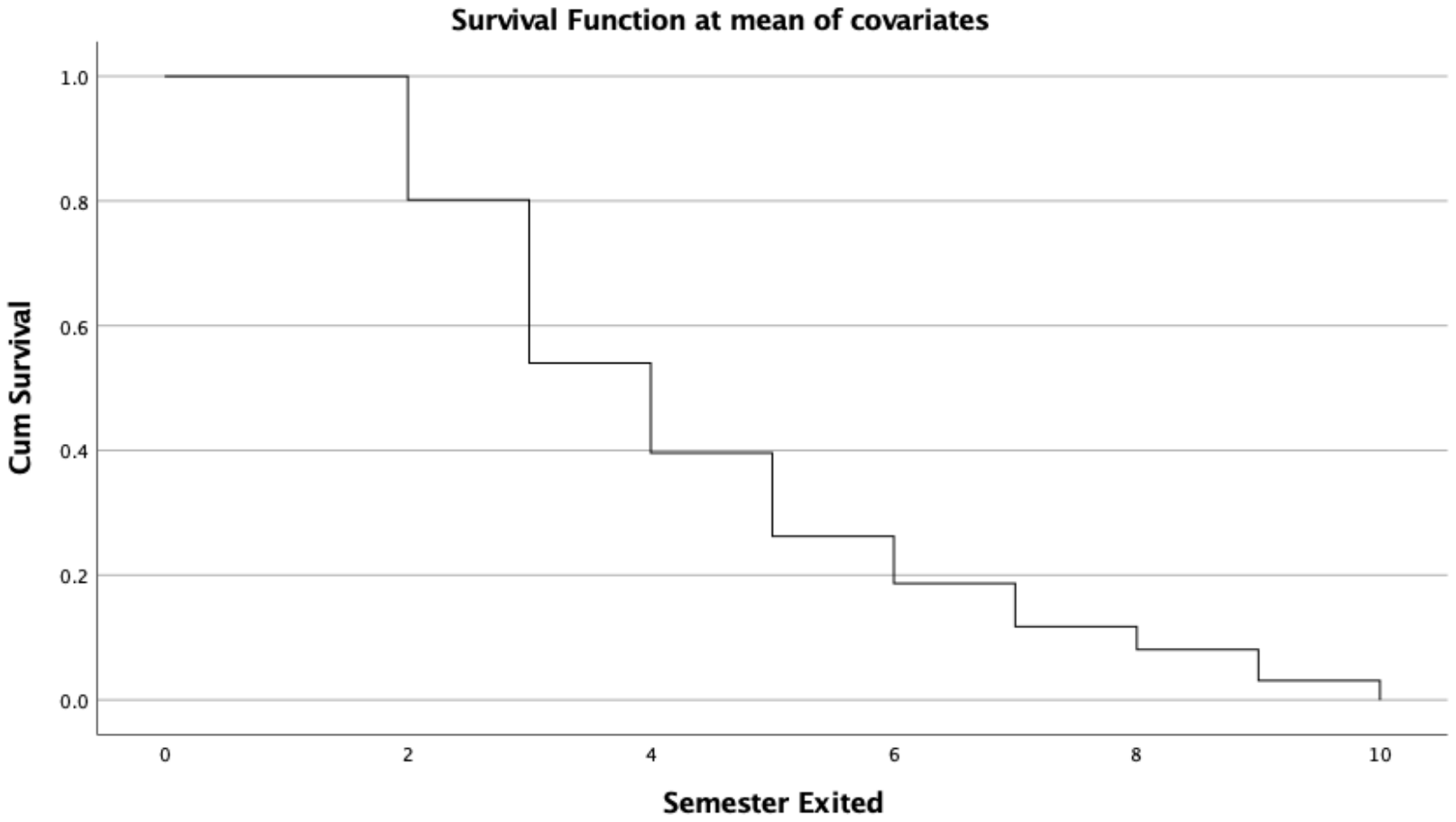

Survival Function at mean of covariates
Cum Survival
1.0
0.8
0.6
0.4
0.2
0.0
0
2
4
6
8
10
Semester Exited

Figure 24

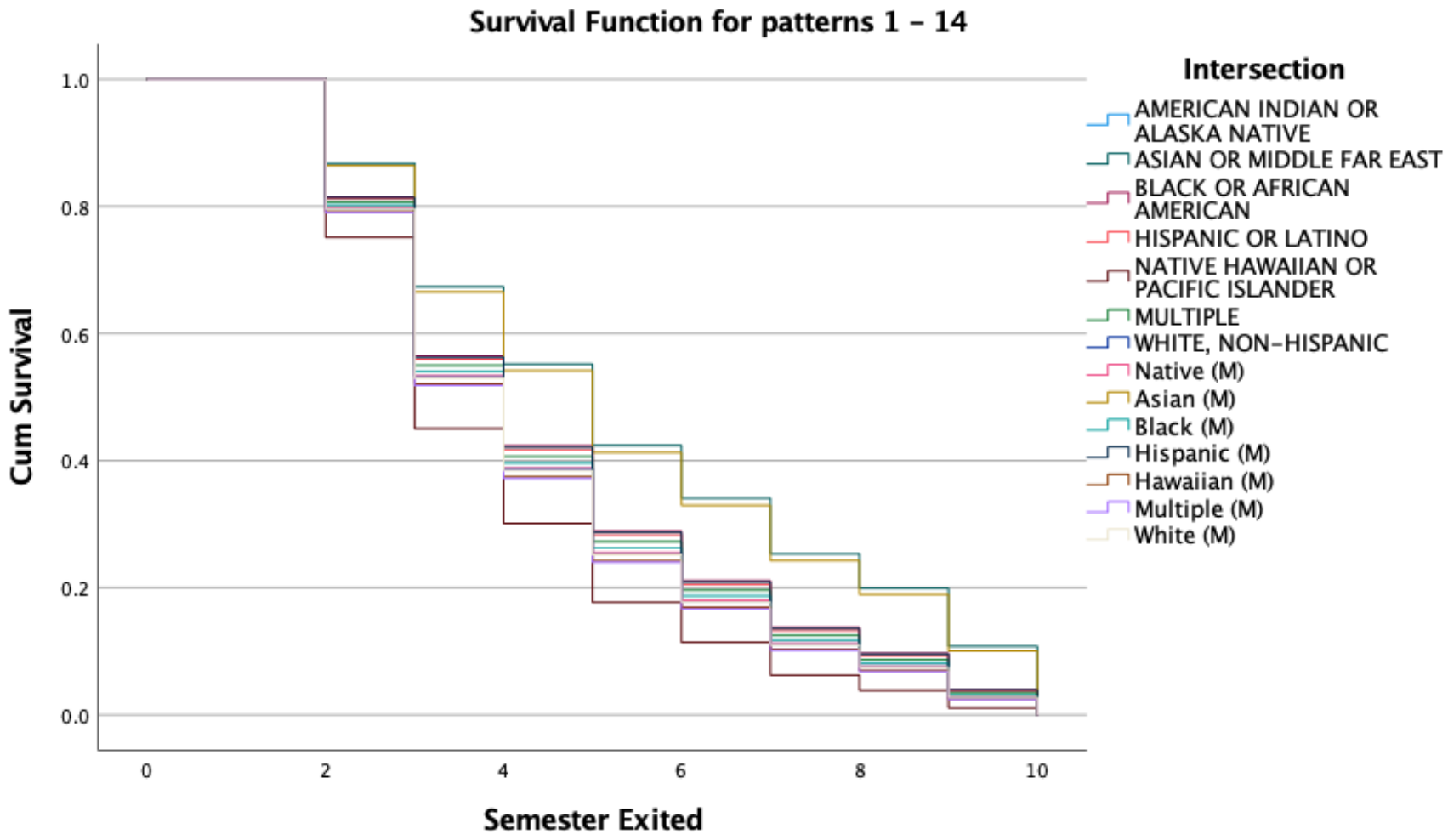


Figure 25
Likelihood of an exit event by variable and group

		Odds Ratio	β (s.e.)	95% C. I.	Sig.	Odds Ratio %
Race/Ethnicity & Gender						
	American Indian/Alaskan Native-Woman	0.994	0.038	(0.922, 1.071)		
	Asian/Middle Eastern-Women	0.622	0.104	(0.507, 0.763)	***	-60.8%
	Black/African American-Women	0.899	0.042	(0.829, 0.976)	*	-11.2%
	Hispanic/Latino-Women	0.915	0.043	(0.841, 0.995)	*	-9.3%
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander-Women	1.255	0.379	(0.598, 2.635)		
	Two or More Races/Ethnicities-Women	0.942	0.044	(0.863, 1.028)		
	White-Women	0.992	0.026	(0.943, 1.044)		
	American Indian/Alaskan Native-Men	0.990	0.043	(0.911, 1.077)		
	Asian/Middle Eastern-Men	0.641	0.105	(0.522, 0.788)	***	-56.0%
	Black/African American-Men	0.969	0.049	(0.879, 1.067)		
	Hispanic/Latino-Men	0.905	0.049	(0.823, 0.995)	*	-10.5%
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander-Men	1.027	0.354	(0.513, 2.056)		
	Two or More Races/Ethnicities-Men	1.035	0.050	(0.939, 1.140)		
	White-Men					
Tribal Affiliation						
	Tribal Affiliated	0.989	0.024	(0.943, 1.037)		
	Not Tribally Affiliated					
HS Type						
	Tech Center	1.214	0.707	(0.304, 4.857)		
	Alternative School	1.365	0.500	(0.512, 3.639)		
	Private: Secular	0.949	0.354	(0.475, 1.899)		
	Private: Christian	0.745	0.083	(0.633, 0.876)	***	-34.2%
	Private: Islamic	0.310	0.500	(0.116, 0.827)	*	-222.5%
	Regular Public School					
HS Charter/Magnet Status						
	Charter/Magnet HS	0.933	0.05	(0.846, 1.030)		
	Not Charter/Magnet HS					
HS Urbanicity						
	Suburb	1.001	0.032	(0.941, 1.066)		
	Fringe	1.102	0.035	(1.028, 1.180)	**	10.2%
	Town	1.055	0.030	(0.995, 1.120)	*	5.5%
	Rural	1.157	0.028	(1.096, 1.222)	***	15.7%
	City					

HS Title I Status						
	HS Title I Eligible	1.018	0.019	(0.98, 1.058)		
	HS Not Title I Eligible					
HS % Population FRL Eligible						
	HS FRL=26-50%	1.121	0.054	(1.009, 1.247)	*	12.1%
	HS FRL=51-75%	1.209	0.053	(1.089, 1.343)	***	20.9%
	HS FRL=≥76%	1.279	0.056	(1.146, 1.428)	***	27.9%
	HS FRL = ≤25%					
HS % of Population PoC						
	HS PoC=26-50%	0.997	0.042	(0.917, 1.083)		
	HS PoC=51-75%	0.982	0.043	(0.903, 1.068)		
	HS PoC=≥76%	1.035	0.048	(0.941, 1.138)		
	HS PoC = ≤25%					

**p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001.*
Total Observations: 4,437

Appendix G

Research Question III: Charts, Tables, & Graphs

Figure 26

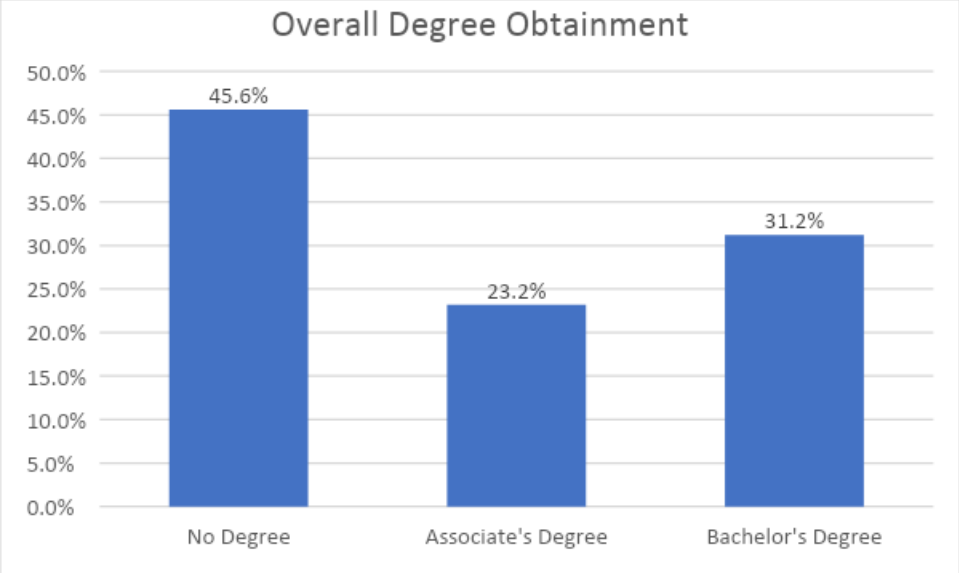


Figure 27

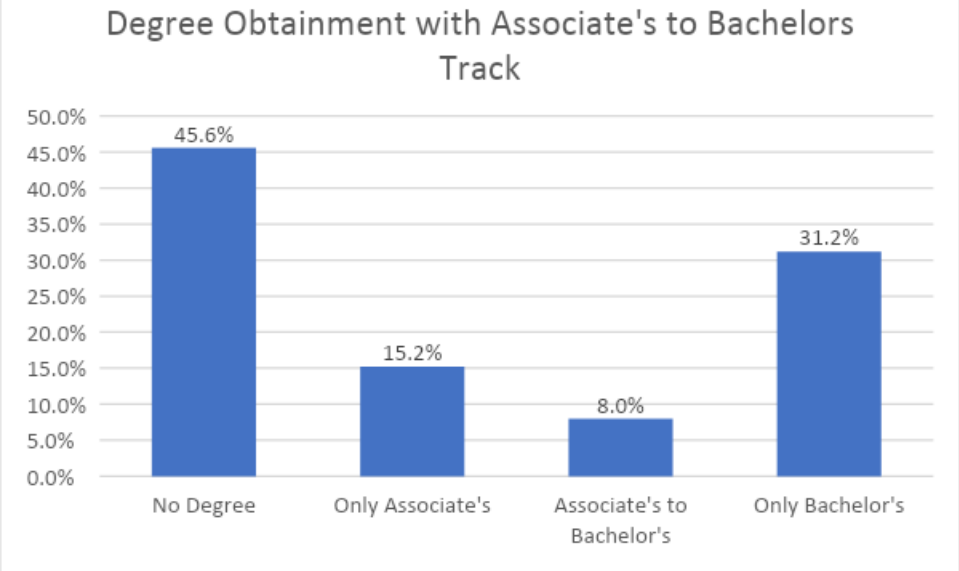


Table 28

Likelihood of Associate's Degree Attainment by Variable and Group—Associate's Degree v No Degree

		Odds Ratio	β (s.e.)	95% C. I.	Sig	Odds Ratio %
Race/Ethnicity & Gender						
	American Indian/Alaskan Native-Women	1.099	0.087	(0.928, 1.302)		
	Asian/Middle Eastern-Women	2.589	0.113	(2.078, 3.234)	***	158.9%
	Black/African American-Women	0.731	0.069	(0.639, 0.839)	***	-36.8%
	Hispanic/Latino-Women	1.582	0.060	(1.402, 1.776)	***	58.2%
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander-Women	1.159	0.614	(0.349, 3.876)		
	Two or More Races/Ethnicities-Women	0.954	0.086	(0.806, 1.129)		
	White-Women	1.340	0.039	(1.241, 1.446)	***	34.0%
	American Indian/Alaskan Native-Men	0.777	0.095	(0.645, 0.936)	**	-28.7%
	Asian/Middle Eastern-Men	1.724	0.125	(1.353, 2.206)	***	72.4%
	Black/African American-Men	0.452	0.101	(0.372, 0.552)	***	-121.2%
	Hispanic/Latino-Men	1.117	0.074	(0.962, 1.287)		
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander-Men	0.284	1.106	(0.035, 2.274)		
	Two or More Races/Ethnicities-Men	0.548	0.106	(0.445, 0.674)	***	-82.5%
	White-Men					
Tribal Affiliation						
	Not Tribally Affiliated	0.79	0.069	(0.69, 0.904)	***	-26.6%
	Tribally Affiliated					
HS Type						
	Tech Center	0.655	0.013	(0.068, 6.301)		
	Alternative/Other School	0.218	1.155	(0.070, 1.507)		
	Private: Secular	0.702	1.054	(0.408, 2.177)		
	Private: Christian	0.860	0.521	(1.440, 2.052)		
	Private: Islamic	9.830	0.12	(0.373, 4.002)	***	883.0%
	Home School Programs	n/a	n/a	n/a		
	Regular Public School					
HS Charter Status						
	Charter/Magnet School	1.071	0.088	(0.901, 1.274)		
	Not Charter/Magnet School					
HS Urbanicity						
	City	1.077	0.057	(0.956, 1.194)		

	Suburb	1.012	0.048	(0.921, 1.113)		
	Fringe	1.063	0.051	(0.963, 1.175)		
	Town	1.13	0.041	(1.042, 1.225)	*	13.0%
	Rural					
HS Title I Status						
	HS Not Title I Eligible	1.06	0.098	(0.996, 1.136)		
	Title I Eligible					
HS % Population FRL Eligible						
	HS FRL = ≤25%	0.658	0.098	(0.544, 0.797)	***	-52.0%
	HS FRL=26-50%	0.938	0.054	(0.844, 1.043)		
	HS FRL=51-75%	0.991	0.047	(0.905, 1.088)		
	HS FRL=≥76%					
HS % of Population PoC						
	HS PoC = ≤25%	1.249	0.099	(1.032, 1.519)	*	24.9%
	HS PoC=26-50%	1.197	0.075	(1.033, 1.385)	*	19.7%
	HS PoC=51-75%	1.113	0.064	(0.986, 1.267)		
	HS PoC=≥76%					

**p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001.*
Reference Group: No Degree.
Total observations: 40,186

Figure 29

Likelihood of associate's degree attainment by variable and group—associate's to bachelor's degree v. only associate's degree

		Odds Ratio	β (s.e.)	95% C. I.	Sig	Odds Ratio %
Race/Ethnicity & Gender						
	American Indian/Alaskan Native-Woman	1.149	0.147	(1.532, 0.147)		
	Asian/Middle Eastern-Women	1.315	0.160	(1.801, 0.160)		
	Black/African American-Women	0.984	0.125	(1.256, 0.125)		
	Hispanic/Latino-Women	0.819	0.101	(0.998, 0.101)	*	-22.10%
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander-Women	0.544	1.157	(5.253, 1.157)		
	Two or More Races/Ethnicities-Women	0.78	0.151	(1.049, 0.151)		
	White-Women	0.931	0.066	(1.059, 0.066)		
	American Indian/Alaskan Native-Men	1.14	0.164	(1.573, 0.164)		
	Asian/Middle Eastern-Men	1.488	0.192	(2.166, 0.192)	*	48.80%
	Black/African American-Men	0.898	0.192	(1.307, 0.192)		
	Hispanic/Latino-Men	0.875	0.129	(1.127, 0.129)		
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander-Men	n/a	n/a	n/a		
	Two or More Races/Ethnicities-Men	0.784	0.199	(0.531, 1.159)		
	White-Men					
Tribal Affiliation						
	Not Tribally Affiliated	1.196	0.119	(0.947, 1.510)		
	Tribally Affiliated					
HS Type						
	Tech Center	n/a	n/a	n/a		
	Alternative/Other School	n/a	n/a	n/a		
	Private: Secular	1.253	0.913	(0.209, 7.505)		
	Private: Christian	1.511	0.202	(1.018, 2.242)		
	Private: Islamic	3.76	0.388	(1.758, 8.043)	***	276.00%
	Home School Programs	n/a	n/a	n/a		
	Regular Public School					
HS Charter Status						
	Charter/Magnet School	1.178	0.158	(0.865, 1.604		
	Not Charter/Magnet School					
HS Urbanicity						

	City	1.064	0.097	(0.879, 1.287)		
	Suburb	0.82	0.082	(0.699, 0.963)	*	-21.95%
	Fringe	0.917	0.085	(0.776, 1.084)		
	Town	0.937	0.069	(0.819, 1.072)		
	Rural					
HS Title I Status						
	HS Not Title I Eligible	1.026	0.057	(0.917, 1.147)		
	Title I Eligible					
HS % Population FRL Eligible						
	HS FRL = ≤25%	1.387	0.17	(0.775, 1.508)		
	HS FRL=26-50%	1.363	0.091	(0.962, 1.377)		
	HS FRL=51-75%	1.316	0.08	(0.812, 1.111)		
	HS FRL=≥76%					
HS % of Population PoC						
	HS PoC = ≤25%	1.387	0.167	(1.000, 1.924)	*	38.70%
	HS PoC=26-50%	1.363	0.129	(1.058, 1.756)	*	36.30%
	HS PoC=51-75%	1.316	0.112	(1.058, 1.637)	*	31.60%
	HS PoC=≥76%					

**p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001.*
Reference group: Associate's Only.
Total observations: 33,815

Figure 30

Likelihood of Associate's Degree Attainment by Variable and Group—Bachelor's Degree v No Degree

	Odds Ratio	β (s.e.)	95% C. I.	Sig	Odds Ratio %
Race/Ethnicity & Gender	0.960	0.045	(0.880, 1.048)		
American Indian/Alaskan Native-Woman	2.290	0.074	(1.979, 2.648)	***	43.7%
Asian/Middle Eastern-Women	0.735	0.049	(0.668, 0.810)	***	-36.0%
Black/African American-Women	0.921	0.045	(0.843, 1.006)		
Hispanic/Latino-Women	1.070	0.404	(0.485, 2.361)		
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander-Women	0.958	0.050	(0.869, 1.056)		
Two or More Races/Ethnicities-Women	1.184	0.029	(1.117, 1.254)	***	18.4%
White-Women	0.744	0.055	(0.668, 0.829)	***	-34.4%
American Indian/Alaskan Native-Men	1.980	0.080	(1.693, 2.315)	***	98.0%
Asian/Middle Eastern-Men	0.517	0.068	(0.453, 0.591)	***	-93.4%
Black/African American-Men	0.757	0.055	(0.679, 0.843)	***	-32.1%
Hispanic/Latino-Men	1.256	0.398	(0.576, 2.737)		
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander-Men	0.762	0.061	(0.677, 0.858)	***	-31.2%
Two or More Races/Ethnicities-Men					
White-Men					
Tribal Affiliation					
Not Tribally Affiliated	1.045	0.029	(0.997, 1.116)		
Tribally Affiliated					
HS Type					
Tech Center	0.936	0.866	(0.181, 5.385)		
Alternative/Other School	0.359	0.769	(0.079, 1.618)		
Private: Secular	1.033	0.372	(0.498, 2.143)		
Private: Christian	1.596	0.077	(1.372, 1.857)	***	59.6%
Private: Islamic	4.483	0.362	(2.205, 9.112)	***	348.30%
Home School Programs	n/a	n/a	n/a		
Regular Public School					
HS Charter Status					
Charter/Magnet School	1.052	0.071	(0.916, 1.208)		
Not Charter/Magnet School					
HS Urbanicity					
City	1.186	0.044	(1.080, 1.286)	***	18.60%
Suburb	0.973	0.037	(0.904, 1.047)		
Fringe	0.929	0.041	(0.858, 1.244)		
Town	1.165	0.033	(1.092, 1.163)	***	16.50%
Rural					
HS Title I Status					
HS Not Title I Eligible	1.033	0.027	(0.984, 1.093)		
Title I Eligible					
HS % Population FRL Eligible					
HS FRL = ≤25%	1.745	0.068	(1.524, 1.993)	***	74.50%
HS FRL=26-50%	1.413	0.045	(1.292, 1.544)	***	41.30%
HS FRL=51-75%	1.146	0.041	(1.059, 1.243)	***	14.60%

HS FRL=≥76%					
HS % of Population PoC					
HS PoC = ≤25%	1.808	0.080	(1.547, 2.116)	***	80.80%
HS PoC=26-50%	1.583	0.062	(1.401, 1.789)	***	58.30%
HS PoC=51-75%	1.500	0.054	(1.353, 1.670)	***	50.00%
HS PoC=≥76%					

**p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001.*
Reference Group: No Degree.
Total observations: 40,186